Caring for others and ourselves in an extraordinary year p. 13, p. 36

WHERE SEL FITS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM p. 24

TOOL: **A guide for instructional teams working remotely** p. 54

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

How academic discipline affects coaching p. 51

THE **LEARNING PROFESSIONAL**

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

learningforward
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING **ASSOCIATION**

in this issue ...

VOICES 7

p. **10**

RESEARCH 15

p. **18**

in this issue ...

TOOLS 53

p. **54**

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

UPDATES 63

Tunette Powell

**Interim director
UCLA Parent Empowerment Project**

"Connection [with families] has to go beyond mass emails, large town halls, and robocalls. That is not connection. That is a form of information sharing. It allows us to share really good information, but it does not allow us to connect. The way that you can think about connecting and including families is what you do in between all of those big events.

"Schools and families should always be learning with and from each other. This becomes important because it positions everybody as both teachers and learners. Successful partnerships require concession of power."

Source: "Connecting with families when it's more important than ever," a Learning Forward webinar on Sept. 3, 2020. Recording available at learningforward.org/webinar/connecting-with-families-when-its-more-important-than-ever.

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LEARNING FORWARD'S

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WHAT WE DO. Coaches Academy helps coaches embrace their roles as learning leaders and better understand their relationships with teachers and principals. The academy also helps teachers develop skills in:

Instructional coaches have the power to influence teaching, student learning, and school culture. Learning Forward is the leader in ensuring that school- and district-based coaches with instructional and content expertise also develop critical skills in building relationships, leading professional learning, and providing effective coaching to individuals and teams.

Coaches who participate in Learning Forward's Coaches Academy apply their knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices to increase student success through effective instruction, collective responsibility, personal and professional efficacy, and continuous improvement. We help coaches understand their roles as change agents in their schools and ensure their work directly impacts teaching and learning.

For more information, contact Tom Manning, senior vice president, professional services, at **tom.manning@learningforward.org**. | **consulting.learningforward.org**

Building relationships

Presenting and facilitating

Leading professional learning

Providing effective feedback

Coaching individuals and teams

Selecting learning designs

Suzanne Bouffard

WHAT'S YOUR MANTRA FOR THIS SCHOOL YEAR?

A recent meeting I attended started with this check-in question: What is your mantra for this school year? The range of responses spoke volumes about the climate in which we're all working. People were hopeful, pragmatic, struggling, laughing, worrying. My favorites included:

- Progress, not perfection.
- We got this.
- Doing the best we can.
- Yeah, we can do that.
- More chocolate.

It's not easy to stay centered right now, with so much uncertainty and so little to anchor us. Mantras can help us set expectations, find focus, and remind us of our core beliefs.

If this issue of *The Learning Professional* had a mantra, it might be: We're all stronger when we support each other. Networks of support are a core tenet of high-quality professional learning, as evident in the Standards for Professional Learning and Learning Forward's ongoing networks including, most recently, Digital Professional Learning for a Virtual World. And there's no question we all need to learn from and lean on each other even more than usual right now.

As authors in this issue show, there are many ways to support colleagues, supervisors, students, and families so that everyone can grow and thrive. Those strategies include deep listening (p. 28), teaming (p. 32), and coaching (p. 51). The tools section provides guidance and resources to help you conduct empathy interviews (p. 59) and form new types of instructional teams during remote learning (p. 54).

Supporting each other means having a strong focus on equity. Authors in this issue write about collaborative professional learning to dismantle racism (p. 24), address racial disparities in school discipline (p. 42), and build student agency (p. 28).

To support others, we also have to take care of ourselves. Simmons points out that "when teachers are stressed, their interactions with students are less warm, student achievement suffers, and the classroom climate is not as warm" and "a stressed and burned-out teaching force is an equity issue." She also reminds us that self-care has "revolutionary and radical aspects" because historically "care has not been distributed equitably."

Taking care of ourselves is a tall order these days. Sharron Helmke (p. 36) explains how leaders can set the tone and create the structures to make it possible. Jim Knight (p. 13) shares small but important steps we can each take, including reminding ourselves of our purpose.

In a much-shared article from NPR education reporter Anya Kamenetz (2020), a teacher recently shared her relatable struggle to balance teaching, parenting, and other responsibilities, saying, "I'm only one person." That could be a mantra in itself, a reminder to be reasonable with ourselves. But let's also focus on what we can do together. With collaboration and support, we can make this school year's whole greater than the sum of its parts.

REFERENCE

Kamenetz, A. (2020, Sept. 17). *'I'm only 1 person': Teachers feel torn between their students and their own kids.* news.wfsu.org/all-npr-news/2020-09-17/im-only-1-person-teachers-feel-torn-between-their-students-and-their-own-kids ■

There's no question we all need to learn from and lean on each other even more than usual right now.

Suzanne Bouffard (suzanne.bouffard@ learningforward. org) is editor of *The Learning Professional.*

VOICES

SUPPORT EDUCATORS, STUDENTS, AND FAMILIES

"**W**e recognize that educators are faced with massive expectations from policymakers and community members alike. Families know how important schooling is for students, both academically and socially. Education leaders weigh dozens of competing factors to create schooling options for their local contexts, considering safety, accessibility of learning for all families in their communities, support for teachers, and quality of student learning experiences."

In their column, Denise Glyn Borders, Learning Forward president and CEO, and Steve Cardwell, president of Learning Forward's board of trustees, outline four themes that have emerged from Learning Forward's weekly webinars and offer specific actions learning leaders can take to support educators, students, and families.

— *"Resilient educators deserve sustained support"*

p. **8**

Denise Glyn Borders and Steve Cardwell

RESILIENT EDUCATORS DESERVE SUSTAINED SUPPORT

Over the course of the last six months, Learning Forward's weekly webinars have given us the opportunity to learn with educators across the globe, and our most inspiring lessons have come from practitioners making sense of a time that demands creativity and resilience. Now that more and more districts are returning to school, we're eager to share several valuable lessons learned and ask you to join us in taking action on the support educators deserve.

We recognize that educators are faced with massive expectations from policymakers and community members alike. Families know how important schooling is for students, both academically and socially. Education leaders weigh dozens of competing factors to create schooling options for their local contexts, considering safety, accessibility of learning for all families in their communities, support for teachers, and quality of student learning experiences.

As educators have created imaginative solutions in the face of ever-changing circumstances, we've seen four consistent themes emerge. We invite learning leaders to consider how they're supporting educators around these issues and suggest specific actions to advance our collective aspirations for all students.

Attend to the health and well-being of students, educators, and communities.

Safety must come first in schools, and we know that every system is faced with balancing a wide array of demands from policymakers and community members as they determine when and how to open schools for the year. When the pandemic first hit in March, school systems jumped immediately to ensure communities had access to food and sought solutions to addressing inequities in access to health care as well as technology and broadband. Keeping students and educators safe is no less important now, despite the fatigue we all feel with a radically changed day-to-day existence.

Emotional well-being is also essential. We want to recognize the high level of uncertainty and fear educators, students, and families bear in such difficult circumstances, which creates a stressful living, learning, and working environment.

KEY ACTIONS FOR EDUCATION LEADERS:
- Prioritize clear communication with educators and respect them as qualified professionals. Consider how they are part of decision-making processes.
- Assess the level of trust and strengthen your culture to support both innovation and candor.
- Invest in building and sustaining relationships — with and among staff, students, and community members.

Offer challenging teaching and high-quality instructional materials supported by effective professional learning.

Even as educators and policymakers adjusted calendars, grading periods, and specific high-stakes assessment expectations, we heard in our webinars that an instructional foundation tied to college- and career-ready standards serves as the academic backbone to reducing learning loss to serve each and every student well for the future.

Investments in high-quality materials are investments in equity. Remote, hybrid, and face-to-

> *Our most inspiring lessons have come from practitioners making sense of a time that demands creativity and resilience.*

Denise Glyn Borders is president and CEO at Learning Forward. Steve Cardwell is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees.

face implementation of standards and materials will, of course, vary; educators will need agility and support to navigate multiple delivery systems.

Aligned professional learning is the linchpin to success with this priority and others. Educators require sustained support to build their capacity to use and adapt materials and leverage deep content expertise.

KEY ACTIONS
FOR EDUCATION LEADERS:
- Establish and share a systemwide instructional vision that takes into account remote, hybrid, and in-person learning modes.
- Invest in high-quality instructional materials and ensure professional learning at the school and team levels focuses on implementing materials.

Prioritize social justice and equity of access to high-quality teaching and learning.

Each passing week of 2020 has shined a painful spotlight on the entrenched inequities and racism built into so many systems in modern society, including education. From the disparity in health outcomes to the lack of access to technology, broadband, and community support for learning, communities of color are particularly hard-hit by the implications of this pandemic. At the same time, the nonstop violence against people of color has resulted in ongoing demands for social justice in cities across the world.

Within education, the parallel injustices — insufficient representation of communities of color in teaching

and leadership positions, curricula that aren't relevant for students in various cultures, and students' lack of access to high-quality teaching, to name just a few — are also in the spotlight.

There are flashes of hope in this realm, including the increasing number of equity officers at high levels in school systems and a heightened awareness of inequity and commitment to improve among so many educators.

KEY ACTIONS
FOR EDUCATION LEADERS:
- Examine your own privilege, beliefs, biases, and assumptions about race.
- Seek opportunities to build knowledge and skills and shift beliefs for yourself and others.
- Outline actions to dismantle inequities within your sphere of influence and demand change from others.
- Create mechanisms to monitor progress on critical actions to dismantle inequities.

Embrace this opportunity to leverage technology to accelerate teaching and learning.

Education is one of the few sectors that technology had not yet disrupted. Through an impressive pivot, the need to offer remote instruction quickly spurred educators to acquire new skills and build new ways of engaging students and conveying concepts.

While the coming months may eventually allow us to return to what we once called normal, educators have an opportunity to expand on what they've accomplished with technology and go so much further, exploring possibilities

VALUABLE RESOURCE TO SUPPORT REOPENING

The Council of Chief State School Officers has created a comprehensive suite of guidance documents for school and district leaders as they navigate reopening schools in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The documents assist educators in making decisions for their local contexts with a wide range of adaptable tools and resources.

Specific sections on academics highlight suggestions, implications, and references geared toward planning and supporting professional learning aligned to school and system goals. The professional learning guidance encompasses an overview, actions for professional learning providers, critical knowledge and skills for teachers and school leaders, and a self-assessment for teachers and school leaders.

A frame for crafting a professional learning scope and sequence includes customizable templates. The guide also includes a template to support collaborative learning time.

Learn more at **ccsso.org/ coronavirus** and navigate to the "Academics" section to focus on professional learning.

WE MUST DISRUPT THE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO EQUITY

Linda Chen is the chief academic officer of the New York City Department of Education, the largest school system in the U.S., with over 1.1 million students in 1,800 schools. She joined the Learning Forward board of trustees in December 2019.

As chief academic officer of a large district, you oversee curriculum and instruction as well as other academic departments. How does professional learning contribute to the success of those departments and the district as a whole?

Professional learning is really the cornerstone of the work that we do in every one of the departments. The Chief Academic Office largely provides systems-level professional learning that is then shared with superintendents and instructional support staff in the districts and boroughs to support every school and the educators in them.

We are responsible for the content of academic policy and evaluation; curriculum, and instruction, including culturally responsive teaching, instruction for English language/multilingual learners and students with disabilities; assessment; teacher evaluation, development, and leadership. While we provide distinct content in each of those along with professional learning that meets the needs of different educators across experience levels, a common anchor is advancing equity.

A combination of expertise, knowing our audience, and a keen focus on student learning are key components to ensuring success in this work.

Equity is part of Learning Forward's core mission. What is the role of professional learning in creating educational equity?

There is much work we need to do collectively to disrupt the structural barriers to achieving equity, and I think the only way we can do it is through professional learning. At the core of professional learning is development, both technical and adaptive development.

To best serve our students, we need to know who they are to meet them where they are with an asset-based approach. This requires a mindset of belonging, inclusion and pedagogical content expertise that tailors learning to the strengths, gifts, and needs of students in front of us. Mindset, behavior, and infrastructure change requires professional learning.

What are some of the positive trends you've seen in professional learning over the past decade?

It's been good to see that professional learning communities are more of the norm than they used to be, and there is less of the sit-and-get kinds of things. There are also more resources that are readily available, through technology that provides the ability to connect people both synchronously and asynchronously.

Even before the pandemic, people were using Google Drive and documents to share information or other collaborative platforms, which has been very helpful for accessing information and connecting with learning communities.

There is also more attention to equity now. But it needs to go beyond talk to action and disruption that results in educational excellence, especially for our historically underserved and marginalized students.

> To best serve our students, we need to know who they are to meet them where they are with an asset-based approach.

Linda Chen is a member of the Learning Forward board of trustees.

HELP YOUR COACHING PROGRAM ACHIEVE ITS POTENTIAL

For coaching to deeply transform practice, school system leaders must build, remodel, and maintain a foundation that ensures coaching will succeed.

While coaching programs have expanded and become a common approach to continuous learning for strengthening professional practice and student success, their infrastructures still need work. For coaching to deeply transform practice and push through to results for students, school system leaders must build, remodel, and maintain a foundation that ensures coaching will succeed.

In the new edition of our book *Coaching Matters* (Learning Forward, 2020), Chris Bryan, Heather Clifton, and I explore the elements that ensure coaching is successful. Extending the framework we presented in the first edition, we explain how school and system leaders can build, remodel, and evaluate their coaching programs based on a set of critical elements.

Taken together, these elements serve as the scaffold that any leader can use, whether implementing coaching for the first time, seeking to enhance a coaching program, or wishing to evaluate the effectiveness of a coaching program.

Here, we preview two of those elements: a defined purpose and goal for the program and a clear role for a coaching champion.

Surprisingly, many existing coaching programs are missing the first element of a defined purpose. This foundation should drive any subsequent decision on the selection and preparation of coaches, the specific roles they enact, and the work they do.

For example, a coaching program focused on implementing a new math curriculum is likely different in form and function from one focused on Tier 1 instruction. The math coaches' roles are likely to include curriculum specialist and instructional specialist more than resource provider or mentor.

When hiring coaches to support math curriculum implementation, then, selection is likely based on proven expertise in math instruction. Preparation will likely include emphasis on the knowledge, skills, and understanding of a specific math curriculum, as well as curriculum implementation, facilitating professional learning, and planning for instruction.

On the other hand, in a coaching program focused on ensuring equity and quality in Tier 1 instruction, coaches will have as their primary purpose student success in all content areas. Selection is likely based on proven instructional expertise with an emphasis on adapting and differentiating instruction to meet student needs.

Because coaches will serve in the role of instructional specialist, data coach, learning facilitator, and classroom supporter, their preparation and ongoing professional learning should address those skills.

Of course, some school and system leaders want coaches who can fulfill both types of coaching described above, and many coaches do. Clarity about the multifaceted coaching program's purpose is still essential and gives direction to the numerous decisions those coaches make each day about how to interact with their clients, as well as decisions about how to focus coaches' professional learning.

In addition to a clearly defined purpose, coaching programs need a clearly defined role for the coach champion who oversees the program. Coach champions make sure coaching is aligned to the core purpose and goals and that coaches meet the expectations of their role.
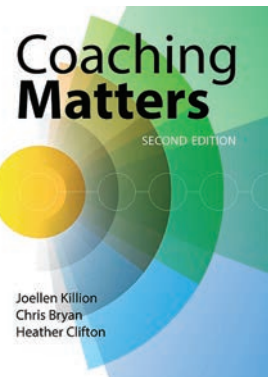
Coaching Matters, **Second Edition, is available in the Learning Forward Bookstore, learningforward.org/store.**

Joellen Killion (joellen.killion@ learningforward. org) is Learning Forward's senior advisor.

Continued from p. 9

for combining the best of all learning platforms and virtual tools, without abandoning the importance of social interaction in schools.

KEY ACTIONS
FOR EDUCATION LEADERS:
- Explore teaching and learning tools systemically to identify options for innovation.
- Hold technology platforms and tools to high standards.
- Build educators' capacity in leveraging technology for student learning and professional learning alike.
- Advocate for technology systems and solutions that will advance district goals.

Clearly, this year's back to school isn't what we all grew up with or anticipated. Yet, despite the many challenges educators face right now, we are hopeful that these challenges will reveal new avenues to excellence and equity in teaching and learning. Our greatest hopes are inspired by the educators we see leading the way every day. Learning Forward is here to support you at every step. ∎

BEING FORWARD / Linda Chen

Continued from p. 10

What are some of the biggest needs that remain in professional learning, aside from the immediate needs caused by the pandemic?

The biggest needs are at the intersection of adult and student learning. Professional learning has to be about adults feeling they have agency and empowerment through knowledge and experience, but it must also be inextricably tied to impact on student learning. It is our responsibility to ensure that every student thrives through the experiences we provide, and are able to do grade-level work and beyond to prepare them for their future.

Even in the context of this pandemic, there is quite a bit of focus on technology skills. How do we engage in professional learning — largely in a new mode virtually — to ensure that, as a result of our connection as adults, we can fully leverage opportunities to greatly advance student learning within this environment?

We have the opportunity to connect with students in a different way, in a more personalized and inclusive way, because we are teaching them directly into their homes. We have the ability to know them better and tailor work through the efficiencies technology can provide.

What readings or resources have had a large influence on your career?

There are so many, but I'll start with the earliest reading that influenced my thinking on racial equity. During an undergraduate sociology course at the University of Washington, I was assigned a short article called "White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack" by Peggie McIntosh.

That piece impacted me and ignited the fire in my belly, if you will, around the importance of equity in education. It wasn't just the article itself; it was the rich discourse that my professor carefully designed and facilitated around it.

A few other more recent books include *Courageous Conversations About Race* by Glenn E. Singleton and *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond.

Another area that is important in my work is instructional leadership, and one reading I recommend is *Student-Centered Leadership* by Viviane Robinson. It centers on research showing that, of all the things principals do, leading teacher learning and development has the biggest impact on student learning.

As a systems leader, I deeply believe that principals are the greatest lever to ensuring the success of every student at scale, particularly those students who have been historically underserved and marginalized.

What was one of your own most meaningful professional learning experiences?

By far, the best professional learning experience for me was when a staff developer came into my classroom and did demo lessons with my students. That showed me was what was possible with my own students and showed me how to enact in my own classroom what I was reading and discussing in professional development.

That experience was powerful in the context of all the other professional learning pieces that allowed me to read, learn, discuss, reflect, teach, and ultimately have a positive impact on my students, which is what professional learning is all about. ∎

COACHES NOTEBOOK / Joellen Killion

Continued from p. 11

They have the vital task of ensuring that the infrastructure of the coaching program is sound, coaches have the necessary preparation and ongoing professional learning they need to succeed, there are both formative and summative measures in place to continuously assess and evaluate the coaching program, and coaches have coaching and other forms of support to succeed in their roles.

In most cases, the responsibilities of a coach champion — often a central office staff member — are added to an already-long list of duties.

For coaching to have its desired effect, the overall program must be sound and fully functioning. Clear roles and responsibilities are the first step. ∎

TAKE TIME FOR SELF-CARE

We are experiencing at least five major disruptions simultaneously: a global pandemic, fears about the economy, a national reckoning about racism, divisive rhetoric from Washington, and, if we work in schools, a deep uncertainly about what it is that is we actually do as professionals and how, as schools navigate between remote, hybrid, and face-to-face instruction.

All of these changes, whether they have potential for good or not, involve the stress inherent to change. That is why now, more than at any time in our lives, educators must do something that doesn't come naturally to us: We must take the time needed to take care of ourselves. Three simple things can help us to have better self-care: purpose, healthy habits, and compassion (for others and, perhaps more importantly, ourselves).

PURPOSE

Sometimes, the most important thing we can do in challenging times is just to remind ourselves of the purpose that brought us to school in the first place. Remembering that purpose can help us persevere when the situation is stressful like it is now.

Richard Leider, a life coach and author, has interviewed hundreds of people over the age of 65, asking them to look back and identify what they wish they had done differently in their lives. During those interviews, Leider heard so much about purpose that he wrote a book about the topic, *The Power of Purpose* (1997).

What Leider learned is that, "without purpose, we eventually lose our way. We live without the true joy in life and work. Until we make peace with our purpose, we will never discover fulfillment in our work or contentment with what we have" (p.4).

One way we can reflect on our purpose is to consider the four questions at the heart of the Japanese concept of "ikigai," which can be understood as "the reason we get up in the morning" (García & Miralles, 2016, p. 9): What do I love to do? What does the world need? What can I get paid for? What am I good at? I have found it to be very worthwhile to take time to reflect on these questions and journal my answers until I get clearer and clearer on my purpose.

In education, aligning our work with our purpose is often less about discovering and more about remembering. The day-to-day rush of urgent tasks that must be done can keep us so busy that we forget why education matters and what difference we make.

Purpose is particularly important right now when educators face challenges they've never experienced before, like learning a host of new technological tools and instructional approaches and navigating health concerns. Purpose can get us through.

HEALTHY HABITS

We have all thought about healthy habits. We make resolutions and take initial steps, but eventually fall back into our old patterns of behavior. We blame ourselves for not changing and then feel even worse. Research shows that we fail to change not because of a lack of discipline,

but because we lack a structure for our behavior change. Willpower by itself does not get the job done. What we need is a habit.

What distinguishes our habits is that, once they are established, we pretty much do them without thinking. Each of us has habits, good and bad. We brush our teeth, get ready in the morning, and drink our morning coffee, all without thinking. Some habits are good, like working out after school, and some are bad, like drinking a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc every night while reading the news on Twitter.

To take care of ourselves, we need to harness the structure of habits to entrench the behaviors that lead to healthier lives. We need to develop a simple routine that we can easily repeat, ideally doing the exact same actions every day at the same time.

We should alter our context as best as we can to ensure it supports our new habit. If we stick with our habit long enough, perhaps 90 days or more, we can develop something that sticks (Wood, 2019), especially if those behaviors are small and simple (Fogg, 2020).

One good place to start is getting enough sleep. Lack of sleep makes us less intelligent, grumpier, less productive, and more likely to gain weight (Stevenson, 2016). Unfortunately, when you are worried about your family's health, or your economic well-being, or whether structural racism puts your child at risk, or the upcoming election, sleep doesn't always come easily.

Luckily, there are a few simple hacks anyone can do to improve the quality of sleep, including keeping your smart phone outside your bedroom,

spending time in the sunshine every day, avoiding caffeine in the afternoon, exercising, and going to bed at the same time every night. Better sleep leads to a better life and a better capacity for taking on the specific unique challenges of this time.

COMPASSION

The challenges, opportunities, and uncertainties of this particular time in history zap our personal resilience, and this means many of us are not at our best. People are upset because their partner has just lost his or her job, or worried about their mother's health, or angered by the latest offensive political tweet. These exceptional times will lead to exceptional, and not always positive, behavior.

To support others, we need to be compassionate, understanding the emotions and needs of others, moving through our own mental barriers so we can demonstrate empathy, and acting on our understanding of others. That includes understanding that when people lash out because of frustration or fear, it's often not personal.

Of course, you are likely already extending a lot of compassion to others. But you might not be treating yourself with compassion. Self-criticism can lead us to say horrible things about ourselves (often silently to ourselves) that we would never say to someone else (Neff, 2011). If we are committed to effectively taking care of others, we need to start by taking care of ourselves.

To overcome self-criticism, we first need to recognize it, and then start to extend to ourselves the compassion we extend to others. This may involve letting go of the need to compete with others, being kind to

ourselves, being mindful, and setting reasonable expectations for what we can accomplish right now.

I don't want to suggest that taking care of yourself is just a matter of adopting a happy frame of mind. Many people are suffering today because they cannot pay for the health care they need or because they are experiencing racist or gender-based systems designed to hold them back. Part of self-care involves working to create systems that are safer, healthier, and more humane. That should be a challenge we all take on.

Today, as we face all of these challenges, I am comforted by the knowledge that people are resilient. We will get through this together. But three simple things can make our getting through easier — reminding ourselves of our purpose, developing healthy habits, and being compassionate toward others and ourselves.

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RESEARCH

THE PATH TO BETTER TEACHING

"Teachers have long said that they want professional learning that is immediately useful and helps them teach better. My takeaway from [research] is that they are right: Professional learning that digs deep into the heart of teaching and gives teachers either content knowledge or concrete strategies for implementing new practices makes a difference for students."

— *"What works? Research probes a complicated question,"*

p. **18**

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ACCESS, KNOWLEDGE, AND CULTURE LIMIT TEACHERS' USE OF RESEARCH

Educators at all levels are regularly asked to use research to inform their instructional choices and practices. For example, the Standards for Professional Learning advocate for understanding and using research about effective professional learning as a habit of mind and a design approach. However, the process of identifying, selecting, and using research can sometimes be a time-consuming and unclear process.

A recent study sought to better understand educators' perceptions about research to determine barriers and identify potential ways to increase the use of research in practice. Specifically, the study examined teachers' beliefs about and practices of using research in STEM teaching.

RATIONALE

Pointing to other fields that normalize the regularity of examining and relying on evidence in their practice (such as nursing or psychology), the researchers note a striking reluctance in K-12 education to view research outcomes as relevant and useful. They highlight the importance of teachers understanding and using education research to counteract misconceptions about what is effective in teaching and discontinue strategies in teaching that are popular but not evidence-based.

Moreover, the authors argue for having a process and supports in place by which educators access and review relevant research first to guide and monitor their implementation as well as set an expectation that quality-relevant evidence is informing their professional decisions.

Creating a culture of evidence informing practice is rare. While there is often an expectation that teachers examine student data to understand student progress and needs, there is less often an expectation that teachers use relevant research about which instructional strategies are most effective for meeting those needs.

There are a number of reasons that it can be challenging to establish such a culture. Research findings are often presented in technical, jargon-filled ways that do not lend themselves easily to implementation. As the authors of this study acknowledge, there may also be misalignment of research studies and classroom practice, leading to a belief that research is not relevant for teachers. Lack of access can be a challenge, too.

Further, educators sometimes perceive research-driven guidelines about instruction, such as standardized curriculum, as hindering educators' autonomy and creativity. Educators need supports and time to be successful in identifying and obtaining relevant research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

The guiding research questions of this study were:
1. To what extent do teachers actively seek, access, and engage with STEM education research?
2. To what extent do teachers apply STEM education research in their teaching activities?
3. To what extent do teachers perceive there is a culture for using STEM education research in their institutions?
4. How do teachers perceive STEM education research as a barrier to their practice?
5. How do teachers dismiss STEM education research as irrelevant?
6. What are similarities and differences among the facets of teacher perception and practices using STEM education research?
7. What factors are associated with teachers' use and perceptions of STEM education research?

To answer these questions, the researchers surveyed 450 K-12 teachers who were participating in a week of professional learning focused on increasing participants' knowledge and capacity to engage in innovative STEM teaching at six sites in a U.S. state in the Rocky Mountains region.

The researchers created their own instrument to gather teacher perceptions and attitudes related to seeking, accessing, and engaging with education research as well as teachers' ability to do so and the culture related to these activities. Items included multiple choice statements that respondents answered on a Likert scale, such as "I use education research to inform my STEM teaching," as well as open-ended response questions, such as "What is your primary reason for accessing STEM education research?"

It is worth noting that this study may be limited in its generalizability because of the lack of diversity of the educators surveyed (96% white) and the relatively small sample size.

FINDINGS

The survey revealed that educators rarely use research. Those who access research only do so once or twice a year. When asked the primary reason for accessing STEM education research, the most frequent response was to gain knowledge (29%), followed by to become a more effective teacher (22%) and to improve student learning (21%). Respondents also reported that they were unsure how to validate whether their classroom practices were, in fact, evidence-based.

The survey found that teachers rarely subscribe to journals that report education research and do not frequently access research findings in other formats. About a third (37%) responded that they access open source materials found on the internet. Among those who do seek out research, 55% say that they use the internet to find research. Only 6% said they get research from a conference or professional organization, and 10% said they are unsure how to locate research.

The survey also delved into questions about whether schools have a culture that supports using research. The majority of respondents (95%) disagreed with the statement that principals share education research with them. Moreover, 60% disagreed that they collaboratively or collectively spend time reviewing education research, 66% disagree that they use it in their planning, and more than three-quarters (77%) disagreed with or were neutral about the statement that they are expected to apply research-based practices in their teaching.

Encouragingly, however, respondents did not indicate that they felt research was a barrier to creativity or innovation. Nor did they feel that their intuition is a better guide than research. In fact, they seemed to recognize the value of applying research to practice.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study suggest that the biggest barriers to teachers' use of research are not in teacher attitudes but in access, knowledge, and professional culture. (Although not noted by the authors, cost is likely a factor as well — for example, in teachers' lack of access to professional journals.) Given educators' already full plates, an expectation of using research must be

HOW RESEARCH IS EMBEDDED IN THE STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Using research is a thread that runs throughout the **Standards for Professional Learning,** not just the **Data standard.** It is especially evident in the **Learning Designs standard,** which calls for educators to be intentional about increasing educator effectiveness and results by integrating theories and research in the design of professional learning.

The concepts in the **Learning Communities standard** — including a culture of inquiry and continuous improvement for adult and student learning — are elements that support and lead to maximizing the effective use of research for improved teacher and student outcomes.

There are clear implications that **Leadership** must be actively engaged in modeling a culture of using research and sharing relevant studies and findings with educators. And **Resources**, including time and funding, could enable and encourage increased access and therefore use of research by more educators, more frequently.

accompanied by a supportive, systemic response from leaders at multiple levels.

The responses suggest that there is a need for greater leadership around

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In addition to serving on the editorial boards of several education journals, she writes a column for *Education Week* called "What Works, What Doesn't," which explores how to apply education research to practice. She recently shared insights about professional learning research with *The Learning Professional*.

WHAT WORKS?
RESEARCH PROBES
A COMPLICATED QUESTION

Q&A with HEATHER HILL

Q: Educators and policymakers often make blanket statements about whether professional learning works or doesn't work. Your research has shown that it's more complicated. What are the most important factors to look at when assessing the impact of professional learning?

A: In a perfect world, I would look for two things to assess impact: whether the professional learning has improved instruction in classrooms and whether it has resulted in students who perform better with respect to the content the professional learning is designed to address.

"Educators may have to look at what's *in* professional learning to make a judgment about the elements that are likely to affect teaching and learning."

Because we are in an imperfect world, it's very challenging to determine whether outcomes improve as a result of teacher professional learning, in part because the standardized tests used in many states are not sensitive to academically rigorous instruction.

Instead, educators may have to look at what's *in* professional learning to make a judgment about the elements that are likely to affect teaching and learning. For example, my study with Kathleen Lynch and others at Harvard found that STEM professional learning programs that focus on helping teachers learn to use curriculum materials were more effective (in terms of improving student achievement) than programs that featured professional learning alone. Combining professional learning with curriculum materials was also more effective than programs in which teachers simply received new curriculum materials.

Why programs that combine curriculum materials with professional learning are more effective is an interesting question. It's possible that the professional learning helps teachers fine-tune how they use the curriculum materials, maybe by focusing on the underlying STEM content or on the specific teaching techniques the curricula contain.

Another possibility is that this professional learning may encourage teachers to use the curriculum materials, improving fidelity and the overall quality of instruction, versus a situation in which teachers are cobbling together lessons from sites such as Teachers Pay Teachers.

Still another possibility is that professional learning without curriculum materials leaves teachers without much structure for actually changing what they do on a day-to-day level in the classroom.

Our study also found that programs aimed at improving teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge tended to outperform those that did not focus at all on this topic. Programs also benefited from what we called "implementation meetings" — chances for teachers to come back together after the beginning of the program to talk about successes and challenges using the program's teaching techniques. And, surprisingly, programs that contained a summer workshop did better than those without.

Teachers have long said that they want professional learning that is immediately useful and helps them teach better. My takeaway from this study is that they are right: Professional learning that digs deep into the heart of teaching and gives teachers either content knowledge or concrete strategies for implementing new practices makes a difference for students.

Q: Can you talk about your research on implementation fidelity — that is, how well educators use an intervention as it was designed and intended? What should educators take away from this research?

A: My co-author Anna Erickson and I looked at the relationship between implementation fidelity and student outcomes in 76 federally funded studies. These studies evaluated many different kinds of programs — for instance, new math curricula, professional development focused on social-emotional learning, and writing programs, and most captured both implementation fidelity and student outcomes. As expected, we found that stronger implementation fidelity increased the odds of seeing positive results on student outcomes.

What was surprising to us is that moderate and high-fidelity implementation produced more positive student outcomes at about the same rate. It was only low-fidelity implementation that led to weaker student outcomes. In line with my comments above, we also found that programs that featured new curriculum materials as a major component tended to report better fidelity.

Q: Teachers have lamented for years that a lot of professional learning is not worthwhile because it is short-term and not connected to teachers' practices in the classroom. How can we weed out ineffective sit-and-get workshops and improve the overall quality and effectiveness of professional learning?

A: I wrote an *EdWeek* article that reviewed research on teacher professional learning, which explains

that coaching and curriculum-focused professional learning programs have, on average, positive results (Hill, 2020).

Weeding out sit-and-get type programs will probably take a few things: changes in state laws that require that teachers cover specific content or take professional learning in a specific format each year; states and districts to refrain from pushing new policies out via professional learning; and regular time for teachers to engage with coaches or colleagues during their regular day or week.

Q: It seems that one important strategy for improving the quality of professional learning is for districts to research how well their professional learning approaches are working. Yet capacity to do this kind of research is limited. What advice do you have for districts about learning from their own work in order to improve it?

A: You're right, capacity is really limited, especially now with COVID straining district resources. To do research on the efficacy of professional learning (or any new program, in fact), districts need to have three things.

The first is the ability to compare a group of classrooms receiving the new program to those that do not. Sometimes comparison groups can be hard for districts to arrange — everyone needs to receive the new program at the same time.

But if there's a chance to pilot the program with a randomly selected set of teachers or release the new program to half of the district's schools in one year and then the other half in the next, this can provide the kind of comparison group that is needed to identify the effect of the program.

The second thing they need is measures that can track change in teachers' classroom instruction and changes in student outcomes. This is a little more tricky. In my field, STEM education, there are lots of classroom observation and student assessment instruments for use in research, but

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PRINCIPLES FOR ONLINE COACHING
Access MQI Coaching's guiding principles for online coaching at: **mqicoaching.cepr.harvard.edu/ files/mqi-coaching/files/mqi_ covid_resource.pdf**

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there hasn't been a ton of progress toward instruments that are both easy to use and accurate when used "live" in school settings.

The best option might be to cobble together measures from the teacher evaluation rubrics used in districts and interim assessments given to students. But these often aren't fully aligned with new programs. For the classroom observations, you will also need more observations per classroom than teacher evaluation systems typically collect, and they must be timed around the beginning and end of the professional learning program.

The third thing is capacity to collect and analyze the data. If you're looking to augment analytic capacity, two strategies to leverage are research-practice partnerships and doctoral students. The former is a way for academics and districts to convene research projects aimed at answering common questions. Regional Education Laboratories and some foundations provide financial support to these partnerships.

The federal government has also had grant programs that provide similar support. And doctoral students are golden. Harvard has a doctoral fellowship that supports partnerships with districts and states to understand the effects of new policies and programs.

Q: In one of your *Education Week* columns, you argued that many grade-level team meetings set to analyze student data focused on noninstructional reasons for students' lack of progress. What would it take to shift the focus of data conversations to instructional

strategies, and would you expect to see a bigger impact on teaching and learning outcomes?

A: I'm a big believer in the power of routines. Effective routines can focus attention and energy on what matters — and make difficult conversations much easier — because everyone knows what to expect.

I'd advise educators to design routines that focus on not just what content students don't know, but also on examining curriculum materials, so that teachers can compare students' unfinished learning to what's present in the materials and the way that content was taught.

Teachers may discuss the ways that the idea the child missed was or wasn't covered during instruction and hypothesize about ways to enhance that content within the parameters of the curriculum materials. If teachers feel shaky on the content of the lessons, routines can support reviewing that content or practicing how to teach it.

These routines also should be flexible enough to lead grade-level teams to other problems in classrooms, such as students who have disengaged from instruction or classroom management problems that take away from learning time. From my recent experience watching mathematics instruction, I would bet that student disengagement is a major driver of unfinished learning.

Q: What does research tell us about online professional learning, such as online coaching, that we can use to help educators in this time?

A: My work with Kathleen Lynch showed that professional learning programs that contained an online element were not as effective as professional learning programs that were entirely face-to-face. However, with COVID, online is part of the new normal.

We've run online math coaching (MQI Coaching) for years, and have

found it to be an effective way to change instruction. One silver lining of this pandemic is that online coaches won't need to ship cameras to teachers this fall — they can easily peek in on instruction that occurs over Zoom or Google Hangouts. MQI Coaching offers a set of guiding principles for online coaching.

Q: What have you learned from the response to your *Education Week* column? Has it changed how you think about the way educators use research and what they need from research?

A: I have studied research use by practitioners, so nothing surprises me. I guess my learning this year has been that teachers and school leaders are faced with an impossible job — trying to reconcile what research says with more local evidence about what works and doesn't in their own practice.

A colleague, Lauren Yoshizawa, observed as teachers and coaches tried to process research recommendations, for instance, for reciprocal teaching all the while knowing that it had been tried and hadn't worked in their classrooms due to problems with implementation.

There are also certainly schools for which the study of student data has worked to improve outcomes. These findings raise interesting questions about whether research or local knowledge should be prioritized in funding programs and federal legislation.

REFERENCE
Hill, H.C. (2020, February 21). Teacher PD gets a bad rap. But two approaches do work. *Education Week.* www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/02/24/teacher-pd-gets-a-bad-rap-but.html ■

RESEARCH REVIEW / Elizabeth Foster

Continued from p.17
using research in schools. In the schools and districts represented in this study — and likely many others — there is significant room for improvement in leaders' sharing of relevant studies, guiding implementation, and setting expectations for the use of research.

The finding that a very small number of respondents learn about research from a conference or professional organization signals that organizations like Learning Forward have an important responsibility to model the use of research, share relevant research with educators in an accessible format, and advocate for free user-friendly tools drawn from new studies.

Learning Forward strives to provide these kinds of supports in multiple ways. For example, in many Learning Forward networks, teams of educators regularly and collaboratively discuss research that is relevant to improving their practice and their students' outcomes. Participation in a network can provide the structure, time, and facilitation support that makes this kind of discussion possible.

Learning Forward has also been advocating for researchers who are engaged in and publishing studies related to improving teaching and learning to be clear and specific about the professional learning that is

DIG DEEPER
One of the important tenets of applying research to practice is consulting multiple studies or reviews of research, as one study on its own is not definitive. Although this column often takes a close look at a single study or article, we know that no one paper is enough to guide decisions and practices, and we always encourage you to read further on the topics we cover. In that spirit, we encourage you to take a look at these other references and resources about using research evidence in educational practice.

EdNext Podcast:
Using Evidence in Education
Nora Gordon and Carrie Conaway, the authors of *Common-Sense Evidence: The Education Leader's Guide to Using Data and Research,* join Education Next to discuss how leaders and educators can bridge the divide between academic research and real-time classroom application. **www.educationnext.org/ednext-podcast-using-evidence-in-education**

Research Use in School District Central Office Decision Making: A Case Study
Elizabeth N. Farley-Ripple's findings "suggest a need for strategies to improve instrumental use, including reconsidering the production and dissemination of research, facilitating the flow of knowledge within the central office, and further examination of conceptual uses of research." **journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1741143212456912**

Great Teaching Toolkit: Evidence Review
Cambridge International and Evidence Based Education (a UK-based research organization) have developed this resource to help educators identify priority actions and the research related to the key strategies likely to improve student outcomes. **www.cambridgeinternational.org/support-and-training-for-schools/teaching-cambridge-at-your-school/great-teaching-toolkit**

required to implement the findings of their research. Several organizations are leading this charge, including the Usable Knowledge website at the Harvard Graduate School of Education

(www.gse.harvard.edu/uk) and the Digital Promise Research Map tools (researchmap.digitalpromise.org/research-resources). ■

DATA POINTS

53% OF TEACHERS FELT LESS SUCCESSFUL DURING REMOTE TEACHING

A survey of teacher working conditions found that teachers experienced a marked decline in their sense of success when teaching and learning moved online in spring 2020. This was less true, though, when schools maintained certain positive working conditions, including targeted professional learning, collaboration, and effective communication.

Teachers in high-poverty and majority Black schools reported the most severe challenges. Career stage also influenced perceived challenges, with midcareer teachers struggling to balance home and school responsibilities and veteran teachers reporting the most discomfort with remote teaching tools.

The study was conducted by researchers at Brown University and City University of New York.
bit.ly/2GOplMw

56% OF TEACHERS INITIATED THEIR OWN LEARNING

Teachers and administrators disagree about how much formal professional learning teachers engaged in for remote learning when schools closed in spring 2020. According to a survey by the EdTech Evidence Exchange and the University of Virginia Curry School of Education, 52% of administrators reported that such learning opportunities were available to teachers, but only 27% of teachers reported access to such learning.

According to teachers, informal, teacher-initiated learning was the most common form of professional learning (56%). The survey, completed by 788 educators as the school year ended, also found that 86% of respondents expected the

need for education technology to increase in the coming three years.
bit.ly/2GOOVkz

56% OF EDUCATORS ENGAGED IN DISTANCE LEARNING SUPPORT OVER THE SUMMER

Professional learning is one of several topics covered in recent surveys by PDK International about educators' and students' responses to the COVID crisis. According to a survey in August, educators responded that the topics most often covered by their schools' and districts' professional learning efforts were online trainings in distance learning (56%), links to distance learning resources (55%), and technology training (54%).

Only 17% reported training in trauma-sensitive teaching, despite the fact that students' social and emotional needs were among participants' top priorities.
bit.ly/2RdgmX8

3 SOURCES OF DATA ON RACIAL BIAS

A recent study published in *Educational Researcher* sought to quantify teachers' implicit racial bias and its association with disciplinary actions and student test scores. The study used data from Project Implicit's white-Black Implicit Association Test, which measures how individuals associate various positive and negative characteristics with white and Black people. It

matched county-level results on the test with data on racial achievement gaps from the Stanford Education Data Archive and racial discipline gaps from the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection.

The study found that educators tend to hold slight pro-white/anti-Black bias, with white educators showing more bias than Black educators and teachers working in counties with larger shares of Black students exhibiting lower levels of bias. Moreover, in counties where teachers show higher anti-Black bias, there are larger racial disparities in test scores and suspensions.

The study wasn't able to determine causality.
bit.ly/2R9wuc6
brook.gs/33dmpk0

44 PRACTICES PROMOTE POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

A study published in *Review of Educational Research* combining meta-analysis and common practice elements analysis aimed to fill gaps in the literature on student-teacher relationships.

The meta-analysis, which examined 21 studies of 13 programs, found small to moderate effects of programs and practices designed to improve student-teacher relationships. The common practice elements analysis, which examined the 12 effective programs, identified 44 promising practices for improving relationships.

Programs with the largest effects on relationships used more proactive and direct teacher-student practices rather than practices in response to behavior problems or indirect practices such as altering the classroom environment.
bit.ly/2Rfa3Ci

SHOW TEACHERS YOU CARE

"Leaders show respect by listening deeply to their faculty and using all their available resources and influence within the larger community to advocate for teachers' most urgent requests and concerns. While it's unlikely teachers will ever really feel safe with so many uncertainties, showing that you hear them, value them, and care about them as more than employees is a demonstration of respect."

— *"Address the stress: How leaders can support teachers in an extraordinary year,"* p. **36**

DENA SIMMONS is assistant director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and faculty at the Yale Child Study Center, where she supports schools to use the power of emotions to create a more compassionate and just society.

She has been a middle school teacher, teacher educator, diversity facilitator, and curriculum developer, and is a leading voice on social justice, anti-racism, and equitable social and emotional learning in teacher education.

Her writing and speaking have led her to the White House, the inaugural Obama Foundation Summit, the United Nations, TED, and beyond. She is the author of the forthcoming book *White Rules for Black People.*

SEL AND EQUITY
'IF WE DON'T ADDRESS THE WOUND, WE CANNOT HEAL'

Q&A with DENA SIMMONS

BY SUZANNE BOUFFARD

Q: How did you get into the work you do with teachers about social justice?

A: I always wanted to work with young people. I decided to become a teacher because my 7th-grade teacher, Mr. Dillon, pulled me aside at dismissal one day and said, "Promise me you'll spend at least one year being a teacher."

Before that, I wanted to be a pediatrician because I reasoned that it would allow me to help children and make money. Growing up in poverty, I knew I did not want to struggle like my mother. But his comment really sparked the idea for me that I could be a teacher.

Education in many ways has opened up the world for me, even though it didn't always come easy, and I thought that if I became a teacher, I could open up the world for others.

I got into teacher education in grad school out of necessity. I didn't have any

> **"If we don't apply an anti-racist lens to SEL, it has the risk of being used as a weapon, as something else Black and brown kids don't know how to do."**

funding, and I needed to pay rent. Once I went into teacher education, I realized the power of working with educators.

I fell in love with supporting teachers' growth and practice and pushing them so they don't commit harm and can create spaces where students can thrive. You are still working for students, in a sense, because you are ensuring that the people who show up in front of the classroom are going to do the best by students.

What drives my work in education is safety. When I was growing up in the Bronx, I didn't have the privilege of safety, like so many of our young people who grow up in underresourced communities.

Then, as a high schooler, I went to boarding school, where I was one of the few students of color for the first time in my life. Now I had to worry about a different type of safety — emotional safety. I asked myself, "Am I safe to be Black in this environment?"

After getting my education and continuing to be in mostly white spaces, I still end up standing out in my difference, and, as a result, I constantly ask myself, "Am I safe to be my full authentic self in this space?"

When I got my doctorate, I aimed to learn how we can create safe spaces for everyone where people can live and learn in the comfort of their skin. As a former middle school teacher, I was looking at teacher preparedness to

address bullying in the middle school context. I fell into studying SEL [social and emotional learning] from bullying prevention because research shows that SEL programming can help mitigate antisocial behaviors like bullying.

Q: You write and speak frequently about the need to approach SEL from an equity lens. Why is it important for educators to have professional learning about equitable SEL?

A: My interest is at the intersection of social and emotional learning and culturally responsive practices so that we can ensure equitable and anti-racist practices. I want to be sure we say anti-racist because I don't want us to forget to do the work of racial justice.

We are now in a place in society where we see what happens when we let a wound fester. The wound we have is a race problem, and we've allowed it to fester for too long, and we're now experiencing civil unrest, which we have experienced before in cycles.

We have to understand that SEL happens within a context. You can't teach people how to get along without talking about why we don't get along. One of the reasons we don't get along is because of the racial strife in our country, the racial barrier between groups of people. If we don't address the wound, we cannot heal.

We can leverage SEL for an anti-racist future and for racial justice, but

SEL without deliberate and active anti-racist work is not enough. SEL alone will not solve racism and oppression. We need systemic change, where racial justice is at the core.

Also, we have to recognize that SEL happens within an education system where the curriculum, if we're being honest, has been and is based on the ways of whiteness. So, if we don't apply an anti-racist lens to SEL, it has the risk of being used as a weapon, as something else Black and brown kids don't know how to do.

I've done a lot of work with districts across the U.S., and what I have seen is how the narrative about SEL changes according to the group of students. When we talk about white kids and privileged kids, SEL is about college and career readiness and about thriving in those settings. When we're talking about Black and brown students, people say, "Our students of color need to learn how to control their behavior." It becomes about compliance and control, and it perpetuates the racial hierarchy.

We have to be careful because how we speak about something becomes how we live and interact, and it impacts our practice. I've said before, and I will say again, that, if we don't apply an anti-racist lens, SEL has the risk of becoming white supremacy with a hug.

Q: Where is the starting place for teachers in this work, especially for

TEACHING TIPS

Check out Dena's "quaranteaching tips" for SEL and culturally responsive pedagogy during remote learning at **#quaranteaching** and **@DenaSimmons.**

← **Tweet**

Dena Simmons @DenaSimmons - May 21
Today's #quaranteaching tip: invite students to leave themselves a message (letter, video, whatever) for their future selves about this moment and their hopes & dreams so they can return two years from now and see how they experienced this #pandemic & reflect on their aspirations

💬 7   ⟲ 58   ♡ 177   ⬆
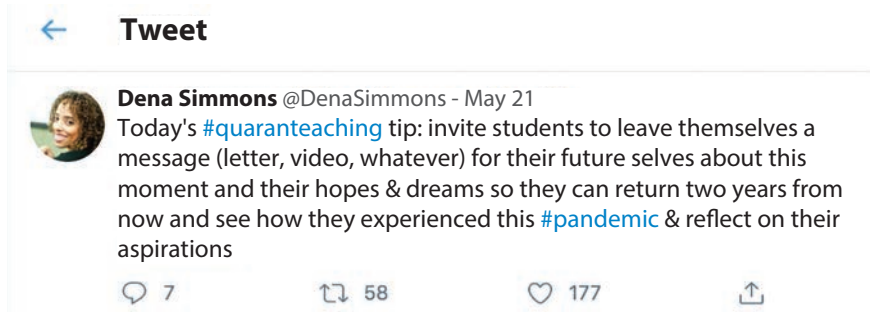
teachers who haven't reflected on these issues before?

A: I think the starting place is self. Who am I? How do I show up in this world? What access and power do I have or not have? And then you start to place yourself in your context as a teacher. How do my students see me? What do I want my students to know about me? And then the question that is important to consider is, how do I want people to leave their interaction with me?

Then you ask those questions about the people around you, about your students. What power and privilege do my students have or not have? Who are they and who are they not? What do I not know and what do I need to ask? Too often, we create narratives about people.

I recommend starting to do this work in racial affinity groups with a focus on healing. This is especially important in our current context. We are all experiencing a collective trauma, and as a result, we are all in need of collective healing.

Once people feel a little secure in what they have to offer the world through their affinity groups, then they can start to have conversations across difference. It's important to be very clear about the purpose of why you're

coming together. You have to make a commitment to anti-racism and equity and say, "This is all of our work." Then, together, you ask, "What do we hope to accomplish?" and "What do we hope to learn together?"

It's always hard to start. There's a certain level of vulnerability and courage you have to have to engage in these conversations. But you create the space and time to have conversations in affinity groups. You do a lot of expectation and norm setting, and ask, "How do we lean into human goodness as we engage in this very important work?"

Once these conversations become a practice, you'll see it become part of the culture. But you have to scaffold it. We know it's not going to feel comfortable, but what we've all learned as educators is that you need to be in that space of disequilibrium in order to grow and learn.

Q: This kind of reflection and connection takes time and ongoing support. What do you see as some of the most promising professional learning approaches to achieve these goals?

A: Storytelling is an important piece. When I work with school districts, it's always grounded in narrative. Narrative

humanizes us and others. It gives us a window into another's life and allows us to open a window for another. It allows people to see what they may have in common — or what their differences are and how to lean into them and learn from someone else.

Storytelling can happen even in a short activity with another person, and during that activity, you could learn something new about someone you've worked with for 20 years. We have to really look at the world and our colleagues as people we can always discover something new about. I always say that I walk around and I see the world as art. It allows me to see the beauty in other people, in the world.

Q: You've been doing a lot of writing and speaking lately about self-care for educators. What advice do you give?

A: First of all, I think it's important to understand the revolutionary and radical aspects of self-care. Particularly, I think of Audre Lorde's quotation, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." For me, the act of taking care of one's self is crucial, especially those of us who are continuously oppressed. That is why I talk about self-care, equity, and healing

together because care has not been distributed equitably.

It's important for teachers to take care of themselves because, if they don't, they cannot take care of others. They're more likely to report feeling stressed and burnt out, and research has shown that, when teachers are stressed, their interactions with students are less warm, student achievement suffers, and the classroom climate is not as warm, either. That's why I believe that a stressed and burned-out teaching force is an equity issue, and if school systems truly care about equity, then they would do better at taking care of their teachers.

So, first, I want to tell teachers to take care of themselves, to start with whatever's causing their stress. Begin to think about an action plan for, "How am I going to address these barriers to care and the stresses I'm facing?" We can't just "do self-care" and not address what's causing our burnout.

And we can't only think about self-care. We have to think about collective care. When we talk only about self-care, we're basically telling teachers, "It's your responsibility. It's your life. Get it together." Instead, people need to ask, "What about the system has contributed to my lack of care? And what practices and policies contribute to the health and well-being of my colleagues?" I think school systems could be doing better with taking care of educators.

Q: In the midst of the collective trauma we're all experiencing, do you see any opportunities for change?

A: The way I've lived my life, I try to look at the light that's coming through the crack. I think a lot of people are now feeling the importance of togetherness. We used to sit at a table together looking at our phones. Now we're thinking, "Please get me away from the screen!" We're really striving for authentic connection right now. We can see this as an opportunity to ask, "How can we do better?" As we strive for being together in person again, how do we do better at connecting and at learning? How do we do better at everything?

This article is based on an interview conducted on Aug. 21, 2020. Dena Simmons' comments are her own and do not represent the views of Yale University or any other entity.

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WHEN TEACHERS LISTEN, STUDENTS LEARN

COACHING HELPS TEACHERS INCORPORATE STUDENT VOICE IN THE CLASSROOM

BY LIESEL CARLSON

The midwinter snow fell outside the classroom window as teacher Nicole Minor set up an iPod Touch, pressed record, and focused her 1st-hour Algebra 2 class on the learning target written on the board.

"Please take a moment to read the learning target for today," she told the class. "Think to yourself, how can you write this in your own words so it makes sense to you? Now turn and talk with your neighbor."

After students discussed their thinking with a peer and wrote down their learning targets, Minor chose a few students to share with the whole group and then continued with the lesson.

After 30 minutes, Minor stopped the iPod recording and uploaded it to a secure online platform. A few minutes later, across town, I received a notification that Minor's video had been submitted. As Minor's coach, I was excited to see her latest lesson video, which marked the beginning of a new coaching and learning cycle.

Over the following week, I reviewed the video, selected three one-minute clips, and wrote reflective prompts. The prompts highlighted Minor's effective interactions with students based on the goals of the previous cycle, which were to communicate clear learning targets and increase peer dialogue.

After Minor viewed, reflected, and responded to the prompts, we met for a 30-minute conference. Minor reflected and planned how to replicate effective practices, and together we co-planned the next lesson. Over the school year, we engaged in 10 cycles like this one, each based on a new video.

At the end of the school year, Minor and I sat together reflecting on our yearlong collaboration, which was part of our district's participation

DOMAINS OF THE CLASS (CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT SCORING SYSTEM)		
Emotional support	**Organizational support**	**Instructional support**
How the teacher promotes positive relationships, helps students find enjoyment in learning, feels comfortable in the classroom, and experiences appropriate choice and independence.	The teacher behaviors that establish an effective structure for learning through the organization and management of students' behavior, time, and attention in the classroom.	The ways in which teachers implement lessons and activities to engage students in learning and promote cognitive development.

in a project on My Teaching Partner-Secondary, a research-based coaching approach to improve teacher-student interactions in middle and high school.

Minor shared what she had learned from the project and how she had seamlessly incorporated new practices into her daily instruction at Eastern High School in Lansing, Michigan. I listened intently, and, toward the end of the conversation, I asked, "What if you hadn't participated in the coaching program this year?"

Minor said, "I would have missed out on what the kids had to say." We paused, letting that reflection sink in. Minor realized that she had started listening to students in a different way over the course of the year. As she paid more attention to her interactions with students, she prioritized student voice more, and student engagement increased.

Minor had tapped into one of the core tenets of My Teaching Partner-Secondary. Listening to students and encouraging their agency is a major focus of the model. When teachers listen intentionally to students, they become attuned to what students think, feel, and experience. They value each student's ways of knowing. This, in turn, can create relevant, equitable learning opportunities for students.

HOW THE COACHING PROGRAM WORKS

My work with Minor and three other teachers took place through the Lansing School District's participation in a multiyear project to implement and study the effects of the My Teaching Partner-Secondary 1:1 Video Coaching model.

The model is a collaborative, individualized coaching program that

focuses on effective teacher-student interactions that contribute to students' social and academic gains. Based on research and shown to be effective in two randomized control studies (Allen et al., 2015; Allen et al., 2011), My Teaching Partner-Secondary uses a standardized process that is strengths-based, interactions-focused, collaborative, and rooted in a teacher's actual practice. The coaching model is content-adaptable and can be applied to any subject area.

The primary goal for participating teachers is to improve their teaching through becoming a better observer of their own practice, specifically understanding and describing interactions, intentionally planning greater learning opportunities for students, and improving curriculum implementation (Pianta et. al, 2010).

This coaching model uses the research-validated Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a framework and tool for understanding classroom interactions (Pianta et al., 2012) that focuses on emotional, organizational, and instructional interactions that support, motivate, and engage students. (See table above left.)

Rigorous studies have demonstrated that teachers' ratings on the CLASS measure are predictive of student engagement and achievement (Allen et al., 2013). CLASS is an essential part of the My Teaching Partner-Secondary 1:1 Video Coaching model and is used as a common lens and language for planning, understanding,

and discussing social and academic classroom interactions.

With My Teaching Partner-Secondary, coaching occurs in a cyclical, five-step process:

1. The teacher records a video during a lesson of his or her choosing and submits it to the coach through a secure platform.
2. The coach reviews the video through the lens of the CLASS framework and selects brief clips of effective practices accompanied by specific reflective prompts.
3. The teacher reviews the video clips and responds to the prompts.
4. The coach and teacher have a conference during which they reflect, set goals, and plan.
5. The coach creates a conference summary and action plan.

This cycle is repeated about every two weeks throughout the school year (Pianta et al., 2010).

While neither the coaching model nor the CLASS framework is explicit about promoting equity or increasing teacher awareness of implicit bias and institutionalized racism, their focus on student voice and agency does so implicitly.

The model focuses on individual interactions, prompting teachers to prioritize opportunities for each student to share thoughts, opinions, and thinking with the teacher and peers, which can increase awareness of each student's needs and increase everyone's access to connection and high-quality learning opportunities.

Indeed, research has demonstrated that the CLASS framework has power in closing one of education's most persistent equity problems, the racial discipline gap. In a recent study of 86 secondary classrooms, researchers found that when teachers improved on CLASS dimensions of emotional and instructional interactions, they reduced exclusionary discipline practices toward African American male students

> **COACH-TEACHER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**
>
> Guiding questions for coach-teacher discussions based on the CLASS framework include:
> - Do I have regular opportunities to check in with students about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences?
> - Have I provided opportunities for choice, student leadership, and peer collaboration?
> - Have I made the lesson and learning relevant and valuable for my students?
> - What is the balance between teacher and student talk in my lessons?
> - Have I provided opportunities for students to do the thinking: connecting previous and current learning, analyzing, comparing, generating, and reflecting?
>
> These questions individually and collectively can help ensure that students feel valued and engaged in the learning.

(Gregory et al., 2016).

The researchers suggest that the CLASS framework's focus on awareness and responsiveness to individual social, emotional, and academic needs and emphasis on engaging, rigorous learning make the framework and My Teaching Partner-Secondary model equity implicit, especially benefitting the most vulnerable populations.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

In 2018, Lansing became one of the first three districts participating in a project to see if the achievement and behavioral effects from previous studies could be replicated. The project, and a research study within it, is being conducted by the American Institutes for Research, Learning Forward, and Teachstone, the organization that developed and facilitates the program's implementation.

Also participating in the first cohort of the project are Waco ISD in Texas and Louisa County Public Schools in Virginia. In 2019, the project team expanded the project to additional districts in California and Utah. In Lansing, we added coach Malikah Gregory to work with a new cohort of nine additional teachers.

To assess the outcomes of the program, the team is collecting multiple measures, including

structured, qualitative interviews with participating teachers, like Minor, as well as unstructured participation reflections with district coaches, like me. These important learnings align with the coaching program's process goals and provide insight into how the coaching model supports teachers to improve their interactions and practices. (Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all standardized testing measures intended to examine quantitative student outcomes are paused until 2022.)

While the study is ongoing, we in Lansing have already learned some lessons from both cohort one and two teachers about how My Teaching Partner-Secondary is improving teaching and learning, especially in building equity. Teachers' experiences have been overwhelmingly positive.

Adam Fedewa, a math teacher participating in cohort one, said, "Ultimately, what I have learned from the coaching and CLASS dimensions is so helpful for the students. It builds relationships with the kids. It has rejuvenated my teaching."

In our district, the CLASS framework is supporting student voice and equity in the way in which teachers are aware and responsive to student needs and how they plan opportunities for choice, leadership, and peer sharing.

These strategies convey to students, "I care about what you experience, say, and feel."

Instructionally, student voice and equity are present in how teachers plan and engage students, make connections with past learning, balance teacher-student talk, facilitate student dialogue, and challenge students to engage in higher-order thinking from brainstorming to analyzing and metacognitive reflection. A focus on these opportunities conveys to students, "I believe that you can engage in rigorous learning, and I care about what you think and say."

For example, Minor said, "As a teacher, I have grown in the area of including student voice in the classroom during instructional time as well as in assignments, connecting more of the math to the students' backgrounds and prior knowledge to help them see the relevancy of Algebra 2 in their lives."

Participating teachers' reflections highlight an essential element of increasing student voice: teacher confidence. When teachers feel effective in the classroom, they interact with students more positively (Pianta et al., 2010). In Lansing, as teachers' confidence increased with each cycle, they tried new CLASS relational and instructional behaviors, adding additional opportunities for student voice.

For example, Courtney McCampbell, a special education teacher, said, "I started focusing on what I was doing right and how to build on those skills. My coach, Malikah, helped guide me and come up with new ideas to help the kids. This increased my confidence as a teacher, which then allowed me to try new things in the classroom. I could see the voice and engagement in my classroom increase, and my joy of teaching went right along with it."

Jennifer Leroy, a cohort two English teacher, said the experience "validated my perspective as well as helped me grow. My coach spoke to my strengths, even as we discussed

A number of factors are shining a bright spotlight on inequity these days, especially the COVID-19 pandemic and protests against institutionalized racism and violence against people of color. These issues highlight the urgency of making everyone's voices heard and ensuring that all members of our school communities have agency.

possible corrections through reflection, analysis, and clearly delineated goals aimed at strengthening student power and voice."

MAKING EVERYONE HEARD

A number of factors are shining a bright spotlight on inequity these days, especially the COVID-19 pandemic and protests against institutionalized racism and violence against people of color. These issues highlight the urgency of making everyone's voices heard and ensuring that all members of our school communities have agency.

At the same time, teaching and learning during this era present new challenges to engagement and access to learning opportunities. The emphasis on listening to students and interacting with them in supportive ways found in My Teaching Partner-Secondary can help us keep our focus on equity, even as we adapt to a new mode of learning.

Regardless of the student management system or video communication platform, this strengths-based model can promote intentional, authentic relationships. Those relationships are the foundation for all meaningful teaching and learning, from conversations and racism and social justice to real-world application of math and science concepts.

When we keep student voice at

the center of our practice, we prioritize equity and we ensure that we don't miss out on what the kids have to say.

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CONNECTIONS
BRING US CLOSER
TO EQUITY AND JUSTICE

PROGRAMS BUILD KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS
TEACHERS NEED TO BE INFLUENTIAL
BEYOND THEIR CLASSROOMS
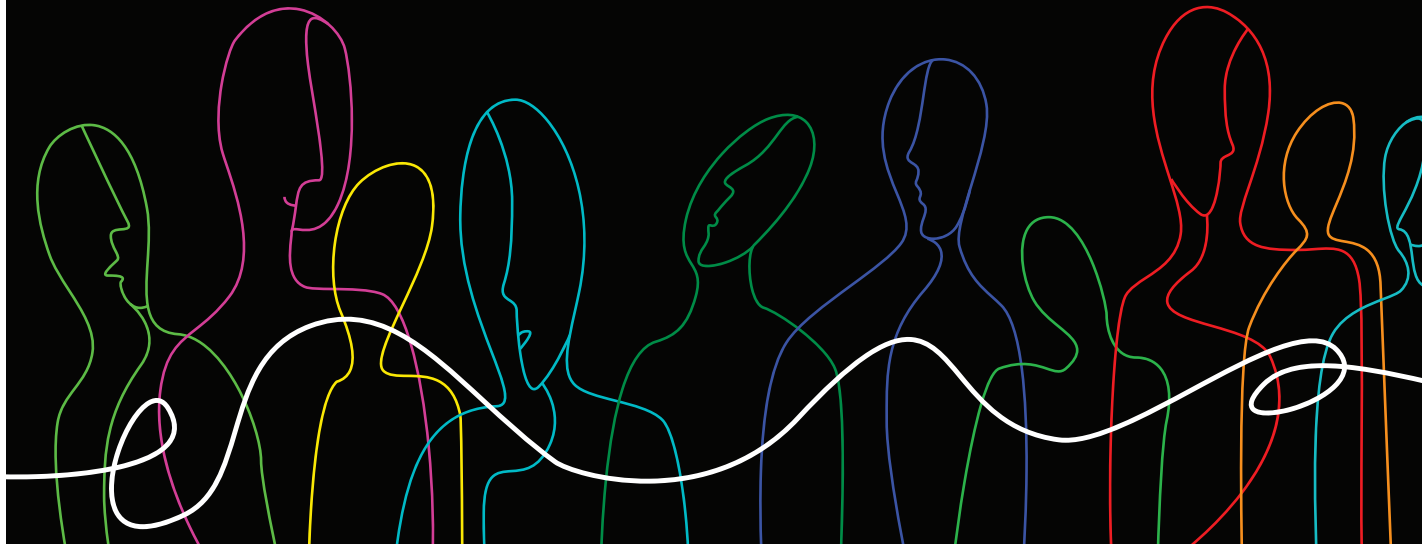
BY ELLIE DRAGO-SEVERSON, JESSICA BLUM-DESTEFANO, AND DEBORAH BROOKS-LAWRENCE

"With so much unrest and uncertainty in our nation, in this city, and in our district, teams continue to be the glue that holds my school together. I make sure to ask teachers, 'How are you feeling?' They all need a place to emote, to learn, to plan, and to connect. Teams are making a difference."

— Urban veteran principal

At their best, teams can bring people and talents together and serve as holding environments — spaces that offer both developmental supports and challenges — for individual, group, and organizational growth and transformation.

While teaming has steadily emerged as a lever for educational change in recent years, educators are now being called on to team in new and deeper ways as they navigate unprecedented uncertainty amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, strive to meet the urgencies

of the Black Lives Matter movement for racial justice, and work to dismantle oppressive systems of all kinds in schools and out.

As suggested by the high school principal quoted at left, teams are critical now and can serve as integral spaces of planning, connection, and advocacy for social justice, broadly defined. Yet educators enter into pressing conversations about equity, race, identity, culture, and the health and well-being of the community from a wide range of starting places.

The fact that many of these conversations have moved online
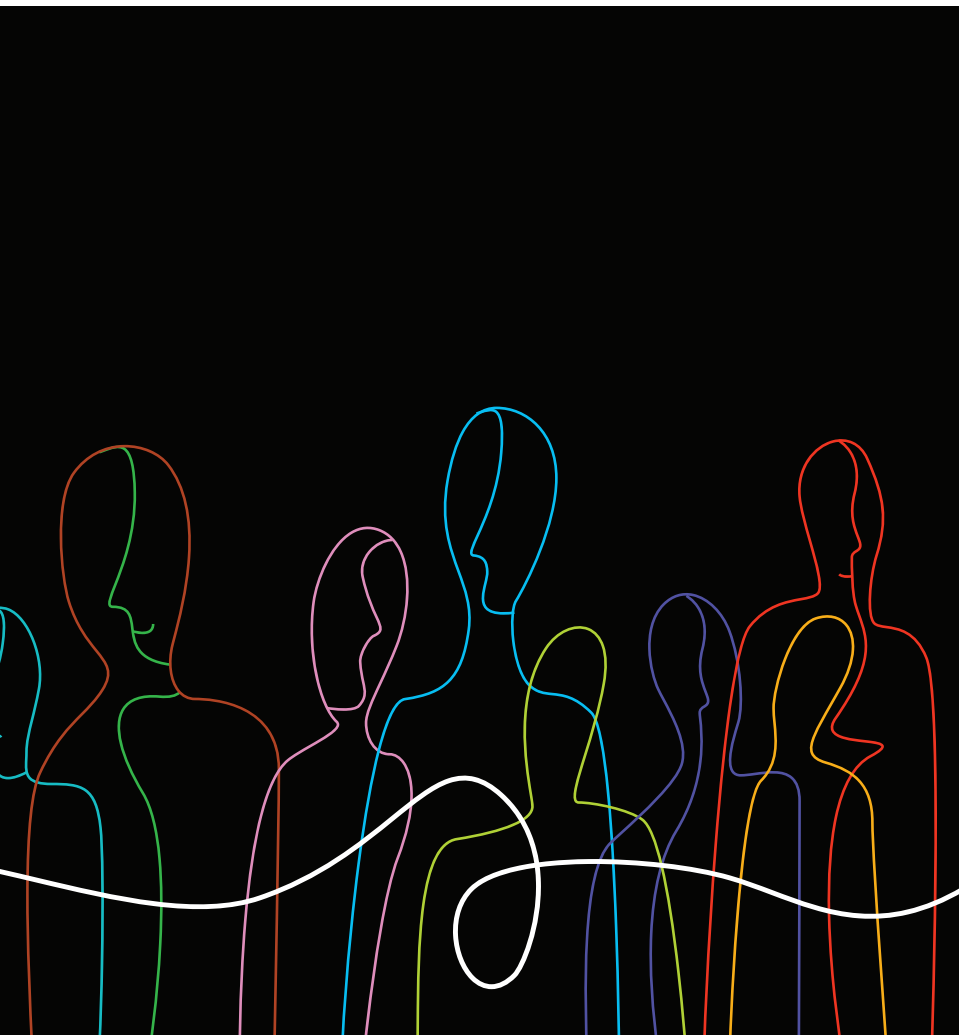
has added new layers of complexity.
For example, some educators have
welcomed the heightened intimacy
of glimpsed homes, pets, families,
and living spaces during virtual
meetings, while others find the
eroding boundary between home and
work and the expanding hours of the
workday challenging (in addition to
technological and child care concerns).

For many, online teaming can
involve all of these feelings and more at
once, depending on the team, the time,
and the purpose of the meeting. All
of this sits atop the already expansive
spectrum of understandings and
commitments individuals bring to
diversity, equity, teaming, and inclusion
work.

What does all of this mean for
educators seeking to leverage teaming as
a pathway for more inclusive, dignity-
affirming, justice-oriented schools?
How can teams — and the people who
compose them — grow together and
forward toward more equitable action
and understanding?

As an intercultural team that
teaches and researches about the
connection between adult development
and educational leadership, we
recognize that every adult brings unique
constructions and meaning making to
teams, which reflect the cumulative
experiences, stories, hopes, cultures,
and expectations embedded in their
positionalities.

We have also found that by

making these diverse constructions
and orientations more transparent
— by acknowledging differences
and commonalities both visible and
invisible, and by deepening connections
and understandings over time — team
members can better meet one another
where they are as they come together as
individuals in service to common goals.

Toward this end, foundational
lessons from research on racial
identity development, the Courageous
Conversation framework (Singleton,
2014), and constructive-developmental
theory illustrate how adults bring
different cognitive, emotional,
interpersonal, and intrapersonal
capacities to teaming. Combined
with practical strategies for building

teams as fertile contexts for authentic communication, collaboration, and action, we can all make more progress toward greater equity and social justice.

TEAMING THROUGH DIFFERENT LENSES

Individuals bring all of themselves holistically into teams, including intersectional dimensions of identity such as race, gender, culture, language, sexual orientation, professional role, and personality. Yet research suggests that people do not always — nor equally — feel comfortable sharing from this rich fullness, depending on the composition and climate of a team, especially intercultural ones. Sometimes, the risk of offering one's most genuine thinking can feel too great. Other times, the silence can be too much to bear.

Seminal research about racial identity development (e.g. Cross, 1995; Helms, 1994, 2020; Tatum, 2017) has helped articulate the diverse and evolving understandings of both self and other that people can bring to teams.

For example, many models of racial identity development describe processes of disentangling oneself from externally imposed, hegemonic narratives about one's racial group and moving toward increasingly positive and interconnected self-understandings over time. These journeys look different for people of color and white people because we live in contexts shaped by systemic racism (Singh, 2019).

Moreover, pioneering work around Courageous Conversation (Singleton, 2014) has made mainstream the idea that, for many reasons, people enter into sensitive and personal conversations about race, identity, and inequity from different compass points (e.g. from emotional, intellectual, moral, or action-oriented orientations).

While bridging different understandings can be difficult in general, engaging in conversations about race and equity from foundationally different compass

points can be particularly painful when these points of entry are invisible or unacknowledged.

Linking models of racial identity development and the Courageous Conversation compass, then, is the unifying idea that bringing under-the-surface orientations into more conscious awareness can lead to growth and change for individuals and groups, and ultimately to more purposeful action and collaboration.

A CONSTRUCTIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Another lens that we have found particularly helpful is constructive-developmental theory (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2017, 2018). Like theories of racial identity development, constructive-development theory maps adults' internal progression toward greater self-understanding and helps put into words some of the meaning making people bring with them into team dialogues.

Constructive-developmental theory highlights adulthood as a potentially rich time of growth and change, during which individuals' perspectives grow more complex over time, rather than a static period where development is "done" (Kegan, 1982, 1994). While constructive-developmental theory is organized into cumulative stages, which we call ways of knowing, these stages are not fixed categories or labels, but rather pause points along an expanding continuum of meaning-making.

What are the different ways of knowing, and why do they matter when teaming for equity in today's complex world?

Instrumental knowers often excel at concrete and logistical initiatives and can bring deep expertise, commitment, and content knowledge to the table during equity teaming. What is harder for instrumental knowers is looking beyond what they see as the "right" way to do things, as they tend to universalize their understandings of how the world works and have not yet developed the

capacity to more fully take others' perspectives.

Adults with a **socializing** way of knowing have developed this capacity, and accordingly orient strongly to valued others' — and society's — opinions and assessments of them. In schools and on teams, adults with this way of knowing often attune well to relational and interpersonal dimensions of collaboration, though they may struggle to engage in conflict or difficult conversations.

Growing into a **self-authoring** way of knowing involves taking a more reflective perspective on the expectations of others and building capacity to author one's own values, standards, and beliefs, such as a deep commitment to equity. Teaming, teaching, and leading with these values is important to self-authoring knowers, although they may struggle to invite others into their value systems and visions.

Self-transforming knowers have developed personal values and philosophies, but are no longer run by them. They seek to continue to further evolve and reflect through interconnection and mutuality. When engaged in equity collaborations, they can simultaneously embrace their expertise and commit to learning more.

This continuum (see the table on p. 35) helps illustrate one additional layer of why adults may orient to teaming differently, including when working toward social justice. This can open a path for more understanding and connection, which is necessary for progress toward equity within teams and beyond.

STRATEGIES FOR INTERCONNECTION

Layered with insights from other theories and lenses, such as models of racial identity development, constructive-developmental theory can help teams establish the foundation of all change work: relationships.

Educators across levels have continually voiced that building teams

WAYS OF KNOWING AND TEAMING FOR CHANGE		
Way of knowing	**Dominant orientation to teaming**	**Growing edges when teaming for change and social justice**
INSTRUMENTAL Rule-oriented self: How can I get the things I want and need?	If everyone would just do and learn what they're supposed to, the school would make progress and get things right.	• Seeing beyond one's own experiences and worldviews. • More fully taking teammates' perspectives. • Recognizing there is not just one "right" way to address equity issues.
SOCIALIZING Other-focused self: What you think of me, I think of me.	How can I say something that won't offend or disappoint my colleagues, especially when we're talking about sensitive subjects?	• Engaging in conflict and difficult conversations. • Taking a strong stand for an idea when others may disagree.
SELF-AUTHORING Reflective self: Am I staying true to my own values and competencies?	It's important to me that I get a chance to share my perspective and offer critique. I'm open to your ideas, but I can decide for myself what's the best next step.	• Working with teammates with very different views and ideas. • Inviting others into one's thinking and vision. • Critiquing one's own vision.
SELF-TRANSFORMING Interconnecting self: How can we learn from each other and grow together?	My colleagues help me see into myself and our work in new ways. Transformation isn't possible without leaning into the contradictions and paradoxes.	• Moving toward concrete action amidst many options. • Navigating hierarchical structures. • Continuing to grapple with the complexities of learning and unlearning about identity and equity.

Source: Adapted from Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2018.

with developmental intentionality has helped them to have critical and difficult conversations, especially conversations about race, privilege, and identity that they previously avoided.

Here are four strategies from our research and work with educators that can build and deepen essential team interconnection and collaboration for greater equity and justice (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2018; Drago-Severson, Joswick-O'Connor, & Blum-DeStefano, 2018).

Check in about expectations. Affording each team member the opportunity to check in at the start of a new or rebooted collaboration can allow individuals to share their hopes, goals, passions, and strengths as well as the kinds of things they would like support with.

Share communication preferences. Openly sharing one's communication and feedback preferences allows each member to better meet others where they are and can be a powerful way to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings.

Generate plans, norms, and agreements. Setting a clear plan for team time and work can optimize conditions for growth and connection. This can be done through protocols, and by developing shared norms, goals, and values that evolve over time.

Deepen connections. Undergirding all of these strategies is the imperative of continually deepening mutual understandings and connections. Deep listening and genuine investment in one another involve setting aside purposeful time to learn about the stories, expertise, and experiences team members bring into any space.

LOOKING AHEAD

Teams are essential today because we cannot effect urgently needed changes alone. Building an educational system that honors, supports, and includes all students and families takes everyone.

This means educators will likely engage in more teams than ever before — not just data teams and curriculum and leadership teams, but equity teams, affinity groups, blended and online learning teams, and many more.

We see the teaming lenses and strategies in this article as the bedrock of transformation, not as bonus features or side projects. When we can infuse even the smallest interactions with intentionality and authentic care and respect, it makes bigger change possible.

As the world continues to seek and embody the "beloved community" championed by Rep. John Lewis, developmental teaming can be one promising path forward.

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ADDRESS THE STRESS

HOW LEADERS CAN SUPPORT TEACHERS IN AN EXTRAORDINARY YEAR

BY SHARRON HELMKE

It's the start of another school year, but unlike any other in our careers. This year, we find ourselves at the nexus of a widespread, months-old pandemic and racial trauma that is centuries old.

We cannot pretend this is an ordinary school year. For many of us, there is fear in our classrooms, fear in the streets, fear of being in crowds, and fear for our families, to name just a few of our concerns.

This layering of health stress that started months ago with the racial trauma that has gone on for generations is not something we can check at the door as we enter school. With no immediate end to either in sight, these crises and the resulting trauma will be with us throughout the foreseeable future.

Leaders must model how to respect and care for colleagues

Despite this trauma and the uncertainty of resolution, we're being asked to step into the actual or virtual classroom, greet our students, and make learning happen. Given this is the reality we face and that taking the year off is not an option for many of us, how do we care for ourselves, our colleagues, and our staffs?

The strategies we should use now are not inherently different than those we would use in any school year. The difference is in being more aware of their importance and more intentional about doing and following through with them. Like so much in education, it starts with leaders setting the stage for this new emphasis and modeling it in practice.

GO BEYOND NORMAL EFFORTS

Leaders must model how to respect and care for colleagues. They must go beyond their normal efforts to show respect for their staffs to avoid giving the impression that teachers' presence is taken for granted (Porter, 2020). We must realize teachers are, rightfully, sensitive to the implication that stepping up to teach in the middle of a widespread pandemic without clear safety plans is what they are paid to do.

Many teachers have long felt undervalued by the larger society, and, for many, that feeling has been exacerbated by demands for in-person instruction without provision of adequate personal protective equipment or clarification of safety

plans (Pawlewicz, 2020). Writing for *The New York Times,* Dana Goldstein and Eliza Shapiro (2020) report that teachers feel the decision to reopen schools "elevates the needs of the economy and working parents above the concerns of the classroom workforce."

Teachers need to know that district and campus leaders understand their concerns and value their personal safety, and that of their families, as much as their ability to successfully manage in-person and virtual classrooms.

Campus leaders can also focus on improving communication and making themselves available to hear teacher concerns. Shutting out the concerns or asking teachers to "focus on the work" or "set aside your concerns for the students" isn't possible when the stress and trauma are pervasive and when the work environment itself is a source of that stress (Cuncic, 2020).

Leaders show respect by listening deeply to their faculty and using all their available resources and influence within the larger community to advocate for teachers' most urgent requests and concerns. While it's unlikely teachers will ever really feel safe with so many uncertainties, showing that you hear them, value them, and care about them as more than employees is a demonstration of respect. Expending your time and effort to listen and act on their concerns shows care and creates solidarity.

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

It's also important for leaders and teachers to keep in mind that research has demonstrated that extreme stress hinders the ability to concentrate, remember, and think logically. You may find that faculty members whom you once thought of as your most creative are suddenly uninspired, while your most reliable are struggling to meet deadlines and meet expectations.

It might be tempting to counsel them to focus and get more organized or to make an emotional appeal about how much you count on them, but they cannot give what their stress-compromised systems cannot make happen (Cuncic, 2020; business.com, 2020).

Instead, leaders would be wise to critically examine every "ask" they make of their teachers: Is this truly essential to the heart of what needs to be done now, in this larger context? While it might be tempting to want your campus community to shine during these crises by going above and beyond, it's important to understand that, while your faculty might aspire to do so, emotional and physical resources for making it a reality are limited by factors outside of their control (Porter, 2020).

In addition to managing our expectations, it is also necessary to increase our support for the challenges teachers face — for example, the technical aspects of teaching during a pandemic, the academic aspects of

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WHAT WE DO. Our support for mentor teachers includes:

Understanding mentor roles, responsibilities, and expectations	Applying a three-phase mentoring cycle	Establishing and maintaining trust with beginning teachers	Conducting classroom observations	Mentoring for classroom management	Analyzing observation data

addressing the curriculum compromises of last spring, and the emotional trauma of living in the midst of multiple crises.

Teachers can benefit from increased access to instructional coaches, technology specialists, counselors, mental health providers, curriculum specialists, and other support resources, but it's equally important that teachers are not made to feel that using these resources is one more "must do" on their list. Instead, make clear what these support staff members can offer teachers and how they might be useful. Ensure teachers know who is available to them, what issues they can help with, and how to contact them as needed.

Equally important is assurance that accessing these resources will remain confidential and that support staff respond quickly since a delayed response will only contribute to the mounting stress (Teachers Thematic Group, 2020; National Association of School Psychologists, 2020).

Supporting individuals in caring for themselves is yet another strategy of respect and compassion (National Association of School Psychologists, 2020). Like the community strategies discussed above, the tips for individuals are nothing new. It's the intentionality and follow-through that are key. Leaders can not only give permission to do these things throughout the workday, they can make time and space for them, and actively encourage their use.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Experts recommend that individuals understand how their bodies and minds hold stress and how to release it (National Association of School Psychologists, 2020; business.com, 2020). Movement, such as walking, stretching, dancing, or running can burn off the stress-generated energy and tightness stored in our muscles (Connley, 2020).

Open expression creative outlets, from coloring books to adult maker spaces, can provide outlets for others, but in busy stressful times, these activities might be viewed as extras, or

Individually and collectively, we may feel that we're fighting to return to normal, or we may be fighting for change, but fall has brought the return of school, and no one is standing still.

even dismissed as frivolous. Making time and space available for physical, emotional, and creativity breaks throughout the day, while maintaining appropriate social distance, can encourage people to take self-care more seriously.

Emotional stress can be diffused by talking, but only with someone who has shown he or she can hold space for the full range of one's emotions without trying to fix or change them and without trying to change the speaker's opinion or minimize the response (Plett, 2019). In some cases, this might be a professional. In other cases, it's a trusted friend.

What's important is to recognize that the safe and timely release of pent-up thoughts and emotions is critical. Do your teachers have a way to excuse themselves and a place to go when the emotional stress threatens to overwhelm them? Does doing so stigmatize them?

Many organizations focused on mental health are advocating that schools assign on-site counselors or other mental health professionals to small groups of teachers to allow relationships to grow so that these professionals can recognize and quickly respond to signs of building stress and trauma (National Association of School Psychologists, 2020; Teachers Thematic Group, 2020).

And while it isn't possible to step through the campus door and pretend that the outside world just ceased to exist, it is possible to use our passion for education, the friendship of colleagues, and the beauty of nature to experience small doses of happiness that can help

fill our emotional cups and boost our physical immunity.

Psychologist and author Rick Hanson notes, "The brain is like Velcro for negative experiences, but Teflon for positive ones" (Hanson, 2020). Human minds have an evolutionary and protectionist bias toward dwelling on and remembering what feels unsafe or affects us negatively.

Under no circumstances would we want to discount this protective measure, but during crises this biological mechanism can go into overdrive and all we take in are the stressful events of our day and the evening news.

To counter this, we must be encouraged to intentionally notice and dwell with the good that presents itself to us — a kind word, a smile, the song of a bird, a student's light-bulb moment — and allow ourselves to feel gratitude for these moments (National Association of School Psychologists, 2020).

To notice these things is in no way denying that there are real dangers in the world; instead, it's working to draw on the good to feed ourselves. Periodically throughout the day, or at day's end, we can remind ourselves and our colleagues to take a moment to reflect and note moments in which we experienced a big or small "good thing."

These moments help us to remember that life can be good even when trauma is present. Noting these good moments is not a betrayal of reality. It's more like offering ourselves an emotional life ring amidst a sea of reality (Hanson, 2020).

MODEL CARING COMMUNITIES

Individually and collectively, we may feel that we're fighting to return to normal, or we may be fighting for change, but fall has brought the return of school, and no one is standing still.

We were called by our communities to find a way to make school happen, and we call to each other to reach out in crises and model what caring communities look and sound like when they value and care for each other.

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Connections bring us closer to equity and justice

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IDEAS

KEEP LEARNING ON TRACK

"**A** variety of evidence provides the most complete picture. Focus on the various ways professional learning can impact schools, for example, by improving teachers' knowledge, changing your organizational culture, and cultivating different practices in the classroom. In addition, consider the myriad ways these levels of change can manifest in student work, in observable changes in classroom practice, in the narratives of those living the change, and so many others."

— *"Chart a clear course: Evaluation is key to building better, more relevant learning,"*

EQUITY IN PRE-K CLASSROOMS

LEARNING LAB SUPPORTS NEW YORK CITY'S EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERS

BY HELEN BARAHAL AND HUMBERTO CRUZ

High-quality early childhood education supports later student success. School districts around the country are focusing on their early childhood classrooms, investing in their youngest learners to get better outcomes in the upper grades.

A high-quality early childhood classroom is a bustling place, full of activity and conversation. It's where children begin to learn the routines, communication skills, and love of learning that support them as they advance in their schooling. School systems need leaders who understand what good early childhood education looks and feels like so some of the tenets of the early grades can make their way into upper elementary grades, middle school, and even high school.

Early childhood education leaders are dedicated, resilient, and caring professionals. They are master multitaskers, seamlessly transitioning from comforting crying children to managing a plumbing problem; from writing a facilities report to meeting with a family to help them better understand their child's development. But they are often not able to dedicate enough time to their crucial role as instructional leader.

This is a well-documented issue among many school leaders (Horng et

al., 2010), but may be more evident in early childhood than at other grade levels because often districts don't require instructional leadership training for early childhood leaders nor is professional learning available.

With this in mind, last year the New York City Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Education initiated a pilot program called Leader Learning Lab to build the instructional leadership capacity of the city's early education leaders.

The New York City Department of Education serves 1.1 million students from birth through grade 12; about 100,000 of those students are in pre-K or below. In 2014, the Division of Early Childhood Education began expanding its reach to offer pre-K to all 4-year-olds in the city.

The expansion has ramped up in recent years, with the Division of Early Childhood Education now serving children from birth through pre-K in a range of settings, including family child care programs, public elementary schools, New York City Early Education Centers run by community-based organizations, and pre-K centers.

Within this sector, pre-K centers play a unique and important role. Pre-K centers are public schools that only serve 3- and 4-year-olds. Each pre-K center is led by a site coordinator who is an experienced educator but is not required to have a leadership license or training.

Early childhood directors, who oversee multiple pre-K centers and the site coordinators who run them, have been critical as the city's Department of Education expanded its early childhood footprint with two initiatives focused on early education.

While maintaining high quality in its buildings and classrooms, the department has also focused on issues important to the communities it serves. In some areas, the central issue might be homelessness. In others, it might be immigration. In all communities, there has been an increased focus on racial equity in education.

BUILDING THE LEADER LEARNING LAB

When the Division of Early Childhood Education began creating the Leader Learning Lab, we turned to early childhood directors to co-construct it with us. Early childhood directors, and the assistant principals they work with, report to their district superintendent. There are 32 districts within the city's Department of Education, 17 of which have a total of 91 pre-K centers.

Through conversation with the early childhood directors, we learned that pre-K center site coordinators would benefit from targeted leadership support. Site coordinators lead their buildings and support teaching teams composed of lead teachers and assistant teachers or paraprofessionals.

However, several factors challenge their capacity to be instructional leaders. For example, site coordinators are technically considered teachers within the city's education system and therefore not allowed to evaluate other teachers.

WHAT LEARNING LOOKS LIKE

New Teacher Center designed many of the activities for the site coordinator professional learning and shared drafts with us for input. In one of our first sessions, New Teacher Center previewed a role-play scenario that they wanted to use.

The scenario portrayed a teacher and a coach debriefing something that had happened in the classroom. The pre-K students had been working on self-portraits. One child reached for a light brown crayon for her portrait. Another student stopped her and said, "That color is too light for you." The student handed her a darker brown crayon and giggled. In the role-play, the coach asks the teacher about their response in the moment.

When we initially shared the scenario, the room got quiet. Questions and concerns emerged about elevating race: Was it too early in the year? Would it overshadow the coaching strategies being taught? It was a critical moment for Leader Learning Lab and the collaboration. We knew it was essential to be able to have explicit conversations about race.

In that moment, we allowed people to share, process, and ask critical questions. The group was able to name how racial inequity is perpetuated when we do not give it voice. We were able to connect this imperative with the Division of Early Childhood Education's mission and the Early Childhood Framework for Quality, and anchor the conversation in the needs of New York City's children.

We ultimately used the role-play in the first Leader Learning Lab session. Site coordinators later said that they appreciated the role-play's authenticity, as well as the opportunity to discuss with New Teacher Center's facilitators and their peers.

As we began to flesh out a structure for the program, we considered the supports site coordinators would need to be successful instructional leaders, even without the ability to evaluate others. Collaborating with early childhood directors, we determined that Leader Learning Lab would focus on supporting site coordinators in two areas: instructional coaching and designing and facilitating customized professional learning for their teaching teams, tailored to the site's specific needs and data about program quality and teachers' strengths and areas for growth.

All content would be grounded in the Early Childhood Framework for Quality, the Division of Early Childhood Education's unifying birth-to-5 framework, which outlines high-quality practices for program leaders and teaching teams across the city's early childhood programs. Programs use the framework to guide their practice in a way that advances positive outcomes for all children and families.

Early on in the process, early childhood directors thought about which elements of the framework were most essential for site coordinators to focus on. The group agreed on element 5: *Work collaboratively toward continuous quality improvement.*

They also made a strong case for element 1: *Respect and value differences.* The group expressed a desire to focus on building a culture of trust, especially in the context of cultural diversity and racial equity — something that the entire system has grappled with.

Last year, the department's Office of Equity and Access began implementing professional learning on implicit bias awareness. We know that inequity starts early. For example, Black children are 3.6 times more likely to be suspended than white children. Black children represent about 19% of all preschoolers but account for nearly half of all preschool suspensions (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

After beginning important
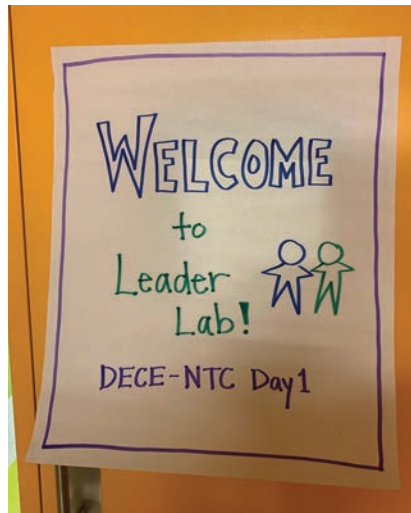
Leader Learning Lab launched in fall 2019 with 90 site coordinators.

conversations about these issues in the professional learning, pre-K center staff wanted to continue building on these conversations through Leader Learning Lab.

To help us, we partnered with New Teacher Center, an organization known for its work disrupting educational inequities for systemically underserved students by accelerating educator effectiveness. New Teacher Center was fully committed to co-constructing the program with our early childhood directors. The center brought national expertise and experience, supported and sharpened the focus on racial equity, and helped us move from broad strokes to specifics.

HOW THE LAB WORKS

Together, the Division of Early Childhood Education, New Teacher Center, and early childhood directors decided on a structure for Leader Learning Lab. Over the course of the school year, New Teacher Center would provide four professional learning sessions, through the lens of framework elements 1 and 5, for site coordinators. Each session would focus on building leaders' coaching skills and supporting them in designing professional learning that they would facilitate for their teaching teams.

Between the four sessions, site

coordinators would go back to their buildings and conduct customized professional learning for their own teaching teams. Then they would come together with a smaller group of site coordinators in small professional learning communities to debrief on how their teaching team sessions went and discuss problems of practice.

This sequence — coming together as a large group to learn and practice new skills, then implementing professional learning for their teaching teams, then coming together with the smaller group — supported the site coordinators as they developed their instructional leadership skills.

We launched Leader Learning Lab in fall 2019 with 90 site coordinators. The morning session focused on coaching strategies, including time for site coordinators to work together on role-plays and other interactive experiences. In the afternoon, we focused on designing professional learning. In November, pre-K center staff across the city participated in professional learning designed and facilitated by site coordinators. After the launch, many site coordinators were eager to further explore their roles as instructional leaders.

Site coordinators fine-tuned their skills as facilitators and coaches in two-hour small-group sessions. Emily Whitmore, a senior consultant at New Teacher Center, created space in these sessions for site coordinators to practice coaching language and stances using real examples from their pre-K centers. The small-group sessions allowed site coordinators to build community and find solutions to problems of practice.

"Over the course of the year, the most exciting growth I observed in the site coordinators was a shift in the way I heard them speak about their roles in relation to teacher development," Whitmore said. "At the start, we received many questions, such as, 'My teacher won't do ___, how can I get her to?' or, 'I told this team that they need to ___ but I am getting pushback. How can I help them see that they need

to do it?' By the end of our first year of Leader Learning Lab, I was hearing questions like, 'How can I help this team collaborate more effectively?' and even, 'How can I continue to build a more equitable and inclusive learning community?' "

ENTER COVID-19

As the second Leader Learning Lab sessions and forums solidified site coordinators' learning and our collaboration, the world changed drastically. The COVID-19 virus spread quickly through the city, and we moved all our professional learning online. Site coordinators' already complex set of responsibilities evolved rapidly as they supported their teaching teams, children, and families remotely.

Not only was New York the epicenter of the epidemic in the U.S., but some of the communities served by pre-K centers were hit the hardest, leaving Black and Latinx families disproportionately affected. As a system, we needed to be sensitive to this reality, not exacerbate the trauma that community members had experienced.

Because of our strong partnership and alignment of mission, New Teacher Center was able to be flexible with content, shifting to virtual spaces and including even more explicit discussions of race and equity as well as strategies for anti-racist leadership.

We added a focus on framework elements 2: *Create safe and positive environments* and 4: *Promote families' roles as primary caregivers, teachers, and advocates.* Site coordinators maintained their sense of community with each other and New Teacher Center facilitators through virtual synchronous forums and asynchronous discussion boards on our online professional learning management system.

LOOKING AHEAD

In the first year of Leader Learning Lab, we learned that the right professional learning content matters. The focus on instructional leadership needed to meet site coordinators' needs. The group wanted explicit support for coaching strategies and designing high-quality professional learning.

For a different group of leaders, the focus might be different, but we listened to what this group asked for. Responsiveness and agility were critical. If we had been too attached to our original plan, not willing to listen and shift, we would have failed. We entered into the project with this attitude and were prepared to make major changes, like moving the whole program online midstream.

And, finally, we saw the power of bringing professionals together. Whether in person or online, the time to brainstorm and collaborate with other professionals was something site coordinators highly valued.

We plan to build on what we have learned and continue to evolve Leader Learning Lab's content and focus, maintaining the goal of developing early childhood leaders' skills as instructional leaders. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we had begun discussing what the second year of Leader Learning Lab might look like for our first cohort. That will depend on what this school year looks like and what will best support those who lead during these historic times.

Amid so much uncertainty, one thing we know for sure is that early childhood leaders will need support more than ever. Leader Learning Lab began as a collaborative program co-constructed by stakeholders and partners. This year will be no different.

While we do not know exactly what Leader Learning Lab will look like, we know that it will continue to be co-constructed and responsive with a focus on equity to help early childhood leaders in New York City support and lead their teams.

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CHART A CLEAR COURSE

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EVALUATION IS KEY TO BUILDING
BETTER, MORE RELEVANT LEARNING

BY CHASE NORDENGREN AND THOMAS R. GUSKEY

When we engage in professional learning, we do it for one big reason: to get better at supporting students. Rigorous and thoughtful program evaluations can provide the critical connection between well-designed programs or initiatives and continuous improvement that builds essential knowledge and skills for educators. Evaluation helps us examine what has been accomplished in a professional learning initiative and identify course corrections that can help the initiative improve.

The importance of high-quality evaluation is underscored in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning: Evaluation provides information that supports advocates, professional learning planners, and anyone who wants to know "about the contribution of professional learning

to student achievement" (Learning Forward, 2011).

Most importantly, high-quality evaluation provides the context around which educators make decisions about what professional learning is valuable for them. For most educators, the critical question is not whether professional learning works in general, but whether it works in their situation and context (Hirsh, 2013; Wiliam, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting impacts on student engagement with learning, state budgets, and many other aspects of educational systems underscore why the particular contexts of districts, schools, and students matters. Educators cannot afford to waste limited time and resources on programming that isn't driving improvements in the knowledge and skills of their educators and the outcomes of their students.

Those decisions rely on not just

the quantitative impact of a particular professional learning program on students and teachers, but also on the qualitative aspects of program design and implementation that lead to the success or failure of those programs in the specific districts and schools where they're used.

This article describes our approach for balancing rigor with relevance in developing an evaluation plan for professional learning focused on student assessment. Working from a systematic framework for understanding the impact of professional learning (Guskey, 2000), we developed an evaluation plan that seeks to understand the mechanisms through which the professional learning of our organization improves outcomes for students and supports continuous improvement of practice through evidence gathered from multiple stakeholders.

This example demonstrates the capacity of evaluation to inform the development of sustainable and effective professional learning practices.

EVALUATING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Although a critical factor in the success of school improvement efforts, professional learning is ill-suited to traditional methods of demonstrating effectiveness. The short duration of most professional learning initiatives, the confounding influence of leadership practices and other school initiatives, and context differences between schools make it difficult to statistically untangle the unique impact of professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

When studies fail to find a statistically significant impact — as has been the case in many randomized controlled trials in education (Lortie-

Forgues & Inglis, 2019) and especially in professional learning (Gersten et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2007) — educators are left to scratch their heads and wonder whether the weak link was the program itself, poor implementation, factors related to policy around the program, or other context issues that inhibited success, such as ongoing access to professional learning materials or the freedom for teachers to collaboratively implement the new instructional approaches a professional learning initiative might recommend.

Recognizing the challenge of building meaningful but rigorous evaluations of professional learning, Guskey (2000) developed an evaluation model to further educators' and policymakers' understanding of the ways professional learning impacts schools, administrators, teachers and students.

This framework builds on the earlier work of Kirkpatrick (Kirkpatrick, 1977, 1978, 1996) and includes five necessary levels of evaluation for professional learning experiences (Guskey, 2002):

1. Participants' reactions: Did participants like the experience? Was their time well-spent?
2. Participants' learning: Did participants acquire the intended knowledge and skills?
3. Organizational support and change: Was implementation advocated, facilitated, and supported? Were resources sufficient to support success?
4. Participants' use of new

knowledge and skills: Did participants effectively apply their new knowledge and skills in classroom practice?
5. Student learning outcomes: How did the experience impact students? Did it affect students' performance, achievement, or well-being?

Each of these levels necessitates a different form of evidence for measuring impact. Level 2, for example, lends itself well to participants' self-assessments or reflections, while level 4 lends itself better to direct or indirect observation of instruction. Level 5 includes perhaps the widest variety of evidence, ranging from student assessment data to projects and performances, student records and portfolios, surveys and interviews, and other measures of students' cognitive, and affective change.

The objective of this evaluation framework is to collect evidence of impact rather than definitive proof that a program in isolation improves student outcomes (Guskey, 2002). This approach requires a desire to understand the impact of professional learning on educators' instructional practices, not just on test scores or other metrics of student outcomes.

We advocate beginning the process of designing a professional learning initiative with a clear logic model that starts with the end in mind. Stakeholders should first determine what outcomes they intend to change for students (level 5) and work backward

IDEAS

WHAT EVALUATION LOOKS LIKE

As with many new professional learning partners, our work with Acorn Public Schools (pseudonym) began with a comprehensive needs assessment: NWEA selected 10% of schools participating in professional learning to represent their peers, and each participated in a half-day site visit that included principal and teacher interviews, observation of instructional planning sessions, and observation of instruction.

These data allowed us to create three distinct learning paths for schools in Acorn. While all ultimately will receive the same learning over time, each pathway prioritized the knowledge and skills that would provide teachers at that school the most substantial short-term successes based on each school's priorities and existing skills.

The participant survey was the next step in this process. With responses from over 1,300 teachers, we learned that, while teachers rated their knowledge of how to use assessment data relatively high, their actual use of these skills was relatively low.

Comparing average scores on these measures with other districts who have taken our survey helped underscore the need for a particular focus in Acorn's professional learning on how and why to use assessment skills.

This data informed adjustments to our professional learning plan that emphasized opportunities for practical application of assessment skills and focused on the specific contexts in which those skills could be applied in the district.

As next steps, district leaders in Acorn will now work with us to bring the teacher observation instrument and participant portfolio into regular use. While considering these tools, Acorn has recognized the importance of making sure its own measures of effective teaching align with the measures of effectiveness highlighted by our professional learning.

Building alignment between our evaluation tools and Acorn's existing methods will provide the added benefit of deepening the alignment between our professional learning goals and district priorities.

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from there, determining professional learning methods and content to target the intended outcomes, designing how the professional learning program will look in the classroom, how to implement it successfully, and so on. This process allows stakeholders to take into account their specific goals and unique aspects of school and district context (Guskey, 2014).

MAKING EVALUATION CONCRETE

Beginning from the road map established by this framework, one of us (Nordengren) began design work on an evaluation strategy to suit a particular professional learning program led by NWEA, an organization that provides professional learning on use of formative and interim assessment — particularly data from its MAP Growth interim assessment — to identify student learning gaps, personalize instruction, and ultimately drive improved learning for all students.

As part of that mission, NWEA offers a variety of types and contexts of professional learning, including in-person workshops, virtual workshops, consulting services, and asynchronous and online learning options. Our

evaluation strategy must flexibly accommodate each of these contexts while still addressing the bottom line for our stakeholders: How are we impacting student learning?

The evaluation strategy for NWEA's work with districts around the country includes four key components: assets and needs assessment, participant survey, classroom walk-through, and participant portfolio.

Assets and needs assessment. An assets and needs assessment identifies and prioritizes opportunities to impact the knowledge, skills, practices, beliefs, and attitudes of teachers and administrators and connects each school to a specific learning pathway through our available professional learning resources.

In addition to being a necessary part of a personalized learning experience, the needs assessment process provides better understanding of the specific outcomes that school and district stakeholders value throughout the evaluation process.

This step supports all five levels of Guskey's framework by beginning with outcomes in mind: identifying the most necessary and significant knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs educators

need for success with assessment practice.

Participant survey. A participant survey, given twice annually, asks teachers participating in professional learning to self-report their knowledge and skills in using assessment data and their attitudes and beliefs regarding professional learning and student assessment.

By aggregating results across all participants engaged in professional learning in a given period, this survey can track the accumulation of a knowledge and skill set over time (usually over several years). The survey focuses on levels 1 through 3, asking participants to demonstrate their learning and connect that learning with the organizational support they've received.

Classroom walk-through. A classroom walk-through protocol focuses on the use of assessment information in instructional differentiation and planning. Designed for use by itself, in combination with other evaluation instruments, or incorporated into existing district walk-through procedures, this walk-through of a typical lesson asks the

reviewer to note factors like teachers' use of learning goals and differentiation based on formative assessment, flexible grouping, and goal-setting processes. Walk-throughs target level 4, showing how professional learning has demonstrated in concrete changes in classroom practice.

Participant portfolio. A participant portfolio shows evidence of student learning outcomes by asking participants to provide documentation of the use of assessment data with students, such as content alignment and goal-setting processes. Reviewed anonymously by NWEA, portfolios provide evidence supporting level 5 by focusing on how students experience data-informed instructional practice.

By going beyond assessment scores to understand how teachers have created experiences that change how students interact with assessment, the participant portfolio demonstrates the breadth of impacts students may experience from their teachers' professional learning.

The design and implementation of this evaluation approach seeks to balance our, and our partners', simultaneous need for rigor and flexibility. The components can be modified to suit the context.

For example, when using the walk-through protocol, we emphasize the importance of strong inter-rater reliability within a district context and offer training to ensure raters (who are district personnel) are well-aligned. However, recognizing that districts use walk-throughs for many different purposes and with different areas of emphasis, we also allow users to customize the protocol for each context.

Similarly, districts may have existing practices for collecting artifacts from instruction that can directly feed into the portfolio process.

Engaging in these customizations reduces the burden of evaluation on educators and create greater continuity between evaluation activities and a district's general strategy for continuous improvement.

LESSONS LEARNED

After introducing this evaluation approach in five districts across the United States, we've learned the following valuable lessons about how to implement and benefit from evaluation of professional learning.

With focus, evaluation of professional learning need not be a difficult undertaking. Ideally, evaluations fit in with existing best practices in your school or district, such as needs assessment, gathering teacher feedback, and observing instruction. Using the data these processes produce can provide feedback to individual educators and, in aggregate, explain the overall impact of a professional learning program.

In one district we worked with, components of a professional learning needs assessment aligned with state requirements to conduct needs assessments every few years, allowing those schools to clearly align their professional learning plan with their overall plan for school improvement.

A variety of evidence provides the most complete picture. Focus on the various ways professional learning can impact schools, for example, by improving teachers' knowledge, changing your organizational culture, and cultivating different practices in the classroom.

In addition, consider the myriad ways these levels of change can manifest in student work, in observable changes in classroom practice, in the narratives of those living the change, and so many others.

In another district we work with, the participant portfolio exercise aligns neatly with the expectations the district has for students, who complete their own portfolios to describe what they've learned at three important touchpoints in their K-12 experience.

Understanding these diverse sources of data enriches the conversation around the outcomes of any learning experience and makes it easier to weed through the confounding variables of setting, context, and competing policies.

Begin with the end in mind. Evaluation focuses on understanding the impact of a program on what its stakeholders consider important. The process therefore begins with understanding what improved student outcomes would look like for those deeply involved in the work and proceeds from there to understand the facilitators behind that that success.

Needs assessment is a particularly valuable tool here, helping us understand what types of outcomes a district values and exploring the current practices and attitudes that might enable or constrain progress on those outcomes.

While getting to levels 4 and 5 can seem impossible when considered in the abstract, these early planning conversations can help narrow the focus of an evaluation to what's truly important to your stakeholders.

HAVING THE HARD CONVERSATIONS

The rapid change of this moment in education calls on us to be relentless in ensuring the resources we provide educators are meeting their needs and helping fulfill their objectives. Simply put, we believe we have a responsibility to rigorously interrogate whether the supports we provide students and their teachers actually work.

Doing so with rigor requires examining the complex interplay between the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes of educators. A thoughtful program evaluation strategy provides the tools through which professional learning providers and recipients can partner to better understand the value of their work together and keep the focus on improving outcomes for students.

The lessons learned through evaluation are critical for any school or district committed to better understanding itself and its role in student success.

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HOW ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE INFLUENCES COACHING

BY EVTHOKIA STEPHANIE SACLARIDES

Given the widespread implementation of instructional coaching, it is not surprising that coaching research has explored a variety of topics, including coaching roles and practices, coaches' preparation and ongoing learning, and coaching's impact on teachers and students across subjects such as literacy, mathematics, and technology. Yet little research has examined how academic discipline influences the way coaches work with teachers.

For example, given that elementary teachers often feel less confident in mathematics than literacy (Drake et al., 2001), might a coach approach a teacher differently when they are working on mathematics instruction

than when they are working on reading instruction? This is an important area of inquiry to ensure that coaches are most effectively supporting teaching and learning across a diverse range of academic disciplines at their schools.

In a recent study, I partnered with three coaches and six elementary teachers to better understand teachers' learning opportunities during one-on-one coaching (Saclarides, 2018; Saclarides & Lubienski, 2018), including whether those opportunities varied according to academic discipline.

The three instructional coaches were trained as generalists and expected to coach across all disciplinary areas (e.g. mathematics, literacy, social studies, and science) and all elementary grade levels.

Although the word "coach" can take on different meanings, here I refer to a coach as someone who works directly with teachers by engaging them in high-quality learning to enhance instruction and, ultimately, student learning (McGatha et al., 2015). Data sources included interviews with the principals, instructional coaches, and teachers, as well as observations of the coach-teacher dyads as they engaged in coaching cycles.

During the interviews, I asked coaches Meg, Claire, and Jade if they tended to coach teachers differently depending on the discipline — for example, whether they were coaching a teacher in literacy versus mathematics. (To protect participants' identities and in accordance with IRB regulations, all

names are pseudonyms.)

Despite the small size of this initial study, coaches' responses provide some insight that can inform coaches' and school leaders' reflections on their own coaching programs and also inform future research on this topic.

HOW EXPERTISE MATTERS

Of the three coaches interviewed, one (Claire) reported no disciplinary differences in her coaching. The other two (Meg and Jade) did note some important coaching considerations across disciplines based on two factors: their own disciplinary expertise and teachers' comfort level with the discipline.

Meg said her expertise in mathematics, science, social studies, and technology made her feel more comfortable coaching teachers in these disciplines, whereas Jade said she felt more confident in literacy. But they reported using different coaching strategies when coaching in disciplinary areas in which they felt less confident.

Because she didn't perceive literacy and writing to be her strongest suits, Meg said she appreciated that her teachers could also seek support from the literacy interventionist at her school.

Jade, who was more comfortable with literacy than mathematics, said she was more likely to model a literacy lesson for teachers than a math lesson. In mathematics, she said, "I'm more willing to do some co-teaching with math and let them take the lead."

By sharing an instructional space and being jointly responsible for instruction, co-teaching a mathematics lesson likely removed some of the pressure from Jade that she would otherwise experience during modeling.

In addition to considering their own disciplinary expertise, the two coaches also weighed the importance of attending to teachers' disciplinary comfort level, given that elementary teachers are trained as generalists and expected to teach all disciplinary areas.

In particular, for disciplinary areas in which teachers felt less confident,

Meg said it was important to discuss the content first to give teachers a solid foundation on which to build when discussing pedagogy. She noted that teachers' underdeveloped content knowledge in mathematics and science could potentially negatively impact their instruction: "Do I understand it enough to teach it?"

Thus, when coaching teachers in the disciplinary areas of mathematics and science, Meg sought to deepen her teachers' content knowledge first before discussing how to most effectively teach that content to students: "Let's break this down to where you understand the parts, and then we can work on the delivery."

IMPLICATIONS

Based on these initial findings from my small sample, I offer several factors for administrators and instructional coaches to consider as they seek to support coaches' professional learning opportunities while simultaneously building strong coaching programs at their schools.

1. **Instructional coaches need access to ongoing and meaningful professional learning to deepen their content knowledge across multiple disciplines.** This is especially important for the many instructional coaches who are charged with supporting all content areas (e.g. literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, and technology).

2. **Elementary schools might consider exploring content-focused coaching models.** In such a model, coaches would focus their coaching efforts in only one discipline, such as mathematics. Ultimately, this model could potentially capitalize on coaches' self-identified strengths by allowing coaches to focus their efforts on coaching in the academic discipline in which they feel most confident.

3. **School-based leadership teams should identify and discuss their disciplinary strengths so they have a shared understanding of how to leverage them to best support teachers.** Regardless of coaches' comfort levels in each discipline, this makes for a stronger and more coherent approach to teacher and student support.

Overall, results from this small-scale study shed light on how academic discipline influences the way instructional coaches work with teachers. Future research should consider exploring this topic using a larger sample size of coaches while also seeking to incorporate the voices of teachers to better understand their perspectives.

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TOOLS

BUILD SUPPORT AND CONNECTIONS

The unique circumstances the pandemic has created for teachers, students, and their families bring new learning challenges. This issue's tools address those challenges.

Innovative forms of staff collaboration are required to deliver hybrid and fully remote instruction effectively while meeting the needs of students, families, and educators.

The first tool, **Strategic Teaming on p. 54**, offers guidance on how to create and manage new types of instructional teams.

The second tool, **Empathy Interviews on p. 59**, focuses on the need to understand the experiences and feelings of others. These one-on-one conversations help create more human-centered improvement practices across school systems.

TOOLS
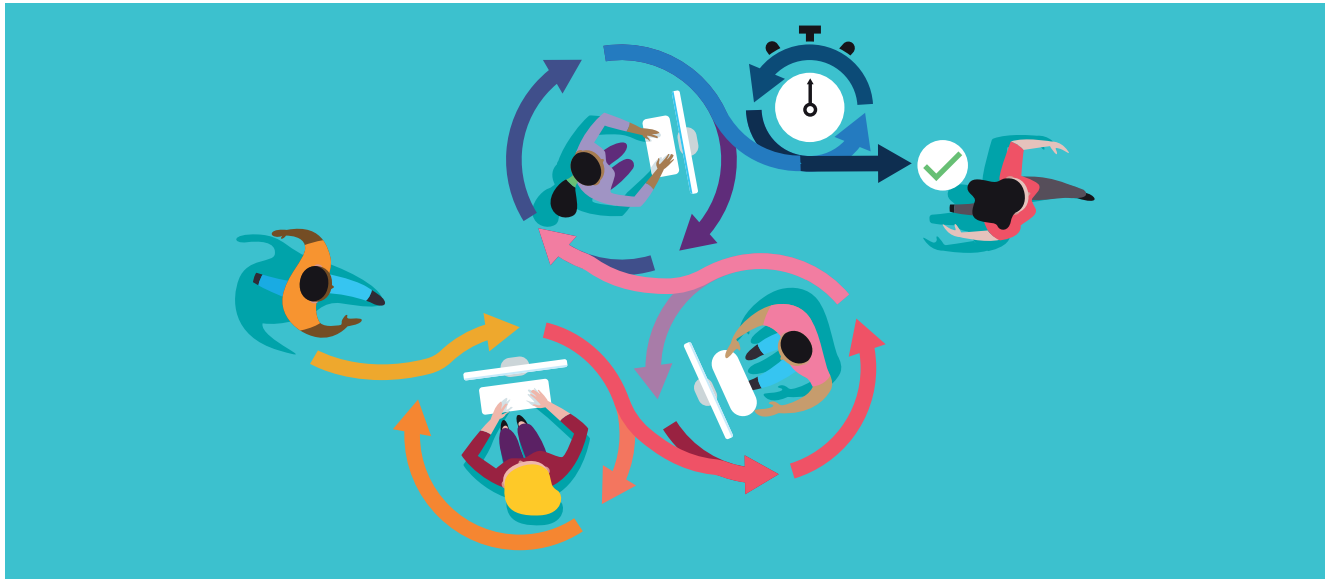
STRATEGIC TEAMING:
WORKING TOGETHER BETTER

BY ELIZABETH M. CHU AND MICHAEL A. ARRINGTON

Innovative forms of staff collaboration are required to deliver hybrid and fully remote instruction — and transition between the two — effectively while meeting the health, learning, and personal needs of students, families, and educators.

As part of a remote learning tool kit for administrators, educators, and families, the Columbia University Center for Public Research and Leadership developed guidance on how to create and manage new types of instructional teams.

These teaming resources, developed in partnership with districts, schools, and education nonprofits, help organize instructional staff members into well-run teams that are collectively responsible for the academic and social-emotional learning of groups of students. Organizing activity in this way allows staff members to:

- Take on responsibilities that

match their strengths to students' needs;
- Manage the additional complexity posed by remote learning, including technology challenges and increased child care and personal demands;
- Learn quickly how to deliver effective remote instruction and create family-school learning partnerships;
- Create a coherent instructional and learning community model across the school and district; and

- Deliver high-quality, equitable services to students and families more efficiently.

The tables on pp. 55-58 guide administrators and instructional leaders in forming and managing these teams. Key steps include:

1. Group staff members into instructional teams.
2. Identify team goals and responsibilities.
3. Determine roles, responsibilities, and recurring tasks.
4. Create a cadence of recurring meetings.
5. Develop a team support plan.

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TOOLS

CREATE AND MANAGE INSTRUCTIONAL TEAMS

1	GROUP STAFF MEMBERS INTO INSTRUCTIONAL TEAMS

First, determine the number and types of teams to create and assign individuals to teams (see TEAMS AND MEMBERS table below). Common team types include grade-level teams, content-area teams, and special teams (e.g. those focused on a particular service modality or group of students).

TEAMS AND MEMBERS	
TEAM NAME:	
TEAM MEMBERS	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.

2	IDENTIFY TEAM GOALS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Articulate the goals of each team (see TEAM GOALS table on p. 56). These goals should be aligned to the school's and district's standards for quality instruction and their academic and social-emotional learning goals. Ask and answer: What does each team seek to accomplish in the short and long term?

With these goals defined, identify the core responsibilities the team will need to take on if it is to accomplish its stated goals (see KEY RESPONSIBILITIES table on p. 56). Be sure to capture staff members' ability to address the needs of students with IEPs and English learners and navigate student and family scheduling constraints.

RESPONSIBILITIES MAY INCLUDE:

- Prioritize content standards.
- Modify curriculum for digital learning.
- Create lesson plans.
- Create weekly individual learning plans.
- Modify weekly individual learning plans for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).
- Differentiate weekly individual learning plans for English learners.
- Update learning management system.
- Deliver synchronous instruction (1:1, small-group, whole-class).
- Deliver intervention and academic support services.
- Hold drop-in academic, social and emotional learning support hours.
- Communicate, and support others in communicating, with families.
- Hold weekly family check-ins.
- Create assessments.
- Perform grading assessments.
- Monitor and analyze student learning data.
- Provide student feedback.
- Monitor and communicate student resource needs to the resource team.
- Monitor and communicate student and family needs to the care team.
- Monitor and communicate student and family needs to the meal team.
- Monitor student engagement.
- Lead cycles of inquiry to strengthen the ability to deliver quality instruction and create a positive and connected learning community.
- Coordinate professional learning with school and district leaders.

TOOLS

2	IDENTIFY TEAM GOALS AND RESPONSIBILITIES, continued

TEAM GOALS

As a team, develop specific and measurable goals that are aligned with school and district goals.

GOAL 1	
GOAL 2	
GOAL 3	
GOAL 4	
GOAL 5	
GOAL 6	

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

In each row, list one key responsibility. In the columns, list the team member(s) primarily responsible for that work, the team member(s) supporting it, and the team member(s) to be kept informed.

RESPONSIBILITY	Responsible: Team member(s) primarily responsible	Support: Team member(s) supporting that work	Informed: Team member(s) to be kept informed
1:			
2:			
3:			
4:			
5:			
6:			

TOOLS

<table>
<tr><td style="background-color:#2b4a7a; color:white;">**3**</td><td colspan="5" style="background-color:#6bb0c4;">DETERMINE ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND RECURRING TASKS</td></tr>
</table>

Identify team members' strengths and personal and professional scheduling constraints that must be considered when determining roles and responsibilities. Then, for each of the team's core responsibilities, determine who on the team will fill these roles (see KEY RESPONSIBILITIES table on p. 56).

- **Responsible:** The individual(s) who will primarily do and guide the work and oversee it to completion.
- **Support:** The individual(s) who will contribute to the completion of the work through input or supportive action.
- **Informed:** The individual(s) who will be advised or updated on the work during and after completion.

For each of the team's core responsibilities, create a weekly overview that contains recurring tasks and owners for recurring tasks (see WEEKLY OVERVIEW BY RESPONSIBILITY table below).

WEEKLY OVERIEW BY RESPONSIBILITY

In the left column, list each core responsibilities and who will be primarily responsible, who will support, and who is to be kept informed. For each day, list the recurring tasks that should be completed to carry out the responsibilities and the owner for each task.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
RESPONSIBILITY 1: Responsible: Support: Informed:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:
RESPONSIBILITY 2: Responsible: Support: Informed:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:
RESPONSIBILITY 3: Responsible: Support: Informed:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:	**Task 1:** Owner: **Task 2:** Owner: **Task 3:** Owner:

TOOLS

4   CREATE A CADENCE OF RECURRING MEETINGS

Set a cadence and divide responsibilities for regular, recurring meetings (see RECURRING KEY MEETINGS table below).

For each recurring meeting, determine:

- Meeting platform (i.e. in person, video platform, telephone);
- Day and time;
- Facilitator;
- Participants; and
- Purpose and objectives.

RECURRING KEY MEETINGS

List recurring key meetings, including when the meetings will occur, who will facilitate each meeting and who will participate, and each meeting's purpose or objectives.

DAY AND TIME	FACILITATOR	PARTICIPANTS	PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES

5   DEVELOP A TEAM SUPPORT PLAN

As a team, plan for how roles and responsibilities may shift should a team member need to take time away due to illness or family emergencies.

For each core responsibility, decide who would act as a substitute for the **Responsible** individual. Ideally, this person would be a team member who plays a **Support** role for that responsibility. In addition, identify team members' individual and collective professional learning needs.

Communicate them to instructional coach(es) and campus administrator(s), and prioritize these needs when engaging in cycles of inquiry.

EMPATHY INTERVIEWS

BY KARI NELSESTUEN AND JULIE SMITH

There has never been a more important time to practice empathy, as we face the formidable task of teaching and caring for students and their families during the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism.

Empathy means trying to understand deeply the experiences and feelings of other people. It is both a mindset to embrace and a skill to practice. While we can never fully understand the experiences of another person, we can listen deeply to their stories and perspectives to uncover unacknowledged needs. As we listen, we must simultaneously examine how our own identities, biases, values, and experiences influence how we make meaning of what others share with us.

While many of us may already practice empathy in our daily lives, we've learned that one practice — empathy interviews — can help create more human-centered improvement practices across school systems.

Empathy interviews usually are one-on-one conversations that use open-ended questions to elicit stories about specific experiences that help uncover unacknowledged needs. A protocol allows the interviewer to probe more deeply into stories than a more traditional interview.

Empathy interviews help ensure that the diverse lived experiences of people are centered in decisions and actions. Although there is well-founded attention to data and research-based strategies in education, it is critical to include lived experience to more accurately and directly represent the lives of students and families who are often marginalized and excluded from traditional data and research methods.

For this reason, empathy interviews should be conducted with humility and awareness of the potential power dynamics at play, such as when teachers try to understand the lived experiences of chronically absent students and their families.

Examples of empathy interviews include:

- In virtual design camps, high school teachers conducted empathy interviews with students to more deeply understand their experiences with virtual learning. Teachers and students used the interview themes to co-design prototypes to improve the virtual experience.

- Educators from across a district conducted empathy interviews with students and families about attendance. They used the information to identify the root causes of chronic absenteeism from the community's perspective.

- A regional network focused on supporting Black, Indigenous, and people of color educators used data from empathy interviews to design system changes to increase retention rates.

Empathy interviews can help identify issues that need to be addressed by the system, unpack the root causes of a problem from a community perspective, and gather information that inspires new, human-centered change ideas. Some people report that their interview practice is an intervention in and of itself since it provides a new structure for voices to be heard.

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TOOLS

Empathy interviews consist of open-ended questions tailored to the situation. Although interview questions are personalized, guidelines can help interviewers embody the principles of being intentional, human-centered, and equity-focused. This tool highlights tips and considerations that can be modified to meet the needs of each unique context.

PLANNING			
Step	**Key question**	**Considerations**	**Notes and action items**
Identify your why.	What's your purpose? Are you collecting stories to identify or refine a problem of practice? To understand the root causes? To design change ideas?	Clearly articulate your purpose and make sure that empathy interviews are the right tool for that purpose. Other data collection tools such as surveys and focus groups should remain in your tool kit as they are well-suited for other purposes.	
Identify whom to interview.	Whose stories need to be heard?	Choosing to listen deeply to students and families who have been historically marginalized by our systems is a way to build equity. It is important to be intentional about whom you include in interviews and be aware of who is not included. If only people with "average" experiences are interviewed, empathy interviews will only confirm what we already know.	
Assemble an empathy interview team.	Who will conduct the interviews?	Assemble a team of interviewers that is both broad and diverse. As you build the team, consider: • **Relationships.** When possible, consider an interviewer who already has a trusting relationship with an interviewee. • **Power dynamics.** Consider how race, position, age, or gender might play out in an empathy interview setting. Deliberately work to reduce harm. • **Language needs.** Include multilingual interviewers or translators on your team. • **Community.** Consider including students, families, and community members as interviewers.	
Plan the when and how.	What are the logistics?	**Number of interviews.** The most important consideration is not how many interviews, but whom to interview. Consider resources, size of interview team, and purpose when deciding how many to conduct. **Data management**. Make sure interviewers can store their notes in a secure data portal and that names and identifying information are not recorded in the data set. **When and where.** Arrange interviews at a time and place that feels safe and not disruptive to the interviewee. When possible, conduct interviews in person (but phone and video can work, too).	
Prepare for analysis.	How will you analyze the data?	One common method of analysis is **headlining**. Team members form pairs or small groups to read and summarize headlines from each interview using descriptive sentences or direct quotes. Once finished, group all of the headlines by theme. Make sure to remain descriptive and avoid judgment, inference, or solutions. Once analyzed, you should be ready to apply what you learned to your original purpose. Allow for the possibility that your purpose might have changed as a result of what you heard. Save time to share stories, reflect on the process, and debrief for next time.	

TOOLS

DESIGNING YOUR QUESTIONS

A typical empathy interview protocol has four to eight open-ended, story-based questions. Use question stems such as:
- Tell me about a time when …
- Tell me about the last time you …
- What are your best/worst experiences with _____?
- Can you share a story that would help me understand more about …?

These questions should be followed by open-ended prompts like, "Tell me more," "Why?," and "What were you feeling then?" The following checklist can help ensure that your protocol is as unbiased as possible and creates a comfortable space for the conversation.

Element	Feature	Is feature present? yes/ not yet	If not yet, explain next steps
Our protocol has an introduction that does the following:	Describes why we are conducting the interviews.		
	Explains how we will use the data.		
	Includes our confidentiality agreement.		
	States that the interview, and each question in the interview, is voluntary.		
Our empathy interview questions do the following:	Start with the positive.		
	Are free of acronyms and jargon.		
	Are free of bias.		
	Primarily ask for stories, not solutions.		
	Include questions about experiences in a range of contexts for a broad picture. For example, when asking about sense of belonging in school, ask about belonging in other settings as well.		
	Include suggested follow-up prompts, such as, "Tell me more," "Why?" and "How did you feel?"		

TOOLS

PREPARE YOUR TEAM

Empathy interviews might seem straightforward but they actually require specific mindsets and technical skills that can be improved through practice. Training interviewers is an important part of preparation. The following checklist can help ensure that your interviewer training focuses on important aspects of the process.

Element	Feature	How will you build this feature?
Give space.	Pay attention to how the interviewee is feeling and responding. Never force a story. Be aware that your questions may trigger past trauma. Give space and stop the interview at any time.	
Stay neutral.	Be careful not to imply that any question has a right answer or to suggest an answer.	
Be aware of your own bias.	Reflect on questions such as, "How does my identity affect how and what people share with me?" and "How do I maintain awareness of my biases and challenge them?"	
Take notes.	It may feel like note-taking is rude or impacts the rapport, but actually it is an important safeguard against bias and inference.	
Follow up if necessary.	Asking questions can bring up intense emotions or memories sometimes. Follow up with the person you interviewed — or find someone else who can — if you think they need follow-up care.	

ABOUT COMMUNITY DESIGN PARTNERS

Community Design Partners' facilitators, coaches, and advisors partner with organizations and schools dedicated to a wide range of social justice issues such as accessing postsecondary options, diversifying the teaching workforce, and advancing student success by removing systemic barriers. Learn more at **communitydesignpartners.com.**

UPDATES

INNOVATE FOR IMPACT

The theme for Learning Forward's 2020 Annual Conference is Innovate for Impact. The virtual conference runs Dec. 6-8. Members of the Conference Host Committee explain what the conference theme means to them.

Innovate for impact means ...

"An opportunity to think big, plan collectively, and inspire growth!"

— *Sarah Mumm,*
director of educational services K-5,
Kaneland School District 30

"That we are designing learning systems that embrace creativity, risk taking, and the exploration of real-world experiences. It highlights the importance of incorporating student voice and choice while exploring engaging curriculum. It emphasizes the importance of monitoring our learning outcomes to ensure that we are accelerating learning for all of our students."

— *Ankhe Bradley,*
assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction,
Joliet Public Schools District 86

"That teachers and administrators are constantly thinking outside of the box to meet the current and future needs of ALL students, so students are given the opportunity to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally as they matriculate through school and into adulthood."

— *Chimille Dillard,*
director of curriculum and instruction,
New Trier High School

For more information about the conference or to download the conference program, visit **conference.learningforward.org.**

UPDATES

VIRTUAL COACHES ACADEMY LAUNCHES IN NORTH DAKOTA, HAWAII

Since 2012, Learning Forward has supported instructional coaches in North Dakota through a partnership with the North Dakota Teacher Support System. This year, for the first time, we began providing that support entirely online through a Virtual Coaches Academy, which launched in September and includes 90 coaches serving schools, districts, and organizations across the state.

The Virtual Coaches Academy provides tools, strategies, and protocols to help coaches understand their roles as leaders and facilitators of professional learning in both a virtual and face-to-face context, while maintaining its focus on creating a collaborative community of coaches committed to developing their skills in building relationships, leading professional learning, and individual and team coaching.

The Academy includes live, facilitated sessions with an expert coach; asynchronous, collaborative learning communities to reflect on learning, reinforce strategies, and share progress; tools and strategies specific to coaching in a virtual context; and individual support for coaches as they work virtually with teachers in their systems.

Also in September, Learning Forward launched a Virtual Coaches Academy for 40 coaches in Hawaii through a partnership with the Hawaii Department of Education, as well as online academies in Illinois, Texas, Tennessee, and California.

As coaches seek to expand their skills to support teachers in this new learning environment, we want to help you empower them to influence teaching, student learning, and school culture. Learn more about how we can support your coaches at **consulting.learningforward.org/virtual-learning.**

Follow us on social media. Share your insights and feedback about *The Learning Professional* by using **#Learn FwdTLP.**

FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Amy Foley
@foley_amy

Thanks @LearningForward for a great #LearnFwdTLP chat to help me reflect on what is most important for professional learning right now.

Handbook will support principals in Massachusetts

Learning Forward is working with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to strengthen and support aspiring and novice principals across the state.

This project includes the development of a model handbook for principal induction and mentoring based on evidence-based practices that will provide districts with concrete tools and resources they can use to implement an effective principal induction and mentoring program.

The handbook will include interactive learning modules aligned to the state leadership standards and feature topics such as developing principals as effective talent managers, becoming a leader for equity through anti-racist competencies, and strengthening the use of effective feedback and high-quality curriculum and instructional materials.

Six novice and veteran principals and two university principal preparation program professors of color are partnering with the department on the Principal Readiness Advisory Council (PRAC) to support this work for the 2020-21 school year.

Paul Fleming, Learning Forward's senior vice president, standards, states, & equity, will lead the project. PRAC will provide feedback and insight on the development and implementation of the model induction and mentoring handbook.

TWITTER CHAT TURNS TO TECHNOLOGY

Learning Forward recently hosted a Twitter chat on Turning to Technology, the theme of *The Learning Professional's* August issue. Article authors and professional learning leaders from around the world joined us to discuss virtual coaching, how to use technology to build teams, and more.

To be notified of upcoming Twitter chats, including one focused on the current issue, follow **@LearningForward.**

You can find this and other chats at **#LearnFwdTLP.**

Learning Forward
@LearningForward

Q6: Technology has become a lifeline for all of us. How will you make the most of it with your educators this school year? #LearnFwdTLP #EduCoach

#LearnFwdTLP

How will you make the most of technology with your educators this school year?

Q6

PODCAST FROM LEARNING FORWARD INDIA

Sandeep Dutt, chairman of affiliate Learning Forward India, hosts a podcast featuring the voices of leading educators. Guests include Steve Cardwell, Fred Brown, Kathy Gross, Monica Kochar, Amrita Dass, and many others. They share their insights about leadership, professional learning, and why they are passionate about education. You can listen to the podcast at **anchor. fm/learningforward.**

SPECIAL PASS FOR CONFERENCE ATTENDEES

Join Learning Forward's virtual 2020 Annual Conference Dec. 6-8. For each day that you are registered, you will receive a 30-day all-access pass to watch other sessions from that same day. This means you won't have to miss any of the great content. You can extend your learning and dig deeper at your convenience.

Move beyond sit-and-get listening as you learn to design, facilitate, and measure the impact of professional learning, with a special emphasis on virtual and hybrid environments. Interact with 124 experts leading more than 50 sessions over three days. CEUs available.
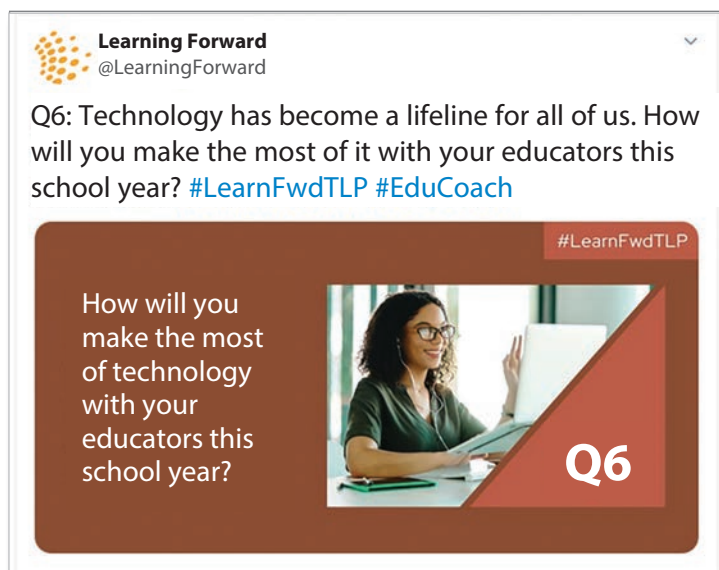
AREAS OF FOCUS

- Virtual professional learning
- Equity & excellence
- Coaching
- High-quality curriculum
- Leadership development
- Leadership practices
- Learning communities and networks
- Learning designs and implementation
- Social & emotional learning
- Research & impact

Affiliate directors retiring

TERRI ILES has retired as executive director of Learning Forward Texas. During her six-year tenure, she not only led the learning agenda and events of the largest Learning Forward affiliate, but also launched a satellite North Texas affiliate and mentored and supported the launch of the new Oklahoma affiliate.

Iles has shared her energy, commitment, and enthusiasm for professional learning and for the Learning Forward affiliates by volunteering at numerous Annual Conferences and Learning Forward events.

To all of this work, she brought more than 30 years of experience as a teacher, principal, coordinator of professional development, coordinator of quality learning, and college tutor. The new executive director of Learning Forward Texas is Lisa Ham.

SHERRI HOUGHTON recently retired as Learning Forward Ohio's executive director after serving in that role for 14 years. Houghton joined the Ohio affiliate in 2004, served as president in 2005-06, and became executive director as a pilot program in 2006.

Her accomplishments include establishing an Ohio academy for coaches, stabilizing the affiliate finances, and bringing instructional coaches and active classroom teachers on to the board. The new Learning Forward Ohio executive director is Susan Drake. Houghton will continue on as a board member.

LEARNING FORWARD STAFF UPDATES

Learning Forward has promoted several staff members.

Tom Manning, formerly vice president of consulting management and services, is now senior vice president, professional services. Manning has been with Learning Forward for 11 years, serving in a variety of positions. In this new role, Manning will lead Learning Forward's efforts to support schools, districts, states, and provinces.

Anthony Armstrong is now senior vice president of marketing & communications. Armstrong has served in several capacities during his 10 years with Learning Forward. In addition to his previous marketing responsibilities, Armstrong oversees the ongoing improvement of our website and selection and implementation of an LMS platform and virtual event platform.

Kristin Buehrig is now senior director, conferences and institutes. In her new position, Buehrig will continue her lead role with the Learning Forward Academy and the Annual Conference as we transfer to a virtual format.

Anne Feaster-Smith is now senior director, controller, building on her 5½ years in accounting and finance at Learning Forward.

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THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

LEARNING FORWARD'S

Learning System

Now offered virtually!

Set a systemwide vision for adult learning

Learning Forward believes schools achieve their potential when leaders at all levels build, scale, sustain, and advocate for coherent systems that connect adult learning to equitable student outcomes. We help systems develop a vision for professional learning, set clear roles and responsibilities to achieve that vision, build structures to ensure job-embedded collaboration at all levels, and define key components of a learning system.

Our system-level professional services are designed to help leaders:

1. Develop and/or strengthen districtwide systems and structures for high-quality in-person, hybrid, and virtual professional learning.

2. Develop districtwide and building-level systems to measure the impact of professional learning, showing connections between adult learning and results for students.

3. Develop districtwide processes to hire, induct, and support the growth of instructional coaches.

4. Use professional learning to strengthen equitable practices for educators and students.

5. Develop strategies for strengthening elements of the principal pipeline.

For more information, contact Tom Manning, senior vice president, professional services, at **tom.manning@learningforward.org**. | **consulting.learningforward.org**

WHAT WE DO. We help you establish the essential components of a learning system, including:

A systemwide vision, mission, and beliefs for professional learning

Professional learning governance, roles, and responsibilities

A vision for using student, educator, and system data to guide decision making

Ensuring time and resources for collaborative professional learning

Mentoring and induction

Evaluation of professional learning

Get connected

With the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and loneliness increasing among young people, social and emotional well-being is a major priority for teachers and students this year. There are many ways for educators to address these needs, but one stands out in surveys of youth: **communication**.

SEL is top of mind

Social and emotional needs are the most pressing challenge this year, according to teachers (**66%**) and students (**64%**).[1]

66% **64%**
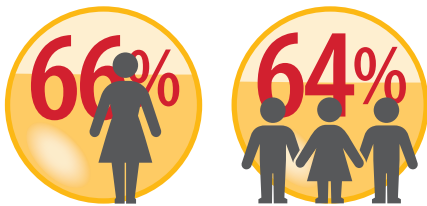
SEL is one of the **top three topics** educators want to learn more about this year.[2]

On SEL strategies, student and teacher opinions differ

TEACHERS SAY THE MOST IMPORTANT STRATEGIES ARE:[1]

55% Doing regular check-ins with students (**55%**).

46% Offering sessions with a school counselor, psychologist, or mentor (**46%**).

46% Offering courses in mindfulness, coping with stress, and self-care (**46%**).

STUDENTS SAY THE MOST IMPORTANT STRATEGIES ARE:[1]

**50%** Regular communication about plans to close/open schools (**50%**).

50% Educators addressing student concerns about preparing to start college or career next fall (**50%**).

47% Schools offering safe opportunities to socialize with fellow students (**47%**).

Communication is key

70% of students say communication from educators is critical for feeling connected.

Only **19%** said online classes help them feel connected.[3]

70%

19%
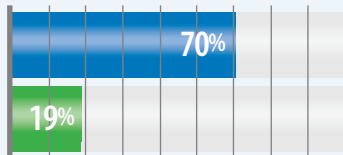
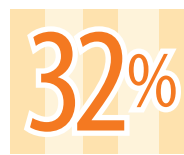During remote learning, infrequent teacher-student communication is associated with declines in student motivation:[4]

65% **65%** report a decrease in motivation when teachers communicate with them **less than 1 time** per week.

55% **55%** report a decrease in motivation when teachers communicate **2+ times** per week.
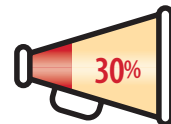
Room for improvement

32%

Only **32%** of students say their school has done a good job keeping them informed about school decisions during the pandemic.[3]

Almost **1/4** connected with teachers less than 1 time per week in the spring.[4,7]

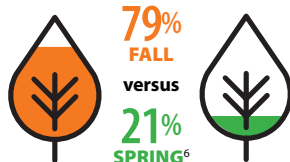FEELINGS OF SCHOOL BELONGING HAVE **DECLINED**:[5]

47% 47% of students felt a strong sense of belonging at school in **FALL 2019**.

30% 30% felt a strong sense of belonging at school in **SPRING 2020**.

Some good news

Districts plan to hold more live, synchronous instruction than they did in the spring.

79% FALL versus **21% SPRING**[6]

54% **54%** of students say there is an adult from school they can talk to when upset, even during remote learning.[5]

References

[1] PDK International. (2020). bit.ly/3kTOCn3
[2] Learning Forward. (2020). Learning Leaders survey. Unpublished.
[3] PDK International. (2020). bit.ly/2FXXQjF
[4] Prichard Committee Student Voice Team. (2020). bit.ly/2GaxJps
[5] YouthTruth. (2020). bit.ly/3cCltdn
[6] CRPE. (2020). bit.ly/33alZuL
[7] Common Sense Media. (2020). bit.ly/3ieKH2u

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THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

THROUGH THE LENS

OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

LEARNING FORWARD'S
STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students ...

Learning Communities

… occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

Leadership

… requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

Resources

… requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

Data

… uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

Learning Designs

… integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

Implementation

… applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

Outcomes

… aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Many of the articles in this issue of *The Learning Professional* demonstrate Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning in action. Use this tool to deepen your understanding of the standards and strategies for implementing them.

Ways you might use this tool include:
- Discuss the questions in a professional learning community;
- Share one or more articles from the issue with your staff and facilitate a conversation; and
- Do a self-assessment of what you have learned from this issue.

STANDARD:
LEADERSHIP

IN ACTION
Leaders always play an important role in supporting staff, but this year, leaders "must go beyond their normal efforts to show respect for their staffs" and model care for self and others, writes Sharron Helmke on p. 36. She says, "The strategies we should use now are not inherently different than those we would use in any school year. The difference is in being more aware of their importance and more intentional about doing and following through with them."

TO CONSIDER
- One way leaders show care and respect, Helmke says, is by "listening deeply" and using resources "to advocate for teachers' most urgent requests and concerns." How are you making time and space to listen even more deeply than usual? How do you balance that with other responsibilities and your own needs?

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- Helmke points out that teachers may need extra support this year from coaches, technology specialists, mental health providers, and others. Yet, some educators reported in the spring being overwhelmed with resources, and, Helmke says, "It's equally important that teachers are not made to feel that using these resources is one more 'must do' on their list." How can you ensure teachers are getting the support and resources they need without overwhelming them?

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STANDARD:
IMPLEMENTATION

IN ACTION
In the Q & A on p. 18, Heather Hill describes her research on what makes professional learning effective. Her studies find that *what* professional learning covers and *how* it is implemented are important determinants of outcomes.

TO CONSIDER
- One of Hill's studies found that professional learning was more effective when it included follow-up in "implementation meetings," where teachers discuss successes and challenges with the new program or practice they learned. How do you follow up with teachers to monitor and support their implementation of new practices?

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- Hill's research finds that professional learning tends to be more effective — and is more likely to be implemented as intended — when it includes support for educators to use new curriculum materials. What curriculum materials do you use in your professional learning, and what additional materials could benefit educators?

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Learn more about Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning at
www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning.