THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

Shifting mindsets about young children p. 26

A shared vision of quality across grades p. 22

What we can all learn from early educators p. 30, p. 40

EARLY LEARNING

A community comes together for literacy p. 48

Rethinking school discipline p. 44

PLUS
STRONGER COACHES, STRONGER SCHOOLS **p. 51**

April 2021, Vol. 42, No. 2

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APRIL 2021, VOLUME 42, NO. 2

in this issue ...

VOICES 7


p. 13

RESEARCH 15


p. 16

THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL
THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

in this issue ...

FOCUS 21
EARLY LEARNING


p. **26**


p. **22**


p. **30**


p. **40**

IDEAS 51

COACHING

TOOLS 63

UPDATES 67

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES learningforward.org/the-learning-professional

Bilingual program builds a bridge to equity.
By Maria Patricia Mesa, Vanessa Gilchrist, and Barbara Noel

A path to early literacy.
By Alyssa Phillips

I SAY

Doris A. Santoro

Professor of education, Bowdoin College

"Burnout is the ubiquitous narrative of why teachers leave … . And I think that is a problem. We need to expand our notion of the sources of dissatisfaction to include demoralization, not only burnout. I think that serious damage can occur when we mislabel demoralization as burnout. That creates degrees of shame and frustration in teachers that could actually move them out of the classroom rather than helping them to better understand how the conditions need to change in order to feel good about their work."

Source: "Educating in a Pandemic: Burnout and Demoralization," Portland, Maine, June 25, 2020.

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Building relationships

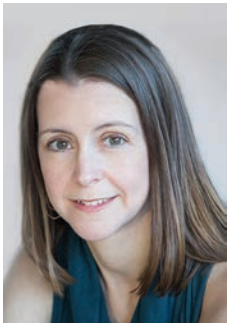
Presenting and facilitating

Leading professional learning

Providing effective feedback

Coaching individuals and teams

Selecting learning designs



Suzanne Bouffard

INVESTING IN EARLY LEARNING BENEFITS US ALL

Little children are a big deal for schools today. Mounting evidence about the benefits of early childhood education has motivated thousands of school districts to offer pre-K. Research on the foundations of literacy has spurred greater identification of reading disorders in kindergarten. And knowledge about how students develop over time is driving efforts to align early childhood and the elementary grades.

As public investment in the early years increases, we are seeing a growing interest among Learning Forward's audience in how to support and build on early childhood education. Over the past year, some of our most-attended webinars have focused on teaching and learning from pre-K to 3rd grade. And an increasing number of our members work with young learners or their teachers.

We recognize the immense value of high-quality early learning. That's why we're so excited about this issue of *The Learning Professional.* It highlights some of the leading voices in early childhood education today on topics like developmentally appropriate instruction, building literacy, integrating social, emotional, and academic skills, and dismantling inequitable systems of discipline. It also homes in on strategies for building capacity, looking at the rich history of early childhood coaching, how community coalitions can bolster teachers' skills, and the benefits of aligning early childhood and elementary education.

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a learning community to prepare the child's educators.

This issue shows why it is important for everyone in education to understand the early foundations of learning and child development, even if you work at the secondary or higher education level. Connecting the dots from early childhood through high school is vital, and it takes all levels working together. As Iheoma Iruka explains (p.40), "Early childhood educators need to know what happens once their kids move on to K-12. And K-12 educators should really understand what's happening in the early childhood space."

As the authors show us, early childhood educators are models for us all. They are masters of agility, engagement, and creativity, experts at weaving together instructional practices from across developmental domains and personalizing instruction to each student's needs. They don't develop these skills by accident, but through sustained, job-embedded, and standards-aligned professional learning. If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a learning community to prepare the child's educators. K-12 educators can learn from the rich history of early childhood coaching and the field's necessary focus on job-embedded learning.

Even as we look to early childhood for inspiration, we must also support the field's learning and growth. One of early childhood education's persistent challenges is financial support and infrastructure. Early educators have historically been paid less, received fewer benefits, and had less access to professional learning than K-12 educators.

That's a problem not only for early childhood teachers and young children, but for all educators, because their work depends on the foundations established in the years before children walked through their doors. As advocates and policymakers aim to fill the gaps in early childhood funding, K-12 leaders must be at the table and their voices must be loud and clear about the value of early childhood education.

Little children become big children who become adults. Their learning and development are continuous, not limited to the boundaries of grade levels and education structures. They need the adults in their lives to know where they've been and where they're going. That takes us investing in our own learning to support their learning. In that spirit, we invite you to dive into this issue regardless of your place in education. ■

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

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HOW TO GET IN TOUCH

The Learning Professional is published six times a year to promote improvement in the quality of professional learning as a means to improve student learning in K-12 schools. Contributions from members and nonmembers of Learning Forward are welcome.

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About our style and word usage

The Learning Professional follows the guidelines set forth in the AP Stylebook. However, we defer to authors' preferences for terminology and capitalization with regard to race. We reserve the right to exclude any terms we consider to convey insult or harm.

INSPIRE. EXPRESS. ADVOCATE.

VOICES

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

What will you do right now to ensure that each child in your care has the best opportunity in your school system? How will you prepare school for students to build agency as early as pre-K and sustain that agency through high school? How will you work with staff, families, and students to build the school community necessary to hold our children in this age of pandemic and social unrest?

— "Why we tell our children's stories,"

p. 12

We've heard inspiring examples of educators addressing challenges they've never encountered before and working tirelessly to create solutions so their students have continued to learn and thrive.

Denise Glyn Borders, top, is president/CEO of Learning Forward. Wendy Robinson is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees.

FROM WHERE WE SIT

Denise Glyn Borders and Wendy Robinson

SIGNS OF HOPE, ACTIONS FOR CHANGE

We see signs of spring all around us and, along with the change in season, several reasons for hope for educators and students. After weathering a punishing 2020, we are cautiously optimistic for better conditions for our students, educators, and communities.

More citizens are receiving COVID-19 vaccines by the day in the U.S., with an encouraging trajectory for the rest of the year. Many states — although sadly not all — have prioritized vaccinations for educators, hand in hand with more schools resuming in-person instruction and other essential services.

The Biden administration signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which includes funding for schools through the almost $123 billion Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. Money will be allocated to provide services to enable homeless children to attend school, address learning loss, ensure students have access to high-speed Internet access and devices, and so much more.

Many of the funds allocated to districts through states can be used to cover the professional learning needs and services that are so essential in ensuring educators have the capacity to strengthen teaching and learning in our current context. This funding will help educators address both short- and long-term needs and is a positive move toward sustaining significant support for professional learning, at least at the U.S. federal level. Beyond funds allocated for education, the aspects of the law that will reduce child poverty will have an enormous impact on students' readiness for education in the coming years.

And with that good news, our biggest reason for optimism remains the expertise, passion, and perseverance of educators around the world. We've heard inspiring examples of educators addressing challenges they've never encountered before and working tirelessly to create solutions so their students have continued to learn and thrive.

What we've experienced and recognized over the past 12 months, however, amplifies the following significant challenges that educators and communities face, and we at Learning Forward are committed to directing our energy to ensure professional learning can address them.

Pandemic preparedness. The COVID-19 pandemic isn't over by any means, and we recognize this may not be the last global health crisis that will impact schools. The need is as great as ever for systems that continually strengthen educator knowledge and skills so each student has access to high-quality teaching and learning and each educator has support and the opportunity

to collaborate and learn with colleagues, both virtually and in person.

Equity in education. The longstanding inequities that were made more obvious by the pandemic remain. Professional learning can address lack of access to effective teaching and learning for students of color, students living in poverty, students living in rural areas and other hard-to-reach circumstances and contexts, but only when nations, provinces, states, and systems prioritize meaningful learning for each and every student, no matter their context, background, or ability.

Civic education. The fundamental disagreements about the nature of truth and civic unrest that follows underscore the need to prepare educators to support students and communities to understand current events in real time and respond critically. Civic education, deep learning, and critical thinking must remain among our priorities for student and educator learning.

Technology skills. Educators' needs to leverage technology to ensure student access and engagement will grow, as will their need for professional learning to continuously upgrade digital and e-learning skills and practices.

Assessment. In the coming months and years, educators will need evolving strategies to assess what students know and are able to do and to plan ambitious teaching to accelerate grade-level learning.

These issues are complex and multifaceted. As we shape educator support to address them, the principles of high-quality professional learning are more important than ever. First, one-shot workshops won't help educators transform their knowledge, practices, and beliefs in ways that serve their students. Educators need long-term, sustained learning in collaboration with peers, facilitated by coaches and informed by reflection and feedback from others.

During the pandemic, many educators experienced workshop learning to address immediate needs related to using unfamiliar tools and connecting with students remotely. This just-in-time emergency skill development is necessary, particularly in times of rapid change. And, it isn't the same as — or a substitute for — research-based professional learning where educators engage, for example, in ongoing teamwork and coaching to build their capacity to implement high-quality curriculum with a diverse mix of students.

The learning educators experience to continually improve over the long haul happens in systems that prioritize learning for each educator and each student, with informed attention to the conditions that surround learning, the leadership and resources that set a vision and create structures, and the commitment to equity that drives evidence-based practices.

Recognizing what educators require and deserve, we're proud that Learning Forward is prioritizing the following, among so many other important initiatives this year.

Standards revision. The revision of the Standards for Professional Learning has been underway since a year ago, with a plan to update both standards and implementation tools to meet educators' evolving needs.

Virtual services. Learning Forward has shifted our learning and professional services to online contexts, from the Annual Conference to our new coaching course to a wide range of services. (Learn more about our online coaching course on p. 68).

Advocacy. In concert with our members and affiliate leaders, Learning Forward continues to advocate for increased and sustained U.S. federal funding for professional learning and funding to address emergency needs.

Equity work. Learning Forward is working with a growing number of districts and states to develop equity-oriented professional services that strengthen educators' capacity to foreground equitable access to teaching, leading, and learning, meet the needs of students who have historically been underserved, and support teachers and leaders of color.

Our work is informed by your needs. This magazine is just one way we share information with members. As members taking charge of your own continual growth, we encourage you to explore our many avenues for knowledge building and connection:

- Our webinars over the past year have grown as a lively platform for learning and community.
- *Professional Learning News,* our weekly e-newsletter, brings you the latest news and research.
- Our learning networks convene district teams to dig deep into their local problems of practice.
- At our virtual Annual Conference later this year, we'll learn by your side from colleagues sharing their lessons and insights and leading voices offering inspiration and findings from research. We'd love to see every one of you there.

We appreciate your dedication and expertise in leading schools and systems through and beyond a very challenging time. Please get in touch with us to help Learning Forward understand your challenges, successes, and highest priorities. ■

Frederick Brown

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT LEADERS OF COLOR?

As we at Learning Forward continue to deepen our equity work, I have been reflecting on a troubling pattern I've seen throughout my career: Leaders of color, especially male leaders of color, are vastly underrepresented in schools and districts, even in systems with high percentages of students of color.

When I was a school principal in the 1990s, I was the only male principal of color in the district. Later, when I was a senior program officer for The Wallace Foundation, one of the superintendents I supported, an African American man, told me he was struggling and hoping to find peers to connect with, but neither he nor I were very successful in making connections. With little support to be found, he left the district — a sad ending not only for him but the educators and students he served. These are just two of my own stories, and I know that other educators of color have many of their own.

It's not just a matter of getting people of color in the principal's seat — it's about supporting principals to be highly effective.

My colleagues and I at Learning Forward recognize that we have an opportunity to help change these patterns so that the proportion of leaders of color matches the populations of students they serve. We believe a systemic approach not only addresses quantity but also professional learning and policies at all levels to ensure quality and support.

It is vital to identify and tap educators of color who demonstrate early indicators of leadership potential. But it's not just a matter of getting people of color in the principal's seat — it's about supporting principals to be highly effective. Support means helping leaders build their skills, learn from peers, and navigate the challenges.

It also means being their champions and advocates, because implicit bias and racism are alive and well. I'm often reminded of a principal who told me that leaders of color, like him, have to be twice as effective as their white colleagues to "stand up to the pushback we get for trying to do the same job as anyone else." They should not have to face those challenges alone.

SEVEN DOMAINS OF PRINCIPAL PIPELINES

1. Leader standards.
2. High-quality preservice principal preparation.
3. Selective hiring and placement of principals.
4. On-the-job evaluation and support.
5. Principal supervisors.
6. Leader tracking systems.
7. Systems and accountability.

To learn more, see www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/principal-pipeline-self-study-guide-for-districts.aspx.

To guide this work, we can look to The Wallace Foundation's deep investment in understanding and developing principal pipelines. After working intensively with six districts and eventually scaling its efforts to more than 90 districts, the Foundation identified seven domains of principal pipelines that can guide efforts to diversify and improve the workforce. (See box above.)

We recognize that these structures and systems must be fortified by policy. Education policies can set goals and aspirations for hiring and retention and establish incentives. They can also reinforce leadership standards and professional learning standards to drive effective practice.

For any of these efforts to be successful, they must be embedded in systems that drive continuous learning and improvement. If those systems are not in place, well-intentioned efforts become haphazard and default back to the status quo. Establishing a culture of professional learning is always the first step to growing leaders and teachers.

Investing in leaders of color is investing in equity for all students. Our communities deserve nothing less. ■

Frederick Brown is chief learning officer/deputy at Learning Forward.

'WHEN WE STOP LEARNING, WE STOP TEACHING'

Mark Elgart is president and CEO of Cognia.

Why has professional learning been important to you throughout your career?
One of my first revelations when I started teaching was that my preparation to teach did not adequately prepare me for all the realities and complexities to be an effective teacher. I made a commitment in my first year of teaching that I still maintain today: I must always engage in my own learning. I continue today to participate in formal learning through the Harvard Business School and other offerings. In leading an improvement organization, I believe that learning is a continuous improvement process.

What is one memorable professional learning experience that shaped your work as an educational leader?
When I was a beginning principal, I attended a seminar at Amherst College focused on the growth and decline of civilizations, including the role that culture plays. The seminar revealed that school leaders must tend and nurture every day the culture of the school community. Culture is the key to unlocking a great school where children can thrive in their learning.

What would you like to see educators understand better about professional learning?
Professional learning is not an event; it is a continuous journey. As educators, we must embrace and reveal our own learning to our colleagues and our students. When we stop learning, we stop teaching.

What do you see as the most pressing professional learning priorities in schools right now?
Although much attention is being given to supporting teachers in using new technologies, the most important and beneficial professional learning is helping students, parents, and teachers strengthen inter- and intrarelationships regardless of the medium of instruction. The primary stakeholders in the learning process have been disrupted and upended. Professional learning must focus on helping key stakeholders establish new norms to guide and reinforce the necessary constructs of the effective relationships for supporting new ways of teaching and learning.

At Cognia, you work with educators around the world. What differences do you see in professional learning across countries, and how can we learn from each other?
The value of professional learning has no geographic limitations. However, we have witnessed that the commitment and engagement of professional learning is more consistently part of institutional planning and teacher life in our international settings. In the U.S., the resource allocations in support of professional learning are less per educator than in other parts of the world. We must dramatically increase our investment in educator growth as the primary strategy to improving student success.

What inspires you about Learning Forward's current work?
Learning Forward's critical mission to influence and impact one of the most significant needs in education inspires me. Education invests limited resources in helping professionals grow and improve in their craft so that those served, our students, benefit. Learning Forward is a passionate and persistent advocate for growing and improving our investment in professional learning, which is essential if we are going to achieve our primary purpose to prepare students for their future. ■

We must dramatically increase our investment in educator growth as the primary strategy to improving student success.

Mark Elgart is a member of the Learning Forward board of trustees.

Angela M. Ward

WHY WE TELL OUR CHILDREN'S STORIES

A baby boy is born, a precious gift to his mother and father. As he enters pre-K, he is overjoyed helping his classmates and modeling — as they develop at a different pace than their peers — what learning and playing in school looks and sounds like.

But when he gets to kindergarten, his teacher doesn't see his gifts. She is intent on making him comply. She places two names — the only two black boys in the class — on a behavior chart, moving down a clip each time either does something "bad."

I am the mother of two black boys. This narrative is the lived experience of my older son, and I was the assistant principal of his school. I bring this awareness to the antiracism work I do in schools.

In 2016, I led a team of educators and community activists to address the scourge of the school to prison pipeline that funnels black boys into systems of oppression. We were tasked with making a recommendation to the school board to end suspensions for students in prekindergarten through grade 2 (ages 3-7).

I needed the group to tell our students' stories and how they experience our system disproportionately based on race. I asked the group to review data from high schoolers who had been in our district's care since pre-K. Their outcomes were dismal.

To get the group to the level of empathy needed to tell the students' narratives, I told my family's story through photos of my then 14-year-old son as he matriculated from birth to high school. I acknowledged that he had us as parents to combat the negative impact on his developing identity in elementary school. As an educator, I know the language, understand the system, and coached my husband to speak in the meetings where I could not muster the professional language necessary to speak for my child. Many parents do not have that advantage.

Working toward equity requires educators to recognize that each child is different. Telling our students' stories helps us do that. Leaders must create the dialogue spaces for staff to expand their lenses to see how "teach to the middle" instruction and punitive discipline strategies leave no room for children to blossom into self-assured, efficacious leaders. We must develop and use our differentiation skill sets so every student's gifts are accessed and their needs met.

As a coach, I encourage leaders and teachers to be critical of their praxis. Praxis is developed through a conscious awareness of how your philosophy of education manifests in the everyday practice you employ in school. A teacher's philosophy may focus on education as compliance or the opportunity to develop students' sociocultural knowledge. A school leader might focus on being a manager or a community builder.

I ask you to critically self-reflect on your philosophy and how it affects your role daily. What will you do right now to ensure that each child in your care has the best opportunity in your school system? How will you prepare school for students to build agency as early as pre-K and sustain that agency through high school? How will you work with staff, families, and students to build the school community necessary to hold our children in this age of pandemic and social unrest?

Above all, what story will your ancestors say about the legacy you left in your current role in schools? Make sure it is one you and your students would be proud to read. ■

Angela M. Ward (angela@2wardequity.com, @2WardEquity) is founder and CEO of 2Ward Equity.

Editor's note: Per our policy on style and word usage (see p. 6), we have deferred to the author's preference for terminology and capitalization with regard to race.

Sharron Helmke

THE KEYS TO COACHING OUTSIDE YOUR EXPERTISE

Kindergarten and elementary classrooms never fail to bring me to a state of awe. Alphabet charts, number lines, book bins — the environment is so different from the high school English classrooms I inhabited as a teacher. The teaching is different, too, guiding inexperienced students in learning what it means to be a student while teaching key foundational concepts.

Perhaps these differences are why I enjoy coaching teachers of young children. I love hearing their thinking as they plan how to make monumental learning happen through discovery and play.

I'm aware that not everyone feels this way. In my work supporting instructional coaches, I find that many feel ill-equipped to support teachers in grade levels or subjects they've never taught themselves. They worry they won't be able to help or add value to the conversation.

That's far from true, however. In fact, stepping out of familiar territory can push us to engage in more powerful coaching. That's because coaching outside of our own teaching experience invites us to step out of the role of expert advisor or problem-solver and stand firmly in the roles of coach and learner. It requires us to act from a place of sincere curiosity about how others think, trust in their instincts and abilities, and respect the knowledge they bring into the relationship.

Stepping out of familiar territory can push us to engage in more powerful coaching.

Here are some ideas I've found useful when coaching teachers in grades or subjects less familiar to me.

Actively work to minimize anxiety about subject expertise. Remind yourself that effective coaching is not about having the answers, but about supporting the teachers' thinking by helping them generate their own ideas, arrive at their own interpretations, and learn to better detect their own blind spots or hesitancies.

Honor the teacher's expertise and build your own. Invite the teacher to share the exact wording of the lesson objective and describe what mastery looks like. This helps the teacher articulate thinking and simultaneously creates an objective and shared criterion for both of you when evaluating options for achieving the stated goal.

Focus your full and undivided attention to listening to understand the situation as the teacher does. Resist your mind's urge to interpret or frame the problem as you would if it were yours to solve. Instead, actively seek to understand factors the teacher sees as relevant. What expectations or priorities is the teacher trying to address, and based on what interpretations of the situation?

Let curiosity guide your questions and wonderings. Consider using observations rather than direct questions. For example, "I noticed you mentioned …" This is an invitation for the teacher to choose how to respond, perhaps by elaborating, explaining, or even ignoring your comment. Each possible response increases your understanding of the teacher's thinking, including where it's clear and where it's cloudy.

Above all, when coaching outside of your personal classroom experience, remember that the value you contribute is in supporting teachers' critical thinking. When addressing your prompts and questions, teachers are exploring aspects of thinking that may not have been fully developed; thus, your curiosity supports their thinking. The key to coaching outside your expertise is seeking to support, rather than supplant, teachers' knowledge and skills. ■

Sharron Helmke is a Gestalt and ICF certified professional coach. She's a senior consultant for Learning Forward, facilitator of the Mentor and Coaching Academies, and co-facilitator of Learning Forward's virtual coaching class *Powerful Communication Skills for Coaches*.

Jim Knight

REAL LEARNING HAPPENS IN REAL LIFE

When talking about instructional coaching, I find it helpful to divide professional learning into two different models: **outside-in** and **inside-out.** The outside-in model involves leaders identifying effective teaching practices for teachers, then providing learning experiences designed to help them learn those practices. The thinking behind this approach makes sense. These are research-based, proven strategies, so teachers should implement them.

Unfortunately, the outside-in model frequently encounters problems. Teachers can find it difficult to fit the new strategy into their existing way of teaching, but they are expected to implement it even if they don't like it. If teachers explain that they don't think a strategy is appropriate for their students, or that it is a bad fit for their approach to teaching, they often are labeled as resistant.

The argument goes that the strategy is proven, so teachers need to implement it whether they like it or not. Not surprisingly, the outside-in model often has little impact on what really happens in classrooms.

Research suggests that the inside-out model is more likely to lead to real change (see, for example, Ibarra, 2015). For this model, teachers identify students' needs, then identify a strategy to address those needs. Following this, teachers learn the strategy and adapt it until students' needs are met.

Teachers still implement proven teaching strategies, but rather than trying to implement a strategy they didn't choose and might not value, they implement a strategy they chose to address important student needs. Simply put, with the inside-out model, real learning happens in real life.

With this model, instructional coaches help make the learning real. Coaches empower teachers to see the reality of their classroom by video recording teachers' lessons, interviewing their students, reviewing student work with teachers, or gathering observation data. Then they help teachers identify clearly defined, achievable, student-focused goals that are deeply important to teachers and will have an unmistakably positive impact on student learning or well-being.

Coaches also draw on a deep understanding of effective teaching practices to help teachers pick the teaching strategies they will use to try to hit those goals. Finally, coaches partner with teachers to adapt those strategies so that they are most effective.

Theoretically, teachers could do inside-out professional learning on their own. They could get their own clear picture of reality and identify their own goals, do the research to identify and learn teaching strategies, and make adaptations to those strategies until the goals are achieved. But, in reality, this is too much without the support of an expert partner whose job is to think through these steps.

Teaching in and of itself makes significant cognitive demands, and there are few teachers who can do all of the knowledge work that teaching entails plus the complex work involved in learning and implementing new strategies. To do the work of the inside-out model, teachers need a partner: an instructional coach.

In the next issue, I'll explore how the inside-out approach applies to schoolwide change and the role coaches play in that process.

Coaches empower teachers to see the reality of their classroom by video recording teachers' lessons, interviewing their students, reviewing student work with teachers, or gathering observation data.

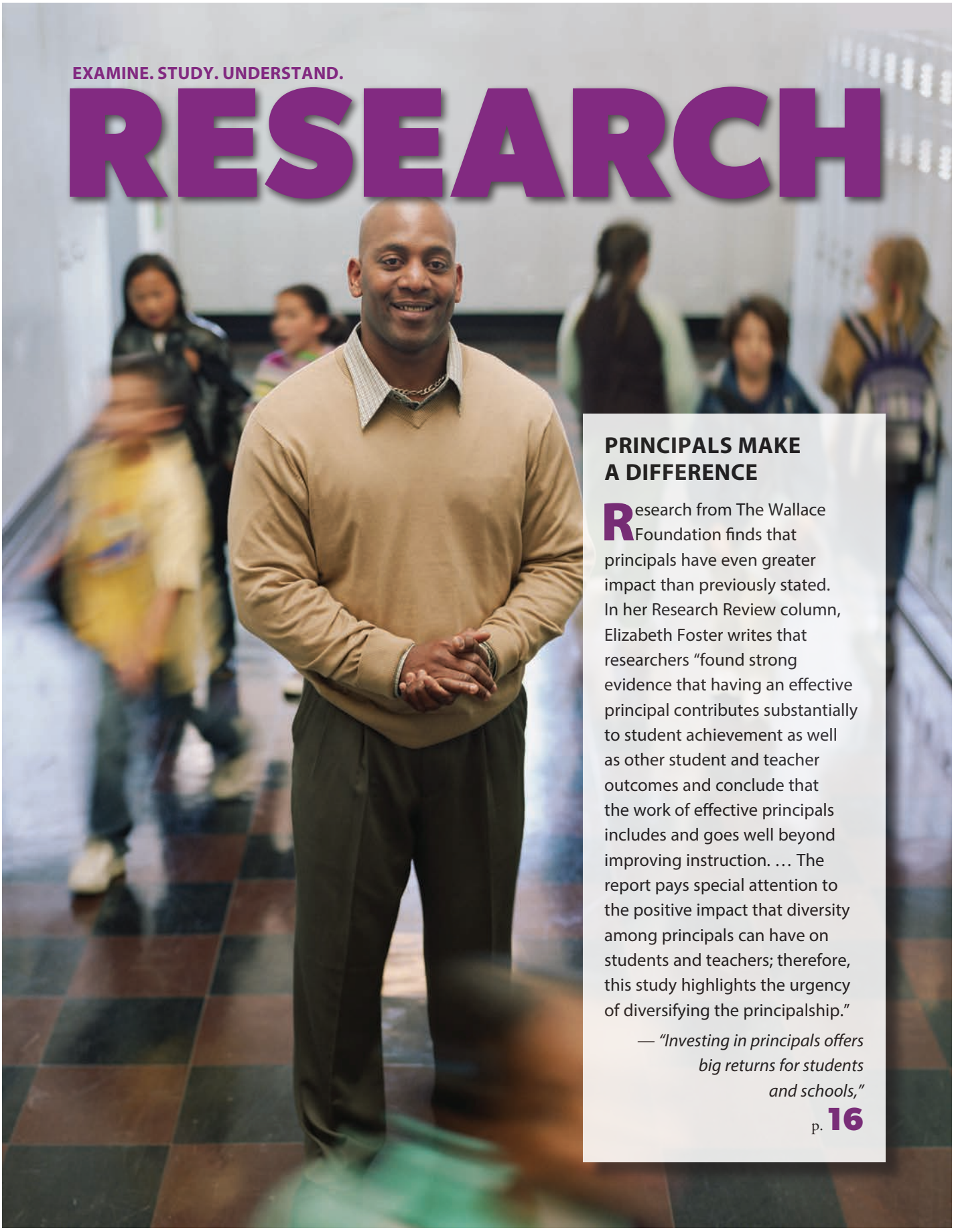
Jim Knight (jim@instructionalcoaching.com) is senior partner of the Instructional Coaching Group and a research associate at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.

REFERENCE

Ibarra, H. (2015). *Act like a leader, think like a leader.* Harvard Business Review Press. ■

EXAMINE. STUDY. UNDERSTAND.

RESEARCH



PRINCIPALS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Research from The Wallace Foundation finds that principals have even greater impact than previously stated. In her Research Review column, Elizabeth Foster writes that researchers "found strong evidence that having an effective principal contributes substantially to student achievement as well as other student and teacher outcomes and conclude that the work of effective principals includes and goes well beyond improving instruction. … The report pays special attention to the positive impact that diversity among principals can have on students and teachers; therefore, this study highlights the urgency of diversifying the principalship."

— "Investing in principals offers big returns for students and schools,"

p. 16

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RESEARCH REVIEW

Elizabeth Foster

INVESTING IN PRINCIPALS OFFERS BIG RETURNS FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

▶ THE STUDY

Grissom, J.A., Egalite, A.J., & Lindsay, C.A. (2021, February). *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research.* The Wallace Foundation. www.wallacefoundation.org/principalsynthesis

The school principal has long been recognized as a critical driver for school improvement and student success, but new research supported by The Wallace Foundation has found that principals have an even greater impact than previously stated. A synthesis of two decades of studies builds on previous research about how principals impact student outcomes and what characteristics and conditions lead to the greatest impact.

The report, *How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research,* updates the evidence base about school leadership, responds to changing policy contexts, and leverages recent improvements in research methodology. This report is a major contribution to the field as well as a critical resource for the revision of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning.

METHODOLOGY

The research team sought to update the evidence related to the impact of principals by synthesizing what has been learned in the last 20 years about the relationship between school leadership and student achievement. This report builds on the foundational research synthesis, *How Leadership Influences Student Learning* (Leithwood et al., 2004), commissioned by the Foundation more than 15 years ago.

Researchers also sought to respond to changing conditions in education over the past few decades such as the rise of high-stakes accountability systems and teacher evaluations, as well as the increased demand for equity in approaches and outcomes. They used new research methods and the ability to draw on state-level longitudinal data systems to understand and investigate relationships between principals and student outcomes and study the long-term impact of principals in striking new ways.

The researchers sought to answer these questions:

1. Who are public school principals in the United States? How have their characteristics changed over the last few decades?
2. How much do principals contribute to student achievement and other school outcomes?
3. What matters in the role of principal? What are effective principals' characteristics, skills, and behaviors?

To answer these questions, the researchers synthesized qualitative and quantitative studies after conducting a systematic search of scholarly databases and grey literature such as policy analyses and position papers, which initially yielded 4,832 studies. These studies were then screened for relevance, rigor, and methods, yielding 219 studies that were analyzed and synthesized.

The conclusions about student achievement are based on six studies that rely on longitudinal data that allow researchers to track over time the impact of a given principal as he or she moves to different schools as well as the impact of different principals on the same school. These data helped the researchers pinpoint the contributions of principals, separating out the impact of an effective principal from among the indirect relationships through teachers and other school personnel.

FINDINGS

The researchers found that the impact of school leadership on student outcomes has not been emphasized enough, given "the magnitude and scope of their impacts on a range of outcomes." They found strong evidence that having an effective principal contributes substantially to student achievement as well as other student and teacher outcomes and conclude that the work of

The report offers a portrait of the critical leadership behaviors and characteristics associated with effective principals related to people, instruction, and organization.

effective principals includes and goes well beyond improving instruction.

The findings related to the first research question provide an interesting look at how the demographics of the principalship have changed in the last two decades. The corps of principals has become more female, and the racial and ethnic diversity among principals has increased, although not to the same degree or as fast as the student body.

The report pays special attention to the positive impact that diversity among principals can have on students and teachers; therefore, this study highlights the urgency of diversifying the principalship. In addition, principals' years of experience levels have decreased, especially in high-need schools — a finding that needs to be attended to urgently as these are the same schools that are most often staffed with the least-experienced teachers.

The ability of the new research methods to parse out the impact of different principals at a school and the impact of an effective principal at different schools is critical given the high mobility of principals among schools and districts. Using advanced statistical methods newly available via longitudinal data sets, the researchers estimated the impact of increasing principal effectiveness.

The researchers found an effect that can be represented in this way: replacing a below-average principal (25th percentile) with an above-average principal (75th percentile) would result in the equivalent of about three months of additional student learning in math and reading. The researchers point out that this is only slightly less than what widely cited research has found in terms of the effect of a teacher on student outcomes.

The researchers assert that the impact of principals is large in magnitude but also in scope. Principals not only impact student achievement, but also impact other factors such as student absenteeism. In addition, an effective principal impacts teacher and school outcomes, including improved teacher job satisfaction and reduced attrition.

The report offers a portrait of the critical leadership behaviors and characteristics associated with effective principals related to people, instruction, and organization. They found that effective principals demonstrate skills in four domains of behavior that include:

- Engaging in instructional conversations with teachers related to teacher evaluation and instructional coaching;
- Building a productive school climate that values trust, teamwork, engaging with data, and continuous improvement;

- Facilitating productive collaboration and teachers working together effectively to improve their practice and student outcomes; and
- Being strategic about staffing and the use of resources, most notably time.

These four domains and the specific associated skills discussed in the report align with the Standards for Professional Learning, especially with the concepts in the **Leadership standard.** This research also highlights the importance of leaders prioritizing and facilitating productive collaboration, a critical concept in the **Learning Communities standard.** These findings add to the growing body of research that supports the power of professional collaboration, an uptick that will be reflected in the revised standards.

This evidence about the skills and knowledge that lead to impact can help establish targets for professional learning goals, provides a foundation for the identification and selection of professional learning content, and offers a list of priorities to use when assessing the professional learning needs of principals, teacher leaders, and aspiring leaders.

Notably, the research suggests that approaching leadership work with an equity lens can promote more equitable school outcomes. The researchers suggest that applying an equity lens to the skills that the research shows has a positive impact on student outcomes could yield good results for students of color, students living in poverty, students with special learning needs, and English language learners. Such practices might include assessing and improving student discipline practices, implementing and supporting culturally responsive teaching practices, hiring teachers of color, and engaging with diverse families and caregivers.

Responding to these findings, the researchers propose a framework that centers equity in school leadership and supports efforts to reorient the principal role toward educational equity. This framework elevates strategies such as developing a productive climate that celebrates diversity and communicates high expectations for all students and engaging families and caregivers from all backgrounds.

Using this equity framework, leaders can examine current professional learning against a set of equity recommendations. The framework highlights the importance of equity-focused professional learning for principals, both for their own learning

and in how they conceptualize and prioritize professional learning for others in their schools and systems.

The researchers also note that the presence of a principal of color appears to produce positive outcomes for students of color in terms of higher achievement and improves job outcomes for teachers of color, including retention.

The report acknowledges that the research related to principals is highly variable and calls for additional investment in studying and understanding the role of a high-quality principal workforce. For instance, the evidence related to principals' contributions is drawn primarily from six studies. The findings related to the aspects of the principal role are drawn from more than 200 studies, but those studies are not tightly aligned methodologically and vary by focus and topic.

This variability limits the conclusions that can be drawn. The researchers conclude that the field would benefit from investments in research focused on the role of the principal that is rigorous and cohesive. Additional research syntheses have been commissioned already by The Wallace Foundation to explore the impacts and characteristics of the assistant principal role and principal preparation programs. These studies will no doubt yield important findings to complement this report.

IMPLICATIONS

The report's findings about the critical and widespread impact that results when principals create a vision for collaborative professional learning and provide resources and supports to reach that vision is at the very heart of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, spanning the **Leadership** and **Learning Communities standards**. This research is informing the standards revision process as we deepen the discussion about collaborative professionalism and highlight the role of principals in ensuring equity.

The revised standards will highlight the importance of equity as a foundation for leadership, culture, and actions in much the same way that the Wallace-commissioned report offers an equity framework for the principalship. These points of alignment between the standards and this new research represent a coherence and a reliance on evidence that will lead to better outcomes.

It is worth noting that, while the comparison of the impact of the principal and the impact of the classroom teacher on student outcomes is helpful in highlighting the power of each role, these findings should never be weighed against one another. Investments in both teachers and principals are what will create the systems and conditions that lead to improved academic and nonacademic outcomes for each student.

With this report, the research team's call for renewed attention to and investment in supporting an investment would build on and leverage the commitment The Wallace Foundation has made to date. This long-term commitment is extraordinary, and a similar investment in professional learning could result in a better understanding of the impact of specific elements and aspects of professional learning.

Exploring how teachers and leaders improve their own practice and a range of student outcomes over time would inform decision-making and planning and be an investment that would yield great returns for teacher and leader practice, growth, and retention as well as student outcomes. Learning Forward is ready to lead the way for this type of investment in coordinated, systematic syntheses of professional learning research.

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DATA POINTS

87% OF TEACHERS IMPROVED WITH MENTORING

The National Summer School Initiative began in summer 2020 to improve virtual teaching and learning in schools with large percentages of low-income students of color. A key component was mentor teachers, who engaged teachers in professional learning and shared videos of themselves teaching model lessons.

About 80% of surveyed teachers believed the mentoring quality was strong and that they learned from their mentor; 87% believed they improved their practice. Mentors also believed their own practice improved.

However, many would have preferred to see more differentiation in the professional learning and wished mentors had conducted observations. Teachers, mentors, parents, and students all believed students improved academically, with 81% of students saying they grew as readers and learned strategies for solving math problems.
at.virginia.edu/3bXVo8M

6 OF 9 STUDIES FOUND TEACHER STUDY GROUPS IMPROVE PRACTICE

A literature synthesis reviewed 32 studies on teacher study groups — learning communities focused on a specific topic. Seven out of 10 studies found a positive link between teacher study groups and increases in teacher knowledge, and six out of nine found improvements in teacher practice. But only two out of seven studies documented positive outcomes for students.

The researchers also examined whether patterns of outcomes could be attributed to specific characteristics of the professional learning. Although no definitive pattern emerged, the studies that

met criteria for all five examined factors reported positive impacts, and the study that met criteria for the fewest factors had the weakest impacts.
bit.ly/387mCZu

2/3 OF DISTRICT LEADERS REPORT SIGNIFICANT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NEEDS

More than two-thirds of district leaders reported moderate or high levels of staff learning needs this year, according to a RAND Corporation survey of how districts are navigating the pandemic.

Top among the learning needs was addressing students' social and emotional well-being, followed by how to help English learners and students with unfinished learning.

One-third of leaders worried about teacher attrition, 56% worried about having enough qualified staff to cover all classes, and almost 70% worried about having adequate funding to cover staffing needs. More than half of leaders anticipated the need for more mental health services for teachers.

On the positive side, the most commonly selected approach for navigating the current year was creating virtual learning communities for staff, with 48% of district leaders planning to implement them and an additional 16% saying they would if they had sufficient funding.
bit.ly/3qhMnw8

1/4 OF PUBLIC PRE-K TEACHERS QUIT

A study of teacher turnover in pre-K and early childhood programs in Louisiana over a two-year period revealed that more than one-third of teachers left from one year to the next, and the majority did not move to another program, suggesting they left the field. Turnover was lower in school-based pre-K, perhaps because these teachers tend to have higher pay and benefits; only about one-fourth of teachers in school-based pre-K quit, compared to almost half of teachers in child care. For nearly all sectors and age groups, teachers who left had lower scores on a standard measure of interaction quality than teachers who stayed.
bit.ly/2O1Lk6z

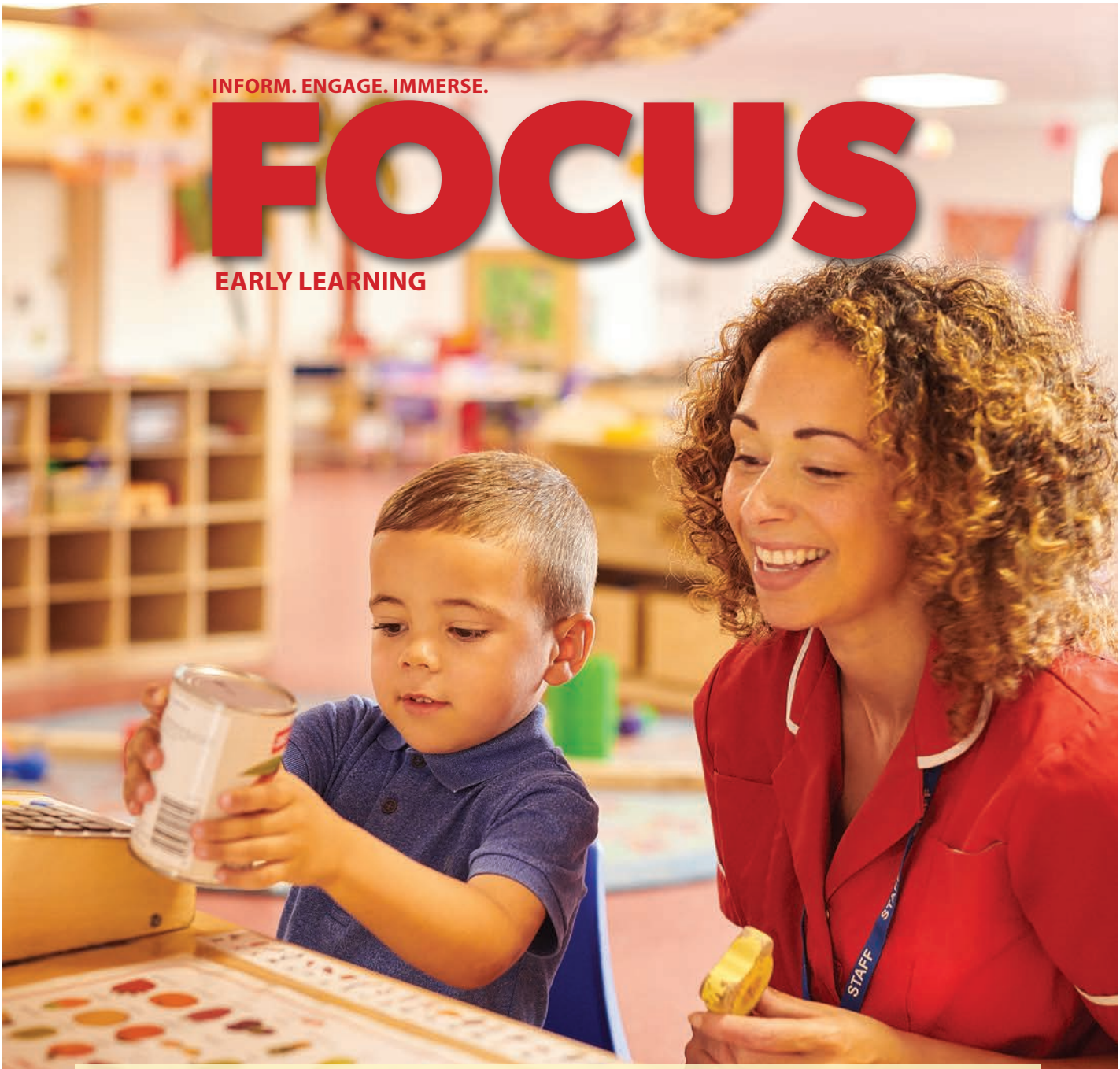
1% FEWER PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

Public school enrollment was 3% higher in 2019 than in 2009, while the number of public school teachers was 1% lower, according to the latest Digest of Education Statistics from U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. The student-teacher ratio rose slightly in that time, from one teacher for every 15.4 students to one teacher for every 15.9 students. Discrepancies in the percentage of teachers and students of color persist, with 48% of students identifying as white but 79% of teachers. Also of note, the average salary for public school teachers decreased 1% in inflation-adjusted dollars in that 10-year span.
bit.ly/3uVbdW7

INFORM. ENGAGE. IMMERSE.

FOCUS

EARLY LEARNING



EARLY LEARNING PAVES THE WAY

Early childhood educators are masters of their craft, and K-3 educators can benefit from their experience. As Suzanne Bouffard writes in her article on p. 30, "Although teaching young children may look easy, it is anything but. It requires not only a deep well of engaging, playful strategies for interacting with young children, but an intentional focus on the foundational skills they need for later learning. Bringing these pieces together requires the skill, coordination, and grace of a ballet dancer. And just like the best ballet dancers, great early childhood educators hone their craft through a lot of practice and a lot of coaching."

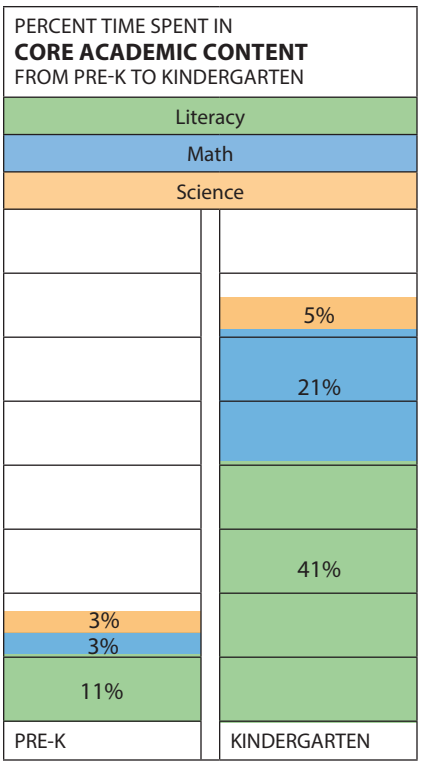
Shared vision leads to quality across the early grades

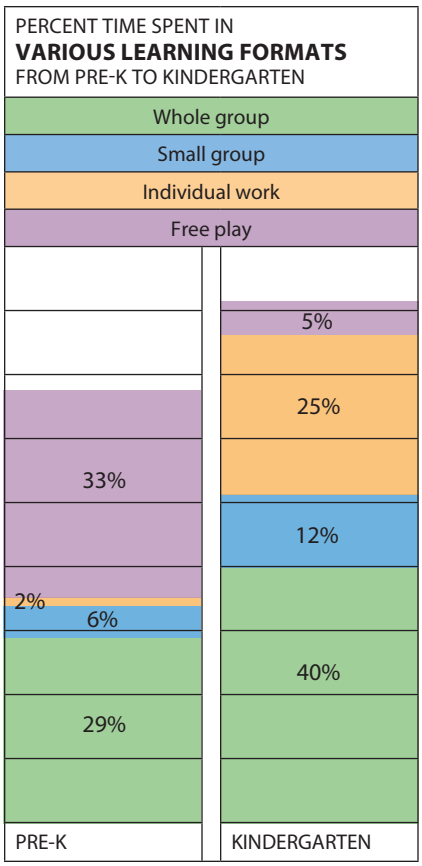
BY BRIDGET HAMRE

Young children's daily interactions with teachers are critical to the development of their social, cognitive, and self-regulatory skills (Hamre, 2014). But not all young children have access to the types of interactions that matter — interactions that are warm, supportive, cognitively engaging, and rich in core academic areas such as literacy, math, and science.

One barrier to ensuring all children have access to great teaching is the lack of a clear and shared vision of good instruction across the early grades from pre-K to 3rd grade. There is much that unites best practices across these grades, but, far too often, educators and parents assume that preschool is a time to focus on social and emotional skills while school really starts when children enter kindergarten and the focus turns to academics.

Research paints a different picture, showing that social, emotional, and academic skills are intertwined and we should nurture all of them over time (Jones & Kahn, 2017). To the untrained eye, a preschool classroom, with 4- and 5-year-olds spending the





majority of their day at play, looks like a different universe than a 3rd-grade classroom, with 8- and 9-year-olds engaged in structured learning activities. But in truth, although the *content* of instruction changes substantially between preschool and 3rd grade, the process or the *how* of instruction should be very similar.

Adopting a shared vision of the teaching and learning process across grades can help ensure that more classrooms are high quality. Teachstone's experience working with schools and districts around the country has shown us what this vision can be and how to make it come alive.

A SHARED VISION

At the core, great teaching across the early years has three major components:

1. **Effective teacher-child interactions** that build strong relationships, promote positive behavior and engagement, and enhance cognition and language skills;
2. **Content-focused instruction and learning opportunities** in core areas, including literacy, math, science, and social-emotional skills; and
3. **Individualized instruction** based on a deep understanding of the social and academic needs of each student.

The best teachers bring these three elements together throughout the school day, seamlessly interweaving them and creating opportunities for learning in formal and informal moments of instruction. For example, effective preschool teachers provide structured opportunities to develop skills such as phonological awareness but reinforce them in small groups, centers, and play settings. Effective kindergarten, 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-grade teachers weave together content areas and recognize that children will best master skills if they attend to the ways that children's social and emotional development impacts their academic learning.

Just as children's development is a gradual progression in which skills become increasingly differentiated, so, too, should good instruction. Children should spend less time in highly structured literacy instruction in preschool than in later grades, and children's growing skills in attention regulation means they can get more out of longer whole-group instruction as they mature.

When teachers and leaders work

together across grades, they can learn from one another and plan strategically for how to create this progression. Professional learning communities, coaching, and other professional learning strategies can help embed the three elements of the shared vision and make transitions smooth for children.

WHAT CHILDREN EXPERIENCE

Unfortunately, most children don't experience this gradual progression. Rather, they experience a stark shift as they move from preschool to kindergarten and beyond. And research suggests the vision for great teaching is far from a reality for most children in preschool through 3rd grade.

Children may get one or two components of quality at a time, but rarely all three. At the younger end of the continuum, too often preschool experiences are engaging but do not provide systematic exposure to core early academic skills. The pattern often flips once they enter kindergarten: Most children spend the majority of their time in rote and rather dull academically focused instruction.

One illustration of this huge shift between preschool and kindergarten comes from research conducted in Fairfax County, Virginia (Vitiello et al., 2020). Observers visited 117 preschool classrooms and 289 kindergarten classrooms. Most (72%) of the preschool classrooms were in school buildings, with the remainder in private child care settings.

Children's experiences shifted remarkably in one year, even though many of them remained in the same school building. As shown in the first graph on p. 23, preschool children spent only a small fraction of their overall day (17%) in the core academic content areas of literacy, math, and science. One year later, these same children were spending an average of 67% of their time in these content areas, with the majority of that time in literacy activities.

The format of instruction also shifted drastically, as seen in the second graph on p. 23. In preschool, children spent about a third of their time in centers or free play. By kindergarten, this was reduced to an average of 5% of their time, while time spent in whole group and individual seat work increased significantly.

In addition, the quality of teacher-child interactions decreased from preschool to kindergarten, based on data collected with the CLASS observational measure. (See box above for information about the CLASS.) This was true for all three dimensions of interaction quality measured, even instructional support, which one might have expected to be higher because the amount of academic content was more intensive.

Additional research (Bassok et al., 2016) and my own experience observing classrooms suggest these findings are not isolated to Fairfax, Virginia, but represent the reality for most children in the United States.

Another recent study that examined interaction quality from kindergarten to 3rd grade found that only 4% of children in the sample had access to classrooms with top-tier quality in emotional support and classroom organization and moderate quality in instructional support (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2019). In fact, over half of students never had access to that desired pattern of quality or only in one year from kindergarten to 3rd grade.

Furthermore, there was evidence that very poor students and Black students were even less likely to experience good teaching for multiple years. This is particularly troubling

USING THE CLASS TO MEASURE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM QUALITY

Although there is no way to fully quantify all elements of impactful teaching, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) demonstrates that great teaching can be systematically observed and measured.

Over 200 peer-reviewed studies provide compelling evidence that the teacher-child interactions measured by CLASS support children's development and learning of key academic and social outcomes, across settings, grade levels, and diverse groups of children.

CLASS describes three core domains of effective teaching: emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support. Emotional support assesses the extent to which teachers foster positive relationships, provide individualized support to children, and enhance children's growing sense of identity and autonomy. Classroom organization focuses on the ways teachers manage behavior, time, and attention in the classroom to ensure children get the most of each day. Instructional support measures the extent to which teachers provide cognitively stimulating learning experiences and feedback, while cultivating key early language skills such as verbal expression and vocabulary.

Within each domain are several dimensions, such as teacher sensitivity, instructional learning formats, and concept development. These dimensions are further described through a series of indicators and behavioral markers that help observers, coaches and teachers really see what these teaching dimensions look like in the classroom.

Educators and assessors using CLASS attend a two-day training where they learn about these dimensions, see multiple video examples, and practice scoring videos. Over 50,000 educators have attended this training and passed a certification test that demonstrates they can use the tool to provide reliable scores on CLASS.

because those few students who did have access to such high-quality teaching across multiple years had stronger literacy skills by the end of 3rd grade.

ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Clearly, there is a need for systematic work to help close these opportunity gaps and inconsistencies in children's experiences from pre-K to 3rd grade. Teachstone has partnered with early childhood programs and school districts across the country to help them systematically focus on, measure, and improve children's instructional experiences during these early years of schooling, using the CLASS. Although the approaches to this work vary, we see a few commonalities in successful initiatives.

Focus on the teaching that matters most.

Classrooms and schools are complex places where educators are required to focus on many things. Effective educators hone their focus on the specific classroom interactions that are most critical to children's learning and development.

CLASS helps educators focus improvement efforts across the most critical elements of the children's classroom experiences, and the specificity of the descriptions of teaching elements help educators achieve alignment across grade levels, content areas, and curricular approaches.

Measure teacher-child interactions and provide actionable data to educators.

The most effective programs use CLASS not only as an accountability tool but also as a way to provide teachers, coaches and leaders with actionable data about what is going well and areas for improvement. We recommend conducting formal CLASS observations twice a year as well as more frequent informal observations by coaches or administrators.

For teachers, it is important that CLASS reports provide details on the types of interactions that were more and less effective so that they can focus their efforts to improve. (We often recommend emphasizing just a few dimensions at a time.)

For administrators at the school or district level, CLASS data help make important decisions about how to allocate professional development resources and can help track progress along the way. This is important as far too often we invest in professional development and have very little data on whether or not it is effective.

Improve teacher-child interactions through intentionally designed professional learning and coaching.

It's simply not enough for teachers to read about or hear lectures on how to teach. They need to be able to see what it looks like in action and have tools and supports to analyze and improve their own teaching. Coaching is a highly effective method for supporting teachers to change practice, especially when coaches ask teachers to videotape themselves to pinpoint examples of positive interactions as well as moments for improvement.

One example of an evidence-based coaching program — one of the few to be included in the What Works Clearing House — is MyTeachingPartner (MTP), in which coaching cycles are driven by questions and observations based on the CLASS (Foster, 2019).

Aligning professional learning

Adopting and implementing a shared vision of pre-K to 3rd-grade learning requires collaboration and capacity building among all leaders and staff. In addition to covering content on instructional format, professional learning should address how staff can develop deep connections with students and their families — a practice that is more common in the earliest years but should be expanded — and understanding of the ways in which children's culture influences their learning and development.

Despite clear consensus on what makes professional learning effective, the majority of educators still spend their precious time engaged in brief and unfocused professional development experiences that simply do not work. Organizing professional learning around a shared vision of high-quality teaching across grades can benefit everyone — teachers, students, and the whole community.

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Shifting mindsets about educating young children

BY TARA-LYNN SCHEFFEL AND LOTJE HIVES

Teaching young students requires more than just learning about child development (Samuelsson et al., 2005) — it requires understanding children and their experiences. As teacher educators, we have seen a lack of such authentic understanding among future and current early childhood educators.

We set out to change that in a bachelor of education degree program in northern Ontario, Canada. For several years, we have taught a six-week elective course premised on an asset-oriented view of young children as capable learners (Fraser, 2012; Rinaldi, 2003; Malaguzzi, 1994). During the course, which is open to K-12 cross-divisional teacher candidates, we engage candidates in discussions about how they view and value children while exploring innovative pedagogies within the increasingly complex and changing landscape of early childhood education.

After co-teaching the first offering, we found ourselves deep in conversation about teacher candidates' understandings of teaching and learning in the early years. We noticed teacher candidates naming shifts in their personal and professional thinking as they reflected on and revisited key pedagogical understandings.

Our inquiry led us to uncover four key shifts, which we continue to see each time we teach this course. We find these shifts to be particularly pronounced for those who have little experience with young children and are coming to understand them in new and powerful ways.

These shifts offer pedagogical leaders a starting place to encourage educators of all levels and settings to explore their own mindsets about young children. We share key quotes from teacher candidates that explain these shifts, drawing on data collected during a collaborative inquiry with nine teacher candidates (five preparing to work in K-6 and four preparing to work in grades 7-12).

1 Viewing children as capable, competent, and curious

With an equity lens, an educator's commitment to all children is foundational and integral. This lens should serve as a motivator to explore new ways to reach and serve each and every child in a comprehensive and nurturing way.

Each text used in our course (whether a children's book or video of learning in action) emphasizes a deep respect for the young child. When we apply this lens, we consistently observe teacher candidates' realizations about the ways in which young children are more capable, competent, and curious than they initially believed based on traditional or outdated views of young learners (Avery et al., 2016; Callaghan, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016; Wien, 2004).

For example, Jesse said: "I have been asked time and time again to reflect on my philosophy of education ... [but] I have seldom been asked to reflect on my image of children." Jesse went on to identify children as "strong, creative, intelligent, competent, curious and powerful beings."

In her final blog entry, Jesse returned to the image she held of children, but with greater confidence in her newly held beliefs: "I have been constantly challenged and reminded to re-examine my pre-existing view of children (in this course). In doing so, I now wholeheartedly share the view that 'all children are capable of complex thinking, curious and rich in potential and experience' " (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 10).

2 Recognizing the environment as third teacher

A second shift involved a heightened appreciation of the pedagogical role of the learning environment, indoors and out. Most teacher candidates initially focus on the educator's role in setting up the classroom, rather than on the potential of the classroom to be a learning space. But our teacher candidates came to see this potential, in part by recognizing intentional choices that we, as teacher educators, made within the design of our course environment to mirror the values of wonder and discovery (see Heard & McDonough, 2009).

Each resource emulated our belief that when learning environments act as the third teacher, they are "responsive to the children's interests, provide opportunities for children to make their thinking visible and then foster further learning and engagement" (Fraser, 2012, p. 67).

For some teacher candidates, the concept of environment as teacher is new. "I need to shift my thinking from teacher-setting-up-my-classroom-in-September to teacher-as-designer to invite students to contribute to their own learning environment," said Emma.

Elly set a similar goal for listening to students and learning about their interests to "allow for the environment to truly be conducive to their learning, because it was really designed by them for them." Meg felt "we should

take advantage of using the natural environment to spark this curiosity and passion in learners."

Some candidates focused on specific aspects of the environment that could impact children. "I've been in classrooms that are overwhelming to even me, so I can imagine they'd be overwhelming to children," said Shelley. "For example, too many colors, way too much stuff hung all over the walls, and too much stuff crammed into a small classroom."

Jesse pictured her own ideal learning workspace as one with "organic materials, natural light, soothing colors, an appealing aesthetic, and room to move," which led her to question, "So why do we assume that young children feel any differently?"

3 Valuing the power of documentation

The design and implementation of our course drew on norms of listening, observing, documenting, and reflecting. Documentation as evidence of learning has become embedded in professional learning throughout Ontario and elsewhere. It is also a core component of model early childhood education approaches such as the Reggio Emilia model (Edwards et al., 2011).

For some of our teacher candidates, especially those being certified to teach junior and intermediate grades, the concept of documentation is sometimes intimidating and a daunting task. "I was unfamiliar with the term and thought it simply consisted of writing down notes regarding student progress," said Cara. "I realized it is much more than that."

Cara's shift in thinking sheds light on the reach of pedagogical documentation in valuing learners and learning (Campbell et al., 2016, p. 4) and making the child's thinking and learning visible (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 36).

Emma discussed the changing role of the educator in a co-learning stance as a researcher first to give students a voice in their own learning. "Pedagogical documentation aims to shed light on the learning process," she observed. "It serves to inform the learner and the educator, to create points of reference for learning, to track questions, explorations, provocations, and to provide evidence for learning."

It became evident that the teacher candidates had taken up the invitation offered by pedagogical documentation — "to be curious and to wonder with others about the meaning of events to children" (Wien, 2013, p. 28) — an invitation we hoped they would take with them into their future teaching and learning experiences, regardless of the grade.

4 Embracing the challenge of inquiry

Teacher candidates came to recognize the value of engaging in inquiry to make meaning, both for themselves and their students. At times, this shift was uncomfortable. For example, Jesse wondered, "How can we plan (long- or short-term) for student inquiry? How can we ensure that students meet curriculum objectives if their interests determine the content? What does an inquiry-based model even look like?"

But creating a space where educators challenge pedagogical understanding can help. Leanne said that reading examples of inquiry (see Krechevsky et al., 2013) helped "to understand the power of inquiry and the wide range of learning opportunities that can stem from a problem, or a student asking a question."

We were encouraged to see candidates embrace the challenge of inquiry. For example, Elly pointed to a "shifting from being the 'teacher' who in the past ... was viewed as the source of all knowledge, the expert, and the one with all the answers … (to) more of a facilitator or, better yet, a 'provocateur.' "

Educators are being prompted to think deeply about pedagogical approaches that are flexible, responsive, engaging, and that reflect global competencies. This, in turn, further enables the shifts described above.

LOOKING FORWARD

As teacher candidates took on a reflective stance, they recognized their own rethinking, growth, and next steps for exploration as educators. Jesse's ongoing reflection of the image of the child, for example, demonstrated the "constant state of (re)learning" (Iannacci & Whitty, 2009, p. 22) that took place as teacher candidates shifted perceptions and challenged previous assumptions.

Elly shifted from seeing the teacher as having all the answers to someone who facilitates learning. In doing so, Elly recognized the need to move beyond assumptions about children's thinking, a shift described by Dewhurst (2016, p. 59): "When speaking with children, rather than assuming that I know what they mean, I listen to learn more about their idea and the thinking behind it. ... Rather than *allowing* children to do something, which puts me in complete control, I consider how I can *enable* them to work through their own ideas."

This quote affirms our beliefs as teacher educators. We strove not to be in control of our teacher candidates' learning but to enable them to work through their ideas. It is this ownership of the continual cycle of professional inquiry that leads to sustainability and longevity of impact.

Engaging in collaborative inquiry ensured that we, as leaders of professional learning, were active listeners as well. And as reflective leaders, the qualitative data we collected informed our intentional pedagogical moves and deepened our understandings in responsive ways.

As Emma said, "The more directions my questions take me, the more they bounce back to me from unexpected angles, giving me a more complete understanding of who I am as a reflective practitioner." Emma's comment is an invitation for all of us to think about how shifts in thinking happen, regardless of our career

stage, and the ways that intentional pedagogical moves act as accelerants for professional learning in support of student growth.

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Coaches shape early learning and beyond

BY SUZANNE BOUFFARD

In 2016-17, I spent many hours with the educators and staff of Boston Public Schools' early childhood program, including the Eliot K-8 Innovation School in Boston's historic North End neighborhood. The Eliot had made a remarkable turnaround over a 10-year period — a transformation that principal Traci Griffith attributed, in part, to the addition of a pre-kindergarten classroom.

Griffith had advocated for that classroom because she believed that "with full-day pre-K, you could create this amazing opportunity for children to learn how to be part of a larger community" (Bouffard, 2017, p. 52). In some ways, it was a surprising move for Griffith, a former middle school teacher who had never worked with young children before.

Griffith is not the only educator to find herself unexpectedly overseeing early childhood classrooms and shepherding the learning of tiny people with enormous curiosity and huge potential. Nor is she alone in crediting those programs with helping students get off to a good start and find long-term success.

But achieving the results Boston has with pre-K takes a lot of intentionality and capacity-building, not only among the early childhood staff but among leaders like Griffith and even teachers in later grades. At the heart of the most successful pre-K and early elementary programs is professional learning — and at the heart of the professional learning is coaching. The Eliot's pre-K and kindergarten teachers have worked

At the heart of the most successful pre-K and early elementary programs is professional learning — and at the heart of the professional learning is coaching.

with district early childhood coaches for many years, even after becoming experts themselves.

Early childhood programs have long been leaders in instructional coaching. As a result of studies showing its value for teachers and students (Yoshikawa et al., 2013), coaching is now considered to be a benchmark of quality in early childhood (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2020), and programs receiving Head Start and Early Heard Start funding have been required to provide teacher coaching (along with a minimum of 15 hours per year of other professional learning) since 2017.

Even though early childhood is a unique period of development, the success of early learning coaches offers valuable lessons for professional learning across grade levels and settings. It can provide a model of effective coaching practice, serve as a resource for collaboration, and help create alignment across early childhood and elementary grades.

GROWING NEED FOR EARLY LEARNING SKILLS

Elementary school administrators and staff have always needed skills in working with young children, particularly kindergarteners. But in recent decades, publicly funded pre-K has grown rapidly, expanding the already wide age range of children served by schools and districts. More than 1.6 million 4-year-olds now attend publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs in the U.S. (Friedman-Krauss, 2020), many of them in public schools.

About 75,000 elementary school principals oversee pre-K classrooms in the U.S. (Abel et al., 2018), and, of course, the vast majority of elementary schools include kindergartens. But a large percentage of principals have no experience or preparation for working with young children.

One study found that only about a quarter have an early childhood certification, and only around half have engaged in professional learning with an early childhood focus (Abel et al., 2016). It's no surprise, then, that about 80% of early career principals do not feel well-versed in early childhood education (Lowenberg, 2015) and 45% consider early childhood classrooms to be of moderate or serious concern (Fuller et al., 2018).

Teachers, too, are finding themselves working with younger children. Although many pre-K and kindergarten teachers have trained specifically to work with those populations, others have not. Teacher licensing requirements vary widely from state to state, and in most states, teachers with an elementary school credential but no specific early childhood training can teach kindergarten (Fowler, 2019).

Shifting teacher assignments sometimes mean that teachers who are used to teaching 3rd or 4th graders suddenly find themselves in classrooms with 5-year-olds. Such shifts underscore early childhood experts' concerns about the developmental appropriateness of public school early childhood classrooms and kindergarten becoming "the new first grade" (Bassok et al., 2016).

To get children off on the right foot, there is a clear need to address these gaps in knowledge and experience. Professional learning offers multiple avenues to ensure that all early childhood teaching and leadership is high quality, developmentally appropriate, and highly effective.

In districts and schools that have committed to such professional learning, the results speak for themselves — and sometimes they speak loudly enough that they influence teaching and learning in later grades, too. For example, Boston's pre-K program for 3- and 4-year-olds has seen such positive and lasting results that the early childhood department used its curriculum and professional learning as a model for redesigning teaching and learning in grades K-3.

COACHING AT THE CENTER

At the center of the most successful professional learning models for early childhood is coaching (O'Keefe, 2017; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). If you've ever been in a classroom of 18 curious, energetic 4-year-olds, you know how helpful it can be to have another set of expert eyes and ears. And if you haven't ever been in such a classroom, you would appreciate that support even more.

Although teaching young children may look easy, it is anything but. It requires not only a deep well

of engaging, playful strategies for interacting with young children, but an intentional focus on the foundational skills they need for later learning. Bringing these pieces together requires the skill, coordination, and grace of a ballet dancer. And just like the best ballet dancers, great early childhood educators hone their craft through a lot of practice and a lot of coaching.

Many studies have found that high-quality coaching improves early childhood teachers' practices in language, literacy, math, and social-emotional development (O'Keefe, 2017). Although fewer studies have found direct links between coaching and student outcomes, it is worth noting that coaching is a core component of some of the most respected programs, like Boston's, New Jersey's long-running Abbott Preschool Program, and targeted interventions like the Chicago School Readiness Project and Head Start REDI.

Coaching is valuable for leaders, too. School leaders not only set the tone for teaching and learning in their schools, but they also set expectations for teaching practice and they observe and assess teachers. Numerous pre-K teachers have shared stories with me of principals asking them to follow schoolwide behavior guidelines and instructional strategies that are not developmentally appropriate for young children.

Some of these teachers said they had been marked down on evaluations for failing to conduct some of these practices, such as writing a daily objective on the white board, a strategy intended to provide clarity for students but not very useful for 4-year-olds who don't know how to read.

Coaching can help principals and other administrators understand what to look for during classroom observations and walk-throughs, the kinds of questions to ask teachers and feedback to share, and the types of teaching strategies to not only expect but also support with resources and advocacy.

A POWERFUL COMBINATION

As in older grades, early childhood coaching is particularly useful when paired with a high-quality, developmentally appropriate curriculum. In preschool and early elementary classrooms, strong curricula use lots of hands-on learning and active exploration of key concepts in child-driven ways.

In Boston's curriculum, the units and lessons are organized around themes like family and weather, tying together diverse books, skill-building activities, enrichment, and cross-cutting concepts, with flexibility for teachers to customize the pacing and activities to their students. Using this curriculum well takes skill, and that's part of the reason the coaching is so crucial.

It's one thing to see an activity on the page, but another to listen to a coach explain how to really elicit children's thinking about the concepts, like when they play a game to guess what shape object is inside a bag by assessing its geometric features. A reminder from a coach to use open-ended questions instead of saying, "Is the edge flat?" can make all the difference for children's learning.

Another example of the powerful combination of curriculum and coaching comes from a recent experimental study of Making Pre-K Count, an initiative to build children's early math skills in 69 school and community-center-based pre-K programs in low-income neighborhoods in New York City (Maier & Kou, 2019).

Using the Building Blocks math curriculum, a highly engaging set of lessons based on research about the progression of early math learning, teachers engaged deeply with the curriculum and worked with coaches to help children use math language and understand fundamental math concepts.

The study found that teachers who engaged in more coaching showed higher degrees of instructional quality and positive learning interactions with students. These outcomes were greater than for teachers who attended in-service trainings but not coaching. Furthermore, the math coaching benefited teachers of all experience levels, whether they were new or had been teaching for many years.

Watching teachers and children engage with Building Blocks is one of my favorite parts of spending time in high-quality pre-K classrooms. Like many early childhood teachers (Leana, 2011), I have not historically been a lover of math. But when I watched children explain why a slice of pizza isn't a true triangle (its crust is usually not a straight line) and point out the "core units" in the patterns they made with Do-A-Dot paints, I found myself delighting in the concepts of geometry, counting, and more. I remember Carolyn, one former preschool teacher who became a coach, telling me, "I never thought I'd be a math person — and now I'm leading the math training!"

LESSONS FOR ALL GRADE LEVELS

There is much that teachers and leaders of all grade levels can learn from watching coaches like Carolyn, as they demonstrate how to make learning fun, playful, and fascinating.

Sometimes the strategies they share are simple ones about making classroom routines smoother and allowing opportunities for student choice. Sometimes they are specific instructional moves that could easily be transferred from the early grades to later grades. What 4th grader wouldn't want to learn fractions by holding objects and solving real-world mysteries — and, most importantly, what 4th grader wouldn't learn more from that experience?

One of the places where early childhood coaches really excel is integrating social, emotional, and academic skills. Educators of all levels are flagging social and emotional needs as top priorities this year, recognizing concerning trends that have existed for a long time but been exacerbated by the traumatic and ongoing events of the last 12 months.

Imagine the benefits of intentionally connecting early childhood coaches with later grades coaches and teachers. They could conduct joint coaching cycles to learn from each other and bring the best of one age group to another. They could lead professional learning communities where teachers work together across grades to understand one another's strengths and concerns and create more vertical alignment and smoother transitions for students.

This kind of collaboration remains rare but is growing, especially in community-based settings. In Boston, early childhood coaches from the school district have worked extensively with community-based preschool teachers to bring the district's curriculum and model to classrooms in YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and small private centers.

Likewise, in New Jersey, coaches work across settings, with some classrooms run in schools and others in private centers. As articles in this issue show, community coalitions in places like San Antonio, Texas, and Nashville, Tennessee, are aiming to make these kinds of connections as well, including shared professional learning.

Historically, it is less common to see districts pulling practices from early childhood classrooms into later grades, but that is changing. In Boston, the early childhood staff, who both write curricula and provide coaching, built on their pre-K curriculum to rewrite and redesign kindergarten, and then moved on to 1st and 2nd grades. As with everything the department does, it put coaching at the center of those efforts.

This kind of collaboration and alignment is the vision of the pre-K to 3rd grade movement. These efforts aim to create an intentional and seamless continuum of learning experiences across the early years from pre-kindergarten to 3rd grade (Stipek et al., 2017). Although these systems can look different from one school or district to another, they typically include both policies and practices, including professional learning, to create alignment of goals, philosophies, and strategies across grades.

The National P-3 Center, which works with states and districts across the U.S., emphasizes professional learning as one of the pillars of building alignment across the grades, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals created a set of pre-K to 3rd grade principal competencies, which include building professional capacity across the learning community (NAESP, 2014).

FINDING RESOURCES

As with all professional learning, coaching should be part of a systemic approach to capacity-building. But learning from early childhood coaches doesn't have to take a brand-new initiative. Schools and districts can start by finding and leveraging the resources already available.

Do you have coaches in your school or district who are experienced in early learning? If not, who else might you connect with — local community-based early childhood programs, nonprofit organizations, nearby university early childhood departments? The knowledge base about best practices in early childhood education continues to grow rapidly, and it brings many opportunities for children and teachers, not just in the earliest years but well beyond.

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Texas district learns the building blocks of pre-K

BY BETSY FOX, IRMA JEAN GAONA, AND LARRISA WILKINSON

Picture a noisy room full of elementary principals building towers with play dough, straws, and toothpicks while laughing, talking, and sharing ideas — and competitively checking the progress of other table groups. In a yearlong program with school and district leaders from East Central ISD in San Antonio, Texas, we begin with this activity to engage principals in understanding how playing to learn supports social and academic development of young children.

This is just one of the components of our district's early childhood professional learning system, which is part of our overall early learning quality improvement process. We support elementary principals in early learning pedagogy so they can better support quality instruction in district programs serving 4- to 5-year-olds. We believe the impact on teacher practice is much deeper with the knowledgeable support of school leaders.

Developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant teaching and learning practices set the stage for ensuring that learning experiences are suited to each child's developmental level.

States and local communities are increasing access to preschool, but there is a significant divide when it comes to the quality of these early learning programs. Education and training requirements for preschool educators vary based on setting and state regulations, and while districts and nonprofits may offer professional learning, effective job-embedded coaching and school-based leadership support are rare.

Teaching our youngest learners well requires a unique pedagogy. Children are arriving at preschool with a wide range of developmental abilities and a small but critical window in which to become ready for kindergarten.

Developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant teaching and learning practices set the stage for ensuring that learning experiences are suited to each child's developmental level. The ultimate goal of our district's early childhood professional learning is that educators understand and implement specific strategies that support each child's development across cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical domains.

To accomplish this, San Antonio's East Central ISD partnered with Pre-K 4 SA, a local tax-funded workforce development initiative whose mission is to improve San Antonio's workforce in one generation by changing the educational trajectory of 4-year-olds across the city. In addition to directly serving 2,000 children, Pre-K 4 SA provides over 10,000 hours of high-quality professional learning to 2,000 early educators in public and private settings across the city annually.

Through this partnership, the district expanded its program to include pre-K classrooms on every elementary campus for a total of 24 classrooms. Just as importantly, East Central ISD receives grant-funded support for curriculum implementation and educator professional learning.

All of this means that our district's pre-K educators, and the leaders who support and oversee them, have greater opportunities to learn, share, question, and grow to provide the strongest pre-K program possible.

CHOOSING A CURRICULUM

Knowing that Pre-K 4 SA would support professional learning and implementation for a curriculum that promotes active learning through play, we implemented HighScope, a preschool curriculum that guides children to explore and interact through purposeful play. It was a radical shift from a more traditional curriculum.

Using HighScope, teachers focus on the foundations of developmentally appropriate practices, such as active

BUILDING EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP ACROSS ALL LEVELS

2018-19

- All elementary principals, director of curriculum and instruction, and the coordinator of curriculum complete nine-hour early learning pedagogy series.

2019-20

- New principals, five academic facilitators, two assistant principals, and the coordinator of early childhood programs complete nine-hour early learning pedagogy series.
- Coordinator of early childhood programs completes Early Learning Leadership Program.

2020-21

- Five academic facilitators and two assistant principals complete nine-hour early learning pedagogy series.
- Elementary principals and the coordinator of early childhood programs participate in the Early Learning Institute for Elementary Leaders (six half-days; school visits).
- Academic facilitators, seven pre-K teacher leaders, and the coordinator of early childhood programs complete professional learning to facilitate pre-K PLCs.

learning, learning through play, classroom environment, teacher-child interactions, and student choice.

The program requires extensive professional learning, which was a factor we had to consider seriously. Could we commit the time for each teacher to participate in ongoing intensive professional learning? Did we have funds for this level of professional learning and enough substitutes to cover teachers' classes while they engaged in it? Would leaders support a play-based curriculum?

For each of these possible barriers, we identified solutions. We reallocated professional learning funds and received a grant from Pre-K 4 SA to supplement them. We refocused all existing professional learning time to address this curriculum initiative and added time as needed. We identified substitutes available to offer released time for teachers. Professional learning for site-based leaders helped them understand appropriate practices in teaching and learning, which set the stage for their buy-in.

We committed to the curriculum and its professional learning requirements because they allow content to be contextualized for our district's educators while ensuring quality implementation. This in-depth learning doesn't focus on merely implementing a curriculum. It is designed to create lasting change in teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Because teachers often have varying educational experiences, this provides all pre-K teachers a common understanding of developmentally appropriate practices so that we can create an equitable and consistent pre-K experience for all children.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER ASSISTANTS

Pre-K teacher assistants are critical to the quality of classroom instruction. Many of them come from the immediate community, are women of color, and are paid at a much lower rate than teachers.

EAST CENTRAL ISD
San Antonio, Texas

- **7** elementary schools, **10,000** students
- **75%** Hispanic; **9%** Black; **15%** white; **1.5%** 2 races or more
- **68%** economically disadvantaged
- **56%** at-risk
- **24** pre-K classrooms
- **24** teachers;
- **27** teacher assistants

To support career advancement and a higher level of professional status while ensuring strong collaboration in each classroom, all assistants can earn a Child Development Associate credential, providing them with a foundation on such topics as child development and learning, observing and assessing, family engagement, and meaningful curriculum.

At the end of the 2020-21 school year, we estimate that 89% of the district's pre-K teaching assistants will have earned a Child Development Associate credential.

"This opportunity came at the perfect time in my career, as I was just starting to work toward my teaching degree," teacher assistant Deanna Sears says. "The content I learned about early child pedagogy in my CDA classes transferred to my college courses, helping me excel as a nontraditional college student."

SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Research shows that, after teachers, school leaders are the second most important in-school factor impacting student achievement (Louis et al., 2010). Early childhood education is not typically covered in principal preparation programs, yet principals increasingly oversee programs for our youngest students.

Over the past several years, organizations such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals, New America, and ASCD have identified the need for elementary leaders to understand developmentally appropriate and equitable practices in early learning pedagogy. Because many of our principals have only taught older students, we partnered with Pre-K 4 SA to create the Early Learning Institute for Elementary Leaders to build foundational knowledge in elementary school and district leaders and support pre-K to kindergarten alignment.

In the first two years, principals, assistant principals, and campus-based academic facilitators engage in a three-session, nine-hour series on child, brain, and social-emotional development. In the third year, principals attend a series of seminars designed to deepen their knowledge of pedagogical topics, including child and brain development, classroom environment, playing to learn, social-emotional development, executive function, literacy, math, and family engagement.

Equity topics are explicitly addressed but also form a continuous thread throughout the series. While content is based on research, there remains a focus on the practical, everyday life of an early childhood classroom.

Each principal also participates in walk and talks with the Early Learning Institute for Elementary Leaders consultant, during which they apply session content to their schools' classrooms. These walks are designed specifically to deepen principal learning, not to serve as an assessment.

As we walk through classrooms, we often start with the opening question, "What do you notice?" We then use probing questions to encourage reflection and application of the knowledge from the seminars. A common refrain from principals is that these walks help them see things differently.

During one visit, a principal realized the importance of having various cultures represented through

materials, books, and visuals so that each child in the class receives a clear message of belonging. Principals often tell us these walks are excellent opportunities to apply their learning in a real-life context.

"My experience with the Early Learning Institute for Elementary Leaders this year has been eye-opening," principal Stacey Johnston says. "I have a background with older students, and it has helped me understand the workings of 4-year-olds and how they learn through play. The program has helped both my teachers and me with classroom layouts, learning styles, and child growth and development." This program provides the ideal collaborative opportunity for principals and teachers to learn and grow together.

TAILORED PLCS

For several years, all district teachers, including pre-K teachers, had been participating in professional learning communities (PLCs) with the goal of fostering inquiry-based professional learning. But the pre-K teachers did not feel the meetings were addressing their specific needs.

Pre-K PLCs were, at times, a source of frustration for all involved. The academic facilitators often didn't possess the content knowledge to adequately guide teacher collaboration. After partnering with Pre-K for SA, we realized that tailoring the pre-K PLCs to take full advantage of our assessment system and curriculum would have a deeper impact on teaching and learning.

To do this, we trained a pre-K teacher and academic facilitator from each campus to be co-facilitators.

We intentionally designed these PLCs to align with Texas pre-K guidelines, data from our pre-K assessment system, and the HighScope curriculum, making the meetings relevant and practical.

The pre-K teacher and academic facilitator collaborate weekly to facilitate a tailored pre-K PLC using inquiry cycles focused on authentic assessment data to inform teachers' everyday teaching and learning. "The training was very thorough. I especially liked the immediate practice and feedback and have a better understanding of the PLC process itself," says academic facilitator Angelina Gonzales.

This new structure is working well. Teachers feel PLC meetings are better at meeting their professional needs and, by having the academic facilitator actively involved, collaboration extends beyond PLC meetings. "In participating in early childhood PLCs, we are now a team that is committed to inquiry-based collaboration focusing on the growth of every child and every member of our ever-developing learning community," says Megan Sandoval, a pre-K teacher.

SCHOOL DISTRICT QUALITY EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK

This framework includes components essential for planning and implementing a high-quality school district early learning program.

Source: Fox Educational Consulting.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

In just three years — and with a considerable investment in staff time — we have connected the dots and created a system in which high-quality early learning can flourish. We have an aligned system of professional learning and support for pre-K teachers and school and district leaders.

This ensures that everyone receives the same messages, prioritizes the same goals, and teaches in a consistent way. Whether a teacher learns something from a college course, a principal or academic facilitator, the teacher across the hall, a pre-K 4 SA coach, or a HighScope trainer, the message is similar.

While teachers are learning and implementing the HighScope

curriculum, academic facilitators are increasing their pre-K knowledge and support. Concurrently, principals and assistant principals are deepening their knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices, ensuring that teaching, learning, and expectations of young children are reasonable and equitable. Communication among all these partners is key, both for sharing information about changes and the reasons behind them.

Now that our foundation of developmentally appropriate practice is strong, we look forward to deepening our discourse and participating in further inquiry. As our work grows, we continue to ensure that intentionally planned professional learning is embedded in all parts of the system.

To help cement this alignment, in the next year, we plan to develop a district early learning mission and philosophy statement, driven by the knowledge and educated involvement of teachers and leaders throughout our district.

In just three years — and with a considerable investment in staff time — we have connected the dots and created a system in which high-quality early learning can flourish. We have an aligned system of professional learning and support for pre-K teachers and school and district leaders.

We can use what we have learned the past few years to dictate where we head in the future.

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Early childhood and K-12 educators have a lot to learn from each other, Iheoma Iruka says.

Early learning and K-12 go hand in hand

A conversation with IHEOMA IRUKA

IHEOMA IRUKA is founding director of the Equity Research Action Coalition at Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute and research professor of public policy at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Her work focuses on supporting the optimal development of children from low-wealth and marginalized communities and ensuring excellence for young diverse learners, especially Black children and their families, through the intersection of research, programs, and policy. This conversation has been condensed and edited.

Q: You advocate for early childhood and K-12 systems to work together and learn from one another. Why is that important?

A: There's a lot we can and should do to align the early childhood and K-12 spaces. It's not just about aligning curriculum or assessments but also about teachers coming together and sharing approaches. Early childhood educators need to know what happens once their kids move on to K-12. And K-12 educators should really understand what's happening in the early childhood space.

A lot happens before children enter your school. If you're not supporting those children, families, and communities, you're going to pay the cost somewhere, whether in suspension data, remediation data, or somewhere else. All the data will show you that you're spending a lot of money to deal with the things that you

"There's a lot we can and should do to align the early childhood and K-12 spaces. It's not just about aligning curriculum or assessments but also about teachers coming together and sharing approaches. … Part of what K-12 can do is start to think about younger children as part of their responsibility and be part of a strong, unified early childhood system."

— Iheoma Iruka

could have shored up early on. It makes your job as a K-12 teacher easier if the students get that early childhood education first.

Q: What role should public schools play in supporting early childhood education systems and educators?

A: Part of what K-12 can do is start to think about younger children as part of their responsibility and be part of a strong, unified early childhood system. For example, K-12 educators could advocate for the professionalization of the early childhood system by encouraging salary parity across the early childhood space. The compensation for early childhood teachers is vastly different based on whether they teach in a school-based or community-based setting.

K-12 leaders can articulate that "we don't want our partners who educate and care for our young children to be at this level of poor pay" and advocate for all those who work with children from the time they are born to get equitable pay and benefits. For example, they can publicly support levies to fund early childhood.

It's also important to think about equity and meeting the needs of Black people across early education and K-12. A lot of the K-12 system is based on segregation, but early childhood is even more highly segregated. The more schools can call out issues of segregation across their communities, the more they can call for equitable resources to be allocated.

Q: Early childhood educators can also help improve K-12. What would you like to see public schools learn from early childhood?

A: First is the idea that children learn based on relationships. Early childhood educators really understand that for them to be able to fully engage with and support a child, they need to really know about that child and their family to understand they are true and authentic to what they need.

Second is a focus on social-emotional health and learning. Early childhood educators have always known this is important for students' ability to pay attention, self-regulate, develop relationships with peers, solve problems, and more. Now, because of COVID, I expect to see K-12 teachers ask for more social-emotional support and resources. I'm hoping they'll look back into early childhood and ask: What do you do to support a classroom culture that really builds on children's social-emotional development and strengthens their social-emotional health?

Third is using observation, which is critically important. K-12 educators tend to rely a lot on children to tell them what they're learning and how they're doing. Early childhood teachers tend to look for other ways to know what a child knows, feels, and thinks. Children regulate in different ways, even in the same classroom. Not all students are going to respond to the teacher and the classroom in the same way. So what are you doing to make sure that all kids are getting their needs met, including kids who are not vocal? That's where observation is really powerful.

Q: What examples have you seen of alignment between early childhood and K-12?

A: There is an organization called Pre-K to 3 that has been leading this kind of work for many years, and there's a lot of work happening at the system level in places like Washington state and Boston Public Schools.

The federal government also recognizes that this alignment work needs to happen. One of the federal grants I'm co-principal investigator on is the Early Learning Network. The focus is on what the transition from pre-K to grade 3 looks like and how policy can strengthen the learning for children and families.

It is really three studies. The first is to see what policies strengthen pre-K-3 alignment in districts and states. The second is to look at what are the malleable factors in the classroom that matter for alignment, and the third is a longitudinal study of how children who are in a formal early childhood program are experiencing education from pre-K to grade 3 compared to children who don't have a formal early childhood program.

We're in the final year of the study now. We'll do a big summit in a couple of years to share what we know so far across the participating sites [in Massachusetts, Virginia, Ohio, North Carolina, and Nebraska, as well as the assessment site in California].

Q: Your work, including the new Equity Research Action Coalition Program that you are leading, focuses on early childhood education and health among historically marginalized communities, especially Black children and families. What are your current priorities in this area?

A: The goal is to recenter the research to use a strengths-based and asset-focused frame. So much of the research we have about Black families comes from a deficit frame, emphasizing risk factors and horrible outcomes. We're working to change that and focus on assets, on what Black families and communities bring to the world.

To do that, we are creating more alignment and deeper connectivity among research, programs, and policy in the early childhood space. It's more coordinated than [the traditional approach in which] research tells programs and policies what to do. That doesn't work.

Instead, we're looking to programs to see what they are doing in the service of Black children and families, and [then asking]: How can research bring that to light? Looking to policymakers, [we're asking]: What is it you don't know that we can help you with in terms of evidence and data to make sure your policies are both Black-centered and antiracist?

LEARN MORE

Early Learning Network, earlylearningnetwork.unl.edu

Equity Research Action Coalition, UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, fpg.unc.edu/equity-research-action-coalition

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National P-3 Center, nationalp-3center.org

Q: One area of your work involves rethinking assessments in early childhood settings, especially settings that serve historically marginalized communities. Why and how should we measure success differently?

A: There are so many competencies and assets that children, especially Black children, bring that we are not measuring and should be. There was work done by Cynthia Garcia Coll and other scholars in 1996 that elevated the fact that while we look at language, numeracy, and all those cognitive assessments, there are other things we don't measure that probably benefit children, like positive racial identity, biculturalism, being able to cope with racism, microaggressions, and other discrimination.

The strengths that Black children bring include oral language, as my colleagues and I have documented. Black children tend to tell a lot of rich stories, and that's not captured in our assessments. We capture very discrete knowledge, so this positions Black children as not knowing a lot, when there's a lot that they know. The form that we ask it in only privileges one way of knowing.

If you're only measuring certain kinds of language and math, that means that everything my kids are learning at home right now [during remote schooling] might not be captured. When they come in to school, someone might say, "Oh, they have all this learning loss," but that's just based on their standard metric. If you look at their oral language, storytelling, problem solving, curiosity, this is what gets them through life and makes them successful in life.

So this isn't just about Black children, but about how we measure the things that will make all children successful in life. Let's measure the things that we already measure, but let's also expand it so that we're not always privileging one group at the loss of another group.

Q: How might educators begin to use different kinds of measurement?

A: One tool that I'm working on with Stephanie Curenton at Boston University and some other colleagues is the Assessing Classroom Sociocultural Equity Scale (ACSES). The idea is to measure how much equitable opportunity teachers are providing to racially minoritized students in the classroom, in terms of personalized learning, conversation, incorporating children's lives and languages, whether it be formal language like Spanish or African American Vernacular English or another language, and also issues of bias and inequitable discipline.

For example, how much are children being shamed in terms of behavior management, and what strategies are teachers using, especially

with Black boys? We have a version of the tool out that's being used across many different programs and studies, but that's just one tool. We need a lot of tools.

Q: What do you see as some of the most important professional learning priorities right now?

A: First, this is an opportune time for us to shape the mindsets of our educators — from early childhood through K-12 — to recognize that Black children and children of Indigenous and Latine origins have been living in a space where a lot of trauma is happening. There needs to be a level of acknowledgement that no matter your race, you as a teacher have been a part of a system placing this trauma on children. We need to recognize that it's not children's fault or families' fault.

Second, we should recognize that there is so much excellence happening among children. I witness it myself, walking into classrooms. But I've seen teachers completely ignore the brilliance of a child, particularly a Black child. Professional learning needs to help us do a mindset check.

We all have the same bias about Blackness. Part of our job is to be aware of our biases, and this is the moment to begin to work on that mind shift.

Professional learning could also do more to center race. The concept of color blindness has been so injurious to our communities. I want to say: See my color! See my experiences! See my joy and my brilliance!

That could help to change how teachers see children, the way they talk to children and families, and the kinds of opportunities they provide — especially for children who have historically been left behind or given less than.

Professional learning could also do more to center race. The concept of color blindness has been so injurious to our communities. I want to say: See my color! See my experiences! See my joy and my brilliance! I would like to see more professional learning embrace the idea that it's quite OK to see color and race, as long as you don't attribute deficiency to color.

But I also want to recognize that teachers are under enormous stress. They have way too much on their plates, and I want us to be cognizant of how much they are doing, not just in instruction but supporting families and acting as social workers, especially Black and Brown educators who have been doing that extra work regardless of pay. I would like to see educators get fully compensated for everything they do. We just want to make sure at the same time that they're not causing any harm under the guise of good intentions.

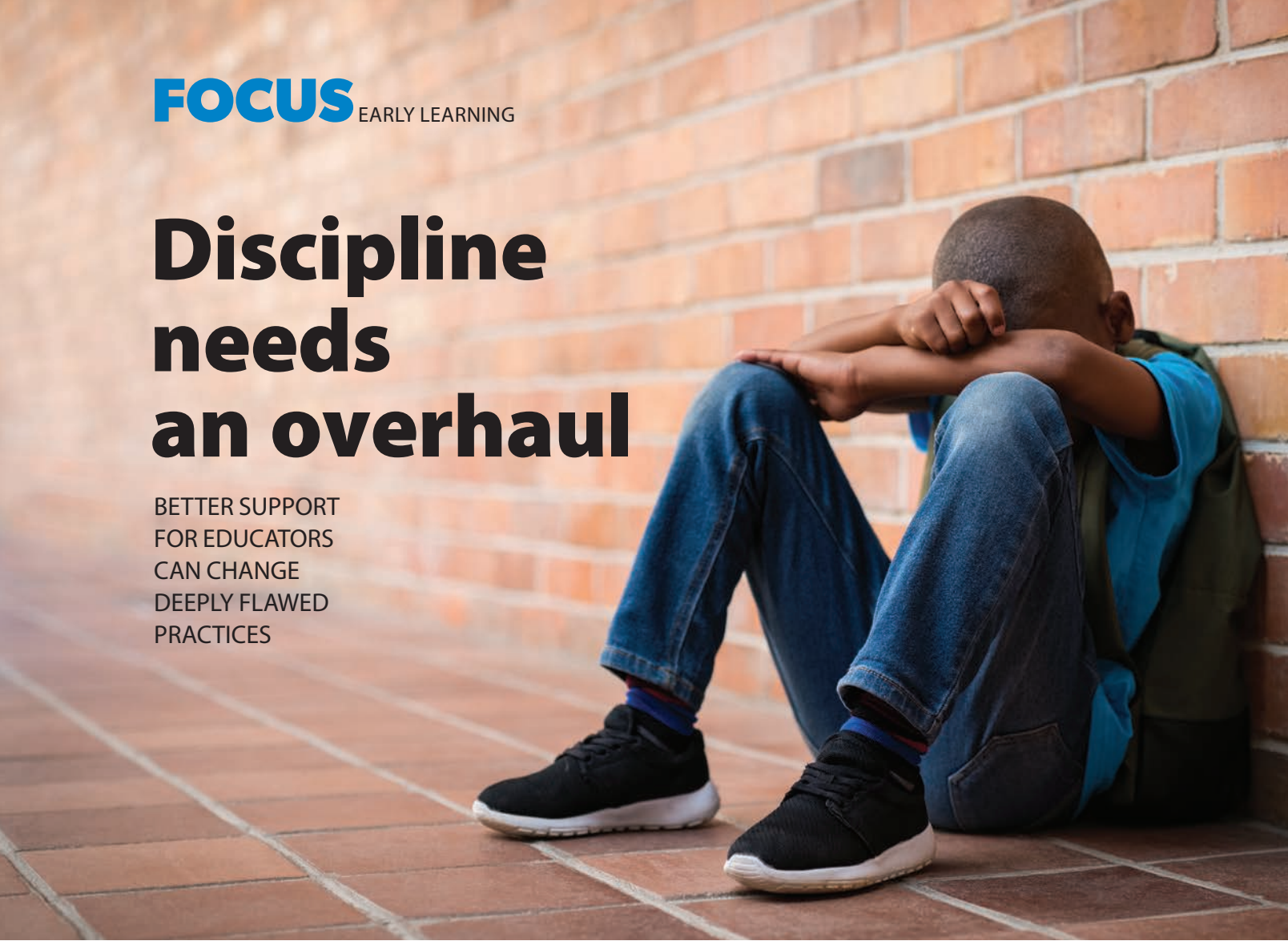
Q: You mentioned some of the things children are learning at home during this COVID year. Why is it important for educators to pay attention to those assets, especially among Black families?

A: As someone who does a lot of national studies, I get it that there is going to be some loss this year in terms of school outcomes. But this idea that children are sitting at home getting dumber, that narrative is unfair to children. And it's insulting to families to suggest that they're not doing anything.

To say that they're not growing in so many ways is a disservice to children and to adults, especially Black people, who have struggled for so long to give their children an education. To discount the work and the toil is unfair. I hope the narrative changes to say to families, "What are you doing at home that's been great and that we can do together in a collective way to meet the needs of children as they go through school?" ■

Discipline needs an overhaul

BETTER SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS CAN CHANGE DEEPLY FLAWED PRACTICES



BY ABBIE LIEBERMAN

Picture a 6-year-old child sobbing and pleading to stay at school while a police officer escorts her through the building and puts her into the back of his police car. That's what a disturbing and heart-wrenching body camera video showed last February (it went viral): a young Black girl, Kaia Rolle, being handcuffed with zip ties by a school resource officer in Orlando, Florida (Toohey, 2020).

Kaia was arrested for reportedly throwing a tantrum earlier in the day that resulted in her kicking a staff member. In the video, Kaia does not appear to be posing an immediate threat to anyone when the officer enters the room to arrest her; she's sitting calmly in a school employee's office.

This isn't the first video or story of its kind to have surfaced in recent years. Because of the increasingly widespread availability of police body camera footage and smartphone videos, we have seen just how inappropriately children can be disciplined in schools. And it's no coincidence that most of these stories and videos are of Black children. While traumatic moments like Kaia's only occasionally make headlines, the data show that the way we discipline young children, and children of color in particular, is a nationwide problem.

INEQUITY IN DISCIPLINE PRACTICES

Across public and private settings, about 250 preschoolers are suspended or expelled each day, according to a Center for American Progress analysis of the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health (Malik, 2017). A 2016 joint statement drafted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and over 30 other national organizations estimated that more than 8,700 3- and 4-year-old children are expelled or pushed out of their state-funded pre-K programs each year. There are serious problems with the way we discipline students across grade levels, but a 2005 study estimated that pre-K students are three times more likely to be expelled than K-12 students (Gilliam, 2005).

The U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection has exposed serious inequities in exclusionary discipline

Sometimes young children are punished for behavior that is developmentally normal. Other times they are acting out because they are dealing with trauma outside of school.

practices. Certain subgroups, particularly Black children, boys, and children with disabilities, are disproportionately impacted. In 2012, Black children made up 18% of pre-K enrollment but 48% of the pre-K children who were suspended more than once (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). And while boys are more likely to be suspended than girls, racial disparities in punishment are more pronounced for Black girls than Black boys (Crenshaw et al., 2015). These racial disparities exist in every single state (Children's Equity Project & Bipartisan Policy Center, 2020).

Exclusionary discipline isn't always a dramatic scene of a school resource officer violently removing a student from the classroom. It's more often an administrator sitting down with parents and explaining why their child cannot come back to school for a few days. Or sometimes it's in the form of "soft suspensions," which may look like a parent being asked to come pick up a child early because he or she is "having a tough day" or an administrator explaining that the program "isn't a great fit" for the child. These less formal disciplinary actions are likely not even included in the data.

The research is clear that exclusionary discipline practices in the early grades are both ineffective and developmentally inappropriate. Sometimes young children are punished for behavior that is developmentally normal. Other times they are acting out because they are dealing with trauma outside of school.

Disparities may be partially explained by implicit bias. In 2016, the Yale Child Study Center looked at whether early educators' implicit biases impacted their behavioral expectations for pre-K students. Using eye-tracking technology, they found that teachers tended to expect Black children, particularly boys, to misbehave more (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic 2016).

Our discipline system is broken, and the stakes are high. When children are removed from school, they not only miss out on valuable learning opportunities, but their emotional well-being may suffer and school might no longer feel like a safe place. These experiences, such as Kaia's, can be traumatic.

In 2016, the Obama administration released a policy statement that said, "Young students who are expelled or suspended are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those who are not" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Exclusionary discipline in pre-K and the early grades is often viewed as the first step in the school-to-prison pipeline.

CHANGING POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The good news is that policies and practices that respond and intervene appropriately can help ameliorate or prevent both inappropriate discipline practices and severe behavior problems.

Policymakers at the state and district level have taken action to limit exclusionary discipline in recent years. According to the Education Commission of the States, 16 states and Washington, D.C., now limit or ban the use of exclusionary discipline practices in pre-K and the early grades (Rafa, 2019). At the federal level, the 2016 update of the Head Start Performance Standards officially banned expulsion and severely limited suspension, which was already common practice in Head Start but had not been codified.

Prohibiting suspension and expulsion in early education classrooms is a good starting point, but policies must go further. Educators need knowledge, tools, and supports to handle difficult situations and best serve students. Real change has to happen within schools and will take time. So what supports are being put in place to assist educators and administrators in replacing exclusionary practices with more developmentally appropriate strategies?

Based on our research at New America so far, there are five primary strategies leaders are using to address inappropriate discipline practices: early childhood mental health consultations, professional learning to address biases, strengthening relationships with families, training on social-emotional learning and trauma-informed practice, and staffing policies.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Early childhood mental health

consultants are trained to manage challenging behaviors and equip teachers to do the same. Research suggests that having access to an early childhood mental health specialist can reduce suspensions and expulsions by half (Gilliam, 2005). Unfortunately, most teachers do not have access to these specialists, and children of color are less likely than their white peers to have access to them or to school counselors (Gilliam, 2005). The Obama administration recommended that states take steps to ensure that all programs serving young children have access to mental health consultants (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Connecticut is often held up as an exemplar of how to curb suspension and expulsion due to its focus on early childhood mental health consultation. In 2015, the state passed a detailed law not just banning suspension and expulsion in pre-K through 2nd grade, but also providing supports to districts and relevant agencies (State of Connecticut, 2015).

Almost 20 years ago, the state began funding the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership pilot program. The program's "About Us" statement on its website explains that it "provides early childhood mental health promotion, prevention and intervention services to children who are at risk of suspension/expulsion from early care and education settings due to behavioral and mental health concerns" (Early Childhood Consultation Partnership, n.d.).

The Connecticut Department of Children and Families runs the program, and all early childhood programs serving children birth to age 5 can participate. The program serves any teacher or child care provider who is having trouble with a disruptive child. A randomized, controlled evaluation found that teachers reported significantly fewer problem behaviors for children who received intervention from the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (Gilliam, Maupin, & Reyes, 2016).

Additional research on early childhood mental health consultation suggests that more access to these specialists is associated with reduced teacher turnover and higher program quality (Brennan et al., 2008).

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

There are multiple ways that districts and schools are addressing inappropriate discipline practices through professional learning. Addressing implicit bias and building capacity for culturally responsive teaching may be good places to start. By working to understand and overcome biases, teachers and administrators could lessen racial and gender disparities in exclusionary discipline practices.

Efforts to strengthen relationships with families can also be effective. Improving communication can help educators understand what children are dealing with at home, giving context to their behaviors. When teachers and parents have positive relationships, they can work together to support the child's needs.

A study of Head Start programs found that more home-school collaboration and parental involvement was associated with less harsh child discipline by parents and better school behaviors (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016).

It is also important to ensure that educators understand social-emotional development and implement trauma-informed practices. Children displaying challenging behaviors in the classroom are often channeling trauma or stress they are experiencing in other aspects of their lives.

One national survey found that only 20% of early childhood educators engaged in professional learning about social-emotional development (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2016). It's likely that even fewer teachers have learned how to implement trauma-informed practices.

Equipping teachers to identify and address trauma is especially relevant now as the pandemic and current recession have added new challenges for many children, from social isolation to economic stress to loss of loved ones. This is especially true for children of color, whose families have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Several years ago, with philanthropic support, Oakland Unified School District and the City of Oakland Head Start partnered to participate in a pilot program in trauma-informed classroom practices for pre-K teachers, as they were struggling with managing children's behaviors. Now termed the ROCK (Resilient Oakland Communities & Kids) initiative, this work could serve as an example for others interested in this approach.

Oakland pre-K teachers are learning how to respond to children's behavior that is related to traumatic experiences, which includes understanding their emotional development and how to create a healing environment, as well as the roles of race, implicit bias, and culturally responsive teaching (Jackson, 2019).

STAFF HIRING AND SUPPORT

Staffing decisions also matter. Pre-K programs with larger student-teacher ratios are associated with higher instances of expulsion (Gilliam, 2008). Adding a paraprofessional to the classroom so that there is another skilled adult who knows each child can help.

One longer-term strategy to address inequities in discipline practices may be increasing teacher diversity to better reflect the student body. A study of North Carolina elementary schools found that Black students, Black boys in particular, were less likely to be suspended or expelled when they had Black teachers (Lindsey & Hart, 2016).

Teacher stress and depression are also positively correlated with pre-K expulsion (Gilliam, 2008). Policies

that support teacher well-being, such as higher compensation and paid planning time, can set staff members up to manage stressful situations more skillfully.

SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

Early childhood educators want to do what is best for children; they just need the right tools to support them. True change requires equipping teachers and school leaders with better resources and building their capacity to support children in positive and proactive ways. Thoughtfully designed policies and careful implementation can make this a reality.

As districts move to reopen schools and educators think about how to best serve children after a difficult year, school discipline reform should be part of the conversation. It has arguably never been more important that teachers and school leaders understand what children are going through and how to support them so that school can be a safe place where they can thrive.

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Young students at the Acorn School at Vanderbilt University explore math and science concepts with Samantha Barclay, preschool teacher and teacher cadre member.

Nashville has a blueprint to address early literacy

BY JOSEPHINE APPLEBY AND RENÉ DILLARD

Developing early reading skills is important for long-term academic success. Too often, however, young children do not have the foundations of literacy they need.

One-third of Tennessee students read on grade level (Tennessee Department of Education, 2021), and in the state's capital city of Nashville, three out of four 3rd graders are not reading on grade level. These students represent some of the most vulnerable populations — students of color and English learners.

In response to the critical need to improve early literacy, a coalition of community partners developed Nashville's Blueprint for Early Childhood Success to identify key levers and align city resources to achieve strong results. Over 200 community leaders, national experts, and researchers spent more than six months developing the six pillars of the blueprint. They are:

1. Strengthen birth to age 3 supports.
2. Improve quality and access to prekindergarten.
3. Strengthen the district's literacy tactics.
4. Reduce chronic absenteeism.
5. Address summer reading loss and maximize out-of-school time.
6. Rally the community to support all children.

The blueprint launched in 2018

with the broad goal of doubling the number of 3rd graders reading on grade level by 2025. It is now housed within United Way of Greater Nashville. United Way provides backbone support, including managing logistics and providing facilitators, facilitates the steering committee, and ensures alignment with collective impact frameworks.

Because we recognize that ours is a lofty goal, we scaffold the work and work collaboratively across the city to develop strategic priorities and implementation plans. Part of what makes the blueprint so successful are the valuable partnerships and relationships built over time. We work intentionally with the local school district and elevate the work of other organizations that support education within the city. This is a citywide initiative, and we are dedicated to drawing on local talent, expertise, and opportunities for collaboration.

An integral part of our plan has been ensuring that Nashville early childhood educators are well-equipped to serve students' literacy needs. We prioritize professional learning to build the capacity of early educators so that all children can thrive academically.

TEACHER-DRIVEN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Early childhood educators in Nashville work in a variety of settings, including local school district sites, Head Start centers, home-based child care, community-based centers, and private preschools. For the sake of this project, early childhood educators are defined as any teacher who teaches pre-K ages 2 to 4. We want to ensure that all students have equal opportunity to enter kindergarten with the requisite foundational literacy skills, regardless of their educational setting.

One potential barrier was that each of the early childhood sites conducts its own professional learning and has varying levels of resources and capacity. To create more coherence and consistency, in late 2019, the Blueprint for Early Childhood Success team convened a workgroup of representatives from over 20 community organizations to map out professional learning opportunities across the city, identify gaps and needs of students, and provide free professional learning to educators regardless of school site.

The workgroup represents organizations in the nonprofit space, public policy, early education, post-secondary education, and other affinity groups. Together they created a common purpose and strategic plan. The workgroup developed a partnership with Lipscomb University's Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning and Innovation to build out early childhood professional learning resources on the institute's website, edutoolbox.org. United Way of Greater Nashville provided facilitation support, connections to funding opportunities, and the framework to track success.

Realizing how valuable teacher voice would be in the success of this project, we wanted to make sure that teachers were integrally involved in creating professional learning resources. In the first phase of the work, we connected with early childhood leaders across Nashville to conduct a needs assessment. We based topics for professional learning resources on data gathered from community conversations and surveys, then created a teacher cadre to inform the development of professional learning.

We selected members of the teacher cadre through an application process that included a written application, classroom visit, and interview — and we made it a priority for the teacher cadre to be representative of diverse, citywide pre-K providers. We selected eight teachers representing Metro

EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCES

The Ayers Institute offers a free comprehensive professional learning program for early childhood educators working in a variety of settings. The professional learning program includes model lesson videos, an online learning module, and a resource library with over 100 resources created through a collaborative partnership with educators across middle Tennessee. Visit **edutoolbox.org/earlylearning.**

Learn more about the Blueprint for Early Childhood Success at **www.blueprintnashville.org.**

Nashville Public Schools, Head Start, United Way's Read to Succeed program, a private child care provider, a university child care provider, and a faith-based child care provider. Members met formally over eight months, working both together and independently to create high-quality, standards-aligned lessons and resources.

Within the first few months of meeting, the teachers determined that the resources they were being asked to create did not directly align with classroom needs. This was an important turning point in the project because it opened up space for teachers to become more invested and passionate about their content creation.

The teacher cadre revamped the original list of expected resources to better represent the urgent needs of early childhood providers in Nashville and partnered with each other to develop high-quality lesson plans and instructional resources.

They wrote lesson plans, interactive repeated read-aloud guides, family engagement materials, classroom management materials, and social-emotional learning resources. The resources then underwent extensive peer review by other teachers in the cadre as well as Ayers Institute faculty.

Three teachers also created model lesson videos that provide footage of authentic classroom lessons as well as teacher vignettes explaining their methods. The videos cover writing and math opportunities in a pre-K classroom as well as child-led inquiry through an emergent curriculum. We included a facilitation guide for early childhood professional learning communities.

While the teacher cadre worked, we developed an online learning module on fostering language development in a pre-K classroom. This online learning module earns six hours of professional learning credits in Tennessee.

A COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE

The teacher cadre was valuable not only for the professional learning resources it created but also because it quickly evolved into a community of collaboration for early childhood educators working to better their own practice — something that had been missing in Nashville.

"I've really loved collaborating with the other teachers and getting to know other pre-K teachers in the Nashville area," one member said. "That's something I've struggled with since I've moved here. Just finding my people and finding people who think similarly, and it's made me think a lot about who I am and how I teach and why I teach, so I think it's made me a better teacher."

This community became particularly important in spring 2020 when the world began to change due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers were closing out the school year like never before, many of them unable to say goodbye to their students. Although the teacher cadre commitment was wrapping up as we prepared to launch the next phase of the project, members expressed their desire to stay connected with each other and expand their network to other early childhood leaders across the city as we grappled with navigating the pandemic.

We created a virtual professional learning community that met weekly in June to foster collaboration and launch the Ayers Institute's online learning module on fostering language development in a pre-K classroom. Seventy-one early childhood educators registered for the professional learning community. While it centered around the online learning module, it served as a community space specifically designed for early childhood educators to reflect, collaborate, and learn.

Funding for the pre-K professional learning program ended in July 2020, but the relationships among teachers in the teacher cadre held strong. During a time of uncertainty and learning a new way of teaching virtually, members of the teacher cadre have remained in communication with each other, meeting informally to connect, share ideas, and celebrate success in an unprecedented time.

NEXT STEPS

Moving forward, the Blueprint for Early Childhood Success will continue to work collaboratively to create change for Nashville's students. Creating literacy-based professional learning is just one aspect of the work, and, as we move forward together, we will continuously improve our programming, processes, and initiatives.

We have identified next steps to continue promoting the professional learning partnership with Lipscomb's Ayers Institute and plan to build a pathway to a more formal community of practice for early childhood educators. We will continue to advertise the expertise of local educators through a variety of outlets. This will eventually include a hub for free and accessible professional learning across the city, a newsletter, and opportunities for educators to share their expertise.

The professional learning program materials are timely, relevant, and unique because they were developed by practicing early childhood educators and address urgent needs in the Nashville community. We hope this collective impact initiative will serve as a model for future professional learning communities across the country and an exemplar of what can happen when a variety of stakeholders unite to support students.

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REACH. INVESTIGATE. DISCOVER.

IDEAS

COACHING

THE MANY FACES OF COACHING

In this issue's Ideas section, we highlight how schools are working to improve the quality and effectiveness of coaches.

In one district, an experienced coach shadows new coaches in their interactions with teachers. Another initiative uses nested coaching, where learning moves from coaches to leaders to teachers to students to improve equitable learning. And another district personalizes professional learning for new and veteran teachers with video coaching.

Their stories begin on p. **52**.

Nested coaching links learning from coach to leader to teacher

BY LYNDA TREDWAY, KEN SIMON, AND MATTHEW MILITELLO

Keisha, an urban principal from California, and Jason, a principal from rural North Carolina, serve different communities, but they both realize that systemic inequities prevent students from fully realizing their potential. Over the course of a year, Keisha and Jason met regularly as part of a group and in one-to-one sessions with a leadership coach. Together, they engaged in a set of collaborative processes that cultivate instructional leadership that leads to more equitable teaching.

Keisha and Jason are part of Project I4, a federally funded SEED (Supporting Effective Educator Development) grant, a partnership between East Carolina University and the Institute for Educational Leadership. Project I4 is a cohort-based, yearlong professional learning experience aimed at reimagining instructional leadership through an equity lens.

Specifically, school leader participants build capacity to document evidence-based, equitable academic discourse during classroom observations. To support this, we implemented a nested coaching structure, which creates a vital through line from coaches to school leaders to teachers to impact student outcomes.

Our professional learning design relies on the people closest to the work positioned to be learning partners in addressing school change efforts that bolster equitable student outcomes (Grubb & Tredway, 2010). The model supports school leaders as instructional leaders to work more effectively with teachers in the context of their own schools with a focus on improving teachers' equitable classroom practices. Together, they cultivate stronger relational trust and identify opportunities for more equitable practices.

Two interdependent principles guide our work. First, **nested coaching networks are essential**. Even the best of us need coaches to become our personal best (Gawande, 2011). Second, **an equity focus is fundamental.** If we want equitable

outcomes, then the work we engage in as leaders and teachers must model equitable practices.

In Project I4, professional development is not an event. Rather, it is daily enactment of professional learning that focuses on teachers and leaders working together to develop the collective knowledge, will, and skill to engage in meaningful and durable learning (Hawley & Valli, 1999). The project design inspires school leaders to embed a professional development process that can continue long after their participation in Project I4.

NESTED COACHING MODEL

The Project I4 design draws on learning communities called networked improvement communities (Bryk et al., 2015), groups of educators with a common focus using "disciplined methods of improvement research to develop, test, and refine interventions" (p. 144).

Four characteristics distinguish networked improvement communities from traditional professional learning communities or communities of practice that are widespread in schools today. Networked improvement communities:

1. Focus on a clearly defined measurable aim or outcome;
2. Offer a theory of improvement based on root cause analysis;
3. Engage the improvement research that seeks reliable, contextualized solutions; and
4. Practice rapid action, reflection, and refinement of interventions.

Embedded in the Project I4 coaching model is an equity-centered focus. The coaching director facilitates leadership coach learning, the coaches work with school leaders, the school leaders work with teachers, and the teachers with students to improve equitable learning.

Here's how the coaching model works with these three interconnected groups:

- **Leadership coaches:** A coaching director meets with leadership coaches at monthly meetings. Together, they calibrate instructional and equity coaching (Aguilar, 2020). Using common protocols, they collaboratively design the monthly school leader community meetings.
- **School leaders:** Leadership coaches meet monthly with groups of six and in one-to-one sessions. The protocols support leaders to reflect on theory and make plans for application to facilitate what Freire (1970) calls *praxis* (reflect in order to act) that leads to substantive change.
- **Teachers:** School leaders facilitate teacher communities that focus on classroom academic discourse and include groups of three to five teachers and possibly a school-based instructional coach or another administrator.

The nested coaching model is a supportive mechanism for bringing instructional and equity leadership to life. The model uses three key approaches to impact leader actions, teacher practices, and student outcomes:

- Facilitate **learning exchanges** to democratize learning spaces and amplify local voices.
- Cultivate **relational trust** as a vital resource for deprivatizing professional learning.
- Center **instructional leadership for equity** in evidence-based observations and conversations about academic discourse.

NESTED COACHING MODEL

COMMUNITY LEARNING EXCHANGES

Local voices are frequently overlooked in school reform. Too often, meetings focus on covering agenda items without setting the professional learning table in a way that invites others to participate. Community learning exchanges are an antidote to these typical school meetings (Guajardo et al., 2016). They are democratized professional spaces where people have honest dialogue about equitable practices for student learning.

We design and model community learning exchanges as spaces that generate the necessary conditions for having courageous conversations about opportunity gaps, inequitable practices, and teacher-driven instruction. Community learning exchanges are built on the fundamental principle that any genuine improvement effort must honor the context of place and the wisdom of local people.

Our program devotes time to investigating place and people in the very context in which students seek to improve. To do so, we embed the community learning exchange pedagogical approaches — gracious space, circles, learning walks, digital stories — in all professional learning.

In learning exchanges, we use a consistent set of protocols, including a common agenda. The agendas for each group and meeting begin with self-care, vis-à-vis dynamic mindfulness and personal narratives (Militello et al., 2020; Bose et al., 2016). Next, they focus on specific content, such as math instruction or academic discourse. This approach strengthens the group culture, opens up channels of transparency and risk-taking, and provides a platform for discussing controversial and difficult issues, including issues of equity.

For example, using a protocol, Keisha, Jason, and Vivian, the leadership coach, each identified five memorable professional learning experiences and shared them with their learning community members. "As a coach, listening to stories provided me insights into how each individual learns best and how we as a collective could move forward to focus on the work," Vivian said.

Protocols generate equitable dialogue that we expect to transfer to classrooms. "I have used the protocols to set up conversations about practices," Jason said. "As a result, I observed teachers in our school [learning community] having conversations with each other that I have never seen before. Then I observed them using them in classrooms and saw that they were trying out practices they had not tried before."

RELATIONAL TRUST

Trust matters to foster high-quality relationships among leaders, teachers, students, and community members (Bryk et al., 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Building relational trust is an intentional act. Our coaching model focuses on cultivating relational trust because we have found that leaders who facilitate by listening are better-situated to lead the equity charge.

In the first school leader community learning exchange, Vivian used a protocol that focused specifically on leadership. The protocol created space for storytelling about early experiences in leadership and how those experiences informed participants' values about leadership.

Jason told the group about being a high school student council president, and Keisha spoke about her role as eldest child. "The stories were deep and compelling," Vivian said. "I was pleasantly surprised just how quickly the leaders were able to share with one another."

In turn, Keisha and Jason used the protocol in the teacher community learning exchange that they led. Jason noted the power of the protocol: "This activity cultivated trust and demonstrated to the teachers in the [community] that I was serious about making the [community] a team where we were all equal and valuable members."

Not only do we consistently engage in relational trust, but we measure it. Participants use the Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL), a nationally validated formative assessment tool that focuses on leadership as a collaborative function in a school (Blitz et al., 2014). Items in the assessment emphasize leadership as a practice rather than individual traits to encourage school leaders and their teams to focus on collaborative leadership and school improvement planning. The CALL data from the first year of the project indicate that relational trust showed statistically significant improvement.

Trust creates space to focus on evidence-based practice, and the CALL data helped build this trust. "The more intentional I was about relational trust, the more I was able to have important conversations about practice," Keisha said. "After we analyzed the classroom evidence together, the teacher asked if I could come back the next day to observe. I saw marked student engagement improvements the next day."

PROJECT I4 RESOURCES

- PI4 website: education.ecu.edu/projecti4
- Guide for effective conversations: tinyurl.com/3dfoongp
- Project I4 tools: education.ecu.edu/projecti4/cohort-ii/spring2021/resources/
- Learning exchange protocols: iel.org/protocols

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR EQUITY

We believe that leadership for equity is instructional leadership and vice versa. Our professional learning structure focuses on evidenced-based observations and post-observation conversations with teachers that address the recurring equity issues of academic engagement and rigor.

Our approach counteracts the traditional approach to walk-through tools in which the observers leap to decisions about what the teacher should change without a grounding in specific classroom evidence. Instead, our evidenced-based tools shift the post-observation meeting from principal feedback to collaborative conversations between the teacher and the principal.

The tools, while not new, have been redesigned so that the principal can conduct a brief observation, analyze the evidence, and have a post conversation in three time blocks that total about 45 minutes.

For example, hand-raising is by far the most common method for calling on students and arguably the least effective for promoting equity (Hamilton, 2019). Jason used the Project I4 calling-on tool to collect and analyze evidence in two classrooms, shared the evidence with the teachers, then had conversations with teachers.

In the first case, the teacher only called on white students to model math problems for the class. He described another classroom: "During a 15-minute lesson segment, I saw evidence of repeated and sustained conversations with only two students, while 12 students got no feedback from the teacher."

In using another tool for collecting evidence on equitable access, the Project I4 question form tool, Keisha observed mostly yes-or-no questions, and think time was nonexistent. "Many (teachers) were asking questions that only required simple answers and no explanation of how the student arrived at an answer," she said. By changing question form to include appropriate think time and coupling that with more equitable calling-on strategies, equitable student responses increased engagement and learning.

Keisha's conversations with teachers were revealing. "The tools led to discussions that informed teachers about their practices," she said. "Many teachers were surprised that they called on the same students frequently and that they usually were looking for students to give the correct answers. That led to a conversation about how the teacher wanted to shift to using other structures for engaging students and professional learning sessions on equitable strategies."

By providing evidence to teachers about academic discourse, principals like Keisha and Jason, with the support of Vivian, collect specific evidence and then use the evidence to guide conversations with, rather than feedback to, teachers.

Jason noted how his role changed. "Before using the tools, I would often struggle to identify the most appropriate and needed next step for improvement," he said. "I actually did not know how to have a conversation with a teacher and not just tell the teacher what to do. The data allowed the teacher and me to reflect together and for her to develop a reasonable and feasible next step."

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS SUPERGLUE

Project I4 addresses a juggernaut of school reform: how to change teacher practice. To do so, it reimagines professional development as a daily, interactive, and useful process. The nested coaching structure creates democratic learning spaces characterized by relational trust. Then, by using observations and conversations to collect and analyze evidence with teachers in the context of those trusting relationships, we create a safe space for conversations about equity.

Participating school leaders tell us they now know how to lead for equity in a more meaningful way that is connected to their roles as instructional leaders. Keisha said, "Given the opportunity to learn in a welcoming, high-expectation, culturally respective, and appreciative environment, educators not only teach, but learn from and with each other, no matter their beliefs, backgrounds, or previous experiences." Jason described his experience as "the most invigorating of any I have experienced in my 26-year career."

Reform that sticks comes from the inside. The leadership actions that we cultivate through Project I4 are like the superglue of professional development: relational trust, nested coaching structures, evidence-based tools, and effective conversations. If school leaders work with teachers in their schools to address local concerns and engage in community learning exchange processes, they can build stronger internal capacity for change.

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Even coaches need coaches

BY SERENA TYRA, BRANDON SHERMAN, AND ANNELA TEEMANT

Coaches play integral roles in many schools' learning cultures, but they often find their entry into coaching life disorienting and difficult. Educators typically take on the mantle of coach because they were successful as teachers, and they may have limited experiences working with adult learners. Yet coaches we work with often point out that the shift from teacher to coach came without support structures and with an expectation that they would learn on their feet.

New coaches rarely have the luxuries of formal preparation, assisted supervision, or ongoing support. Coaching preparation, where it exists at all, is rarely as extensive as the student teaching experience or apprenticeship model found in most teacher education programs. And unlike coaching for new teachers, coaching for new coaches is rare. Even where coaches do have access to more experienced coaches, such support is generally informal and closer to mentoring (Burkins & Ritchie, 2007). As one coach put it to us, "My title changed from teacher to coach, but no one showed me to how to coach."

For new coaches, having access to the support and assistance of more experienced coaches encourages efficacy and success, deepens learning, and helps boost morale in the face of a steep learning curve. This kind of ongoing professional learning and support structure is critical for growth and change.

Our model of coaching for coaches uses shadow coaching. In this approach, an experienced coach shadows new coaches in their interactions with teachers across one, and in some cases, two years, building in systematic support. With shadow coaching, new coaches get ongoing and timely feedback, assistance, opportunities for reflection, and chances for new action in the very moment of coaching.

The quotes in this article are from coaches participating in our ongoing coaching research project, which supports teachers and coaches in elementary schools in an urban school district in the midwestern United States. The coaching approach is not limited to a specific content area but is focused on developing dialogic and equitable classrooms.

CYCLES OF SHADOW COACHING

"How did I learn how to coach? I read a lot of books, but that didn't prepare me for what coaching was really going to be like."

In the shadow coaching process, an experienced coach works with a coach and a teacher dyad over the course of seven cycles in a school year. Each shadow coaching cycle includes a preobservation conference, a classroom observation, and a post-observation conference.

In each instance, the coach engages with one teacher in reflection, dialogue, and growth. The shadow coach works with one coach-teacher pair. During this time, the coach also works with other teachers independently to practice and develop their coaching skills.

The shadow coach sits apart, being available but separate from the conversation. The shadow coach observes and may at times interject at critical points by asking questions, highlighting points of interest, or offering suggestions for possible next steps. The purpose of shadowed coaching cycles is to support reflection, sharing, and assistance that promote teacher and coach development.

To be successful, there must be trust. When done effectively, shadow coaching becomes a triad of trust and support among the teacher, the coach, and the shadow coach. Just as a coaching relationship built on trust gives teachers a safe space to be vulnerable and try new things, shadow coaching allows the supported coach to take risks, ask a variety of questions, or push a little more. One coach said, "I was braver because I had someone to help me."

The impact of the shadow coaching cycles with one teacher prepares the coach throughout the observed coaching cycle, but, more importantly, it helps coaches develop the skills, mindset, and flexibility they will need when coaching all their teachers.

Key elements of shadow coaching include:

- Shared pedagogical targets;
- Feedback and reflection;
- Clear power dynamics;
- Systematic cycles of shadow coaching; and
- Creating a coaching community.

SHARED PEDAGOGICAL TARGETS

"When I was a teacher, I thought everyone taught like I did. Now that I'm a coach, I realize that isn't true."

Teachers and coaches need shared and clear pedagogical targets for coaching. Upon leaving the classroom, coaches often find that what they thought was common practice and understanding of good teaching in all classrooms was actually specific to their classrooms.

Coaches express surprise when confronted with the prevalence of teacher-dominated instruction, deficit views of learners, and dated theories of teaching and learning. Faced with the prospect of coaching teachers with such differing belief structures and views of learning, coaches can become overwhelmed by the options and possible pedagogical paths.

We use the Enduring Principles of Learning (Teemant, 2018) in our shadow coaching model as shared pedagogical targets of good teaching. (See p. 58.) This framework is an augmentation of the standards of effective pedagogy (McClure, 2008; Tharp et al., 2000), a set of principles based on wide-ranging research and sociocultural principles and pedagogy. It has been employed in pre-K through university settings throughout the world.

The framework is meant to inform professional learning and address educational inequities. United by these overarching principles, coaches and teachers are able to focus their coaching cycles on appropriate and effective

application of principles of learning in daily classroom practice.

Although there are shared pedagogical targets and a common vocabulary between coach and teacher, there isn't just one way to either coach or teach based on these principles of learning. Pedagogical targets, therefore, give teachers and coaches a shared experience with enough flexibility to allow coaches and teachers to have their own journey toward those targets.

For their part, shadow coaches are able to help new coaches reflect on shared pedagogical targets and reconcile them with the variety of approaches, philosophies, perspectives, preferences, and classroom realities teachers can represent. They also help navigate starting points for ongoing coaching conversations on pedagogy.

FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION

"Feedback was hard to get at first, but I found out that it was the most important part of the coaching process. I learned more about myself, and I changed as a coach."

Feedback and support are a critical part of the shadow coaching process. If coaching is a process built on reflection, dialogue, and interaction between individuals who are dedicated to growth, action, and change, then coaches need to engage in those activities with other coaches as well.

In addition to having coaching sessions shadowed, the shadow coach and coach debrief after each part of the coaching cycle and reflect on the teacher-coach conversations. At each point along the way, the shadow coach meets with the coach to debrief in real time, providing feedback and support, posing questions, and creating space to reflect. In this way, the shadow coaching relationship mirrors what is occurring between the coach and teacher.

This is critical not only for honing new coaches' skills and abilities but also for helping them develop their identities as coaches. The reflective conversations allow coaches to develop

ENDURING PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING

JOINT PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY

Teachers and Students Producing Together

Facilitate learning through joint productive activity among teacher and students.

Enacting level: The teacher and a small group of students collaborate on a shared product.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Developing Language and Literacy Across the Curriculum

Develop competence in the language and literacy of instruction across the curriculum.

Enacting level: The teacher provides structured opportunities for students to engage in sustained reading, writing, or speaking activities and assists academic language use or literacy development by questioning, rephrasing, or modeling.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Making Meaning: Connecting School to Students' Lives

Connect teaching and curriculum to experiences and skills of students' home and community.

Enacting level: The teacher integrates the new activity/information with what students already know from home, school, or community.

CHALLENGING ACTIVITIES

Teaching Complex Thinking

Challenge students toward cognitive complexity.

Enacting level: The teacher designs and enacts challenging activities with clear standards and performance feedback and assists the development of more complex thinking.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONVERSATION

Teaching Through Conversation

Engage students through dialogue, especially the Instructional Conversation.

Enacting level: The teacher has a planned, goal-directed conversation with a small group of students on an academic topic; elicits student talk by questioning, listening, and responding to assess and assist student understanding; and inquires about students' views, judgments, or rationales. Student talk occurs at higher rates than teacher talk.

CRITICAL STANCE

Teaching to Transform Inequities

Empower students to transform society's inequities through democracy and civic engagement.

Enacting level: The teacher consciously engages learners in interrogating conventional wisdom and practices, reflecting upon ramifications, and seeking actively to transform inequities within their scope of influence in the classroom and larger community.

an idea of who they are as coaches, who they want to become, what actions they want to take, and how they want to develop themselves as coaches. One coach said that during these debriefs, "I was more concerned about being liked than being a coach. I couldn't be the coach I wanted to be and keep worrying about if my teachers like me."

This process also gives coaches a chance to articulate and question their assumptions about coaching and teacher learning. Another coach said, "I realized I wasn't helping anyone by asking the easy questions. I don't want to be that kind of coach."

CLEAR POWER DYNAMICS

"When I started the shadow coaching, I worried about what the shadow coach might say or think about my coaching. I wondered if I was doing it wrong. After working with the shadow coach, I know we are working toward the same goal and that we really are doing this together."

One tension often present in the relationship between teachers and coaches is that of power. As hard as coaches might try to position themselves otherwise, they often find that teachers defer to them as the expert or authority. This tendency is something shadow coaches need to be wary of as well. Shadow coaches do provide feedback from a position of experience and expertise but should avoid allowing the new coach to elevate them to a position of unquestioned authority.

Shadow coaching doesn't mean coaches work in the shadow of the more experienced coach. Rather, it is the more experienced coach who stays in the shadow of the coach-teacher relationship. The shadow coach's goal is to cultivate reflection and growth, not dependency.

CREATING A COACHING COMMUNITY

"I didn't realize how lonely coaching would be. I'm no longer a teacher, and I'm not an administrator. I don't fit in anymore."

Having left a teaching community that might have included grade-level, department, or content teams, coaches may find they are now a one-of-a-kind professional in their building. One coach lamented, "I used to have a team of colleagues to talk to. Now, I'm the only coach in the building, and I don't think people even understand what I do."

A critical part of the shadow coaching experience is developing a coaching community. The shadow coach and coach are a community of two that can sustain each other through the early trials of coaching.

In the next stage of the work, the individual growth made in the shadow coach-coach-teacher triads is maximized when multiple coaches meet with the shadow coach to share triumphs and struggles with others who understand the work because of their shared roles, pedagogical targets, and lived experiences. In this setting, the shadow coach is able to focus on shared concerns to reinforce learning.

For example, the community of coaches may benefit from a focus on intentional questioning, meaningful walk-throughs with principals, developing students as critical thinkers, or the difference between coaching to teach versus coaching to learn. These group meetings become a balance between new learning and reflection on experience that build an extended network of colleagues in the coaching community.

EVERYONE NEEDS A COACH

"I am a better coach because I have a coach, and other coaches help me reflect on what I do as coach. Without them, I would be stuck doing the same thing I always did and not knowing how to change."

Coaches have the potential to influence the pedagogy of every teacher within their sphere of influence. It is a powerful role, and coaches must be supported, guided, and encouraged to grow and learn if they are to reach their full potential.

For teachers, the strength of coaching is found in the reflective conversations, the planning and support of teaching and learning, and the influence of daily practices in classrooms. Coaches deserve parallel support from coaches of their own — shadow coaches — to engage in this type of work.

Coaching is too important, too critical for the growth of school communities, teacher learning, and student success to ignore the ongoing development of the coach.

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Video coaching puts a new lens on learning

BY VALERIE MINOR AND SUZANNE McGAHEY

An effective teacher is the No. 1 factor determining a student's achievement and growth (Marzano, 2003), and in the Keller (Texas) Independent School District, we wanted to help grow the capacity of our teachers to maximize the growth of our students. Over the past year, we've had success in using video to provide personalized professional learning to teachers across the career continuum, from new teachers to veteran teachers looking to improve their practice.

Our decision to use video-based professional learning and coaching has transformed how teachers in our district view professional learning. It is allowing our teachers to set goals, reflect, and improve on exactly what they need at that moment. It is also allowing coaches to "see" inside classrooms more often and with less intrusion on the students and giving all teachers a window into each other's classrooms without having to leave their own.

DEVELOPING REFLECTIVE TEACHER LEADERS

Our use of video began when we set out to support the growth of teachers who want to become leaders within their classrooms, rather than pursuing

"If you are brave enough to accept the challenge, take a look at yourself, literally, and record yourself teaching, you'll be amazed at what you think you are doing during a lesson versus what you are really doing during a lesson. But I promise the reward, the growth, and the professional and personal development are so worth the risk."

— Donna McDaniel, a biology teacher at Keller (Texas) High School

administration careers. We envisioned creating an ever-growing network of excellent teachers willing to engage in a transparent process of continuous improvement by allowing others into their classroom, listening to feedback, and reflecting on their craft.

Out of this desire was born the professional learning program known as LADDER (leadership, achievement, discovery, determination, empowerment, and reflection). Teachers apply and interview to be selected for the program. They must demonstrate the desire to reflect, learn, and improve their practice, including a recommendation from their principal to show they are an ongoing learner and a positive leader on their campus. In 2020-21, there are 40 teachers participating in two cohorts.

The program began in the 2019-20 school year with a cohort of 15 teachers. After their first year, those 15 teachers opted to go through a second year. Because of the first group's experience, we were able to recruit 25 additional teachers in 2020-21.

Participating teachers set personal goals, visit each other's classrooms to capture and share measurable data that will help their peers reach their goals, and video record their lessons for self-reflection and peer evaluation. Seeing themselves on video helps teachers observe and reflect on their practices and helps motivate them to improve. Professional learning that will stick with our teachers needs to be relevant to them, take in their professional experience and knowledge, and be ongoing and personalized. Video-based learning fit right into these needs.

Because the video is a central component, we quickly realized that we needed a platform in which to house the videos and the dialogue between the teachers. We implemented the video-based professional learning platform from Edthena to help meet this need.

Teachers upload videos that showcase the specific problem of practice they are working toward and receive specific feedback from colleagues in their cohort and coaches to assist with the growth and development of this problem of practice. Problems of practice include: building stronger relationships to increase student achievement, improving critical thinking through inquiry-based activities in the classroom, and student ownership of learning using tools and resources the teacher puts in place in the classroom.

While the prospect of recording a lesson, watching yourself, and then opening up your classroom for peer critique was the one factor all of the participants feared, it ended up contributing enormously to their growth. Teachers even requested to add more recording sessions to the program and agenda.

Donna McDaniel, a biology teacher at Keller High School, said, "If you are brave enough to accept the challenge, take a look at yourself, literally, and record yourself teaching, you'll be amazed at what you think you are doing during a lesson versus what you are really doing during a lesson. But I promise the reward, the growth, and the professional and personal development are so worth the risk." This was a common theme that we heard over and over again.

EXPANDING THE USE OF VIDEO

Based on our success using video coaching, we decided to use a similar approach with our new teacher induction program. In the 2020-21 school year, first-year teachers use the Edthena platform to record videos for video coaching and reflection. This allows those who support the first-year teachers to gauge the needs and strengths in first-year teacher classrooms, which in turn allows us to adjust the support we provide these teachers.

To guide the professional learning and coaching of first-year teachers through the video coaching process, we are using resources and guidance from *Video in Teacher Learning: Through Their Own Eyes* by Laura Baecher (2019). One such resource is the continuum of teacher learning in video analysis. We are assisting teachers through the development of learning how to look at teaching and learning, how to look at specific practices, what their students look like when learning, and what it looks like when they are accomplishing something in relation to a set of criteria (Baecher, 2019).

Teachers will upload their videos, reflect on what they see, then receive

feedback from a coach and engage in a coaching conversation. From there, the first-year teachers take that feedback and work with the coach to create a commitment within the platform on what their next steps will be. Teachers will continue to reflect on and improve their practice as the year progresses. This reflection practice is a tool that will continue to assist teachers in their career development.

As an incentive to participate in the video coaching experience, first-year teachers earn points for opting to record setting up a lesson, checking for understanding, or closing a lesson. Teachers can also earn extra points for reflecting on video about their experience and growth so far, sharing a video with their entire cohort of grade-level first-year teachers, or providing feedback on a colleague's video.

As we watch the videos and provide feedback to first-year teachers, they have the opportunity to reflect on what they see as well. Through this, they can make commitments for growth and improvement through the process. As teachers compile points, they can earn extra duty pay as an additional incentive. Because this is a new initiative and it can be a bit scary for new teachers to record themselves, we found that incentivizing participation allows for choice on participation and motivation to participate.

As part of the induction program, in pre-COVID years, first-year teachers visited experienced teacher classrooms. Because that was not an option this year, we began using the Organization Video Library portion of the Edthena platform. Mentor and participating teachers contribute videos they have recorded in their classrooms for our first-year teachers to watch. These videos demonstrate effective and engaging teaching strategies and act as a mentor text for first-year teachers with exemplar teaching practices at their fingertips.

Because this was such a huge success and useful tool for first-year teachers, we have since opened up this video library to the entire district. Teachers across the district can contribute videos of exemplar teaching strategies and watch videos from other teachers. This has proven to be an invaluable tool, especially as many teachers are navigating uncharted waters with remote and hybrid learning environments.

When moving to video-based professional learning and coaching, consider starting with a small group or cohort who would embrace stepping out of their comfort zone to try something new.

Through this experience with video coaching and reflection, it is our hope that all first-year teachers will experience the same growth and positive development in their own practice as teachers participating in the LADDER program have experienced. We are monitoring student test results and benchmark data to assess the impact on student learning outcomes.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Our experience with both new and veteran teachers has taught us valuable lessons about using video in school contexts.

Start small. When moving to video-based professional learning and coaching, consider starting with a small group or cohort who would embrace stepping out of their comfort zone to try something new. This is an important first step in changing the culture in a district. Keller ISD is working through this culture shift. Participating teachers have fully embraced the cognitive dissonance they experience when watching themselves and reflecting on video and are beginning to spread that to others. We hope to eventually expand this shift to the entire district.

Choose the right tools. Find the right technology to support your district's goals and initiatives. Does the cost fit your budget? Do the customer service and support meet your needs? Is the platform user-friendly and easy for teachers to record and watch their videos? We wanted a provider that could help us develop plans and goals as well as a technology that was intuitive and wouldn't add complicated steps to this process, which we felt might deter teachers from participating.

Make time and space for learning. When engaging in video-based professional learning, teachers will need the time and opportunities to reflect, provide feedback to each other, and receive valuable feedback that is relevant to their needs. This time needs to be built into the schedule.

Give teachers choice and voice. This process must be driven by teachers' needs and desires. Allow teachers to set their own goals and choose which videos of their teaching practice they upload and share. Ensure coaches understand the feedback teachers are looking for and provide relevant feedback to them in a timely manner. This will encourage teacher engagement, buy-in, and commitment.

With these pieces in place, participating teachers in our district have demonstrated personal and professional growth. Incorporating video into coaching is one of the best ways we've found to provide our teachers with on-time, relevant, and personalized professional learning.

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DISCUSS. COLLABORATE. FACILITATE.

TOOLS

Principal Lindsay Amstutz-Martin, foreground, and colleagues take a break from planning.

THE POWER OF A THEORY OF CHANGE

"Change is hard. As a former history teacher, I frequently look to ancient philosophers for inspiration. Socrates said, 'The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.' The key to this process is deciding how to spend our energy, and it is then that we will make changes that create the results we want in our schools."

— Lindsay Amstutz-Martin, principal, Fairfield Elementary, Fort Wayne Community Schools, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Source: Psencik, K., Brown, F., & Hirsh, S. (2021). *The learning principal: Becoming a learning leader.* Learning Forward.

How principals implement change effectively

Kay Psencik, Frederick Brown, and Stephanie Hirsh explore how school leaders can apply a learning lens to achieve their ambitious goals for educators and students in *The Learning Principal,* their new book for Learning Forward. The authors show how learning and leading go hand in hand, especially when it comes to innovation and improvement.

Chapter 3, "Managing Change," details how leaders can create the conditions and learning opportunities that help staff navigate change — a vital but often challenging part of increasing equity. This leadership must happen throughout the change process, from establishing readiness for change to leveraging strategies to support staff through challenging steps.

One of those strategies is articulating and following a theory of change. As the authors write, "Developing a clear theory of change proposes the best understanding of the relationships among our assumptions, strategies, outcomes, and results based on the data we collected to frame our problem. Developing this theory is helpful in informing a change management plan that will successfully support desired outcomes. Combined with the logic model, an action-planning tool, the theory of change guides the principal and leadership team as they seek to respond to these questions:

- What is the outcome sought? What will it look like when the desired results are achieved?
- What will staff and stakeholders need to learn and be able to do differently to achieve the desired results?
- How will people acquire the new knowledge and skills?"

You can learn more and read an example of theory of change in chapter 3. In addition, each chapter of the book includes online tools to help readers implement the strategies.

Developing a Theory of Change, the tool on the following pages, supports teams in drafting and implementing a plan of action based on theory and research. Using this tool, you and your team members will answer foundational questions independently and then together so you can work toward your goals and address your challenges in an aligned way.

ABOUT *THE LEARNING PRINCIPAL*

The Learning Principal: Becoming a Learning Leader supports school leaders in developing a learning orientation to each challenge they face, ensuring they are ready to identify solutions that put students' equitable outcomes at the fore.

Chapters cover principals' roles and responsibilities related to designing professional learning, implementing curriculum, managing change, leveraging feedback and coaching, maximizing resources, and more. Online tools complement each chapter.

Purchase the book through Learning Forward's bookstore at **learningforward.org/store.**

DEVELOPING A THEORY OF CHANGE

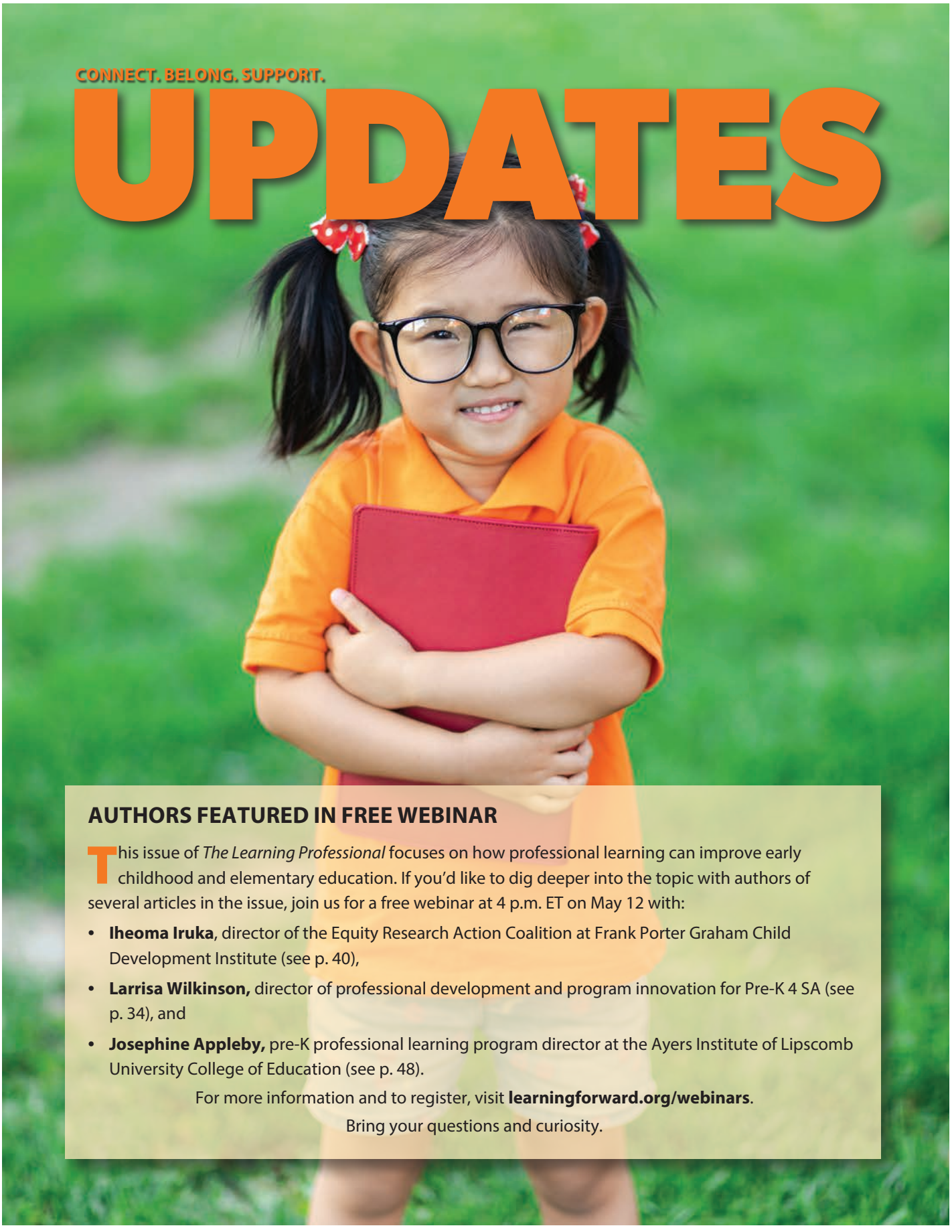
Purpose	Theory of change protocols support the development of thoughtful plans to address challenges or opportunities. This tool can be used by a principal learning community or with other leadership, grade-level, and subject matter teams.
Recommended time	1 hour minimum. Time allocation will vary throughout implementation.
Materials	• Questions to Guide Development of a Theory of Change • Media for capturing notes and recording artifacts for virtual and face-to-face small-group discussions (e.g. tablets, laptops and applications, white boards, chart paper, note cards)
Process	1. State the team's expectations: Team members will establish a theory of change to achieve the goals they have set as an organization. Team members will develop a clear theory of change before making decisions about the actions they will take to achieve their goals.
	2. Explain that a theory of change helps to clarify all building blocks required to achieve a long-term goal. This set of connected building blocks establishes a path to success.
	3. Ask participants to work individually or in small teams to answer each of the seven questions on the following page. Note: If team members require additional research before the questions can be answered effectively, ask them to conduct their research and come prepared to share.
	4. Consider the questions one at a time. Once each participant has answered the first question, ask each small team to come to agreement.
	5. Ask each team to share results with the whole group.
	6. Find common ideas and come to consensus as a whole group.
	7. Then answer the second question in the same way and proceed until all questions are answered.
	8. Ask each team member to reflect on his or her work, share it with the larger community, and make revisions in the answers based on the best thinking of everyone.
	9. Use the theory of change to establish a clearly articulated plan of action.
	10. Implement the plan and reflect on the progress regularly.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DEVELOPMENT OF A THEORY OF CHANGE

Answer each question individually, then work as a team to come to consensus about the answers.
1. What is the current situation that we intend to impact?
2. What will it look like when we achieve the desired results we set for ourselves earlier today?
3. What do we need to do to achieve that?
4. What behaviors need to change for that outcome to be achieved?
5. What knowledge or skills do people need before the behavior will change?
6. What resources will be needed to achieve our results?
7. How will we know we are achieving the goals that we have set for ourselves?

CONNECT. BELONG. SUPPORT.

UPDATES



AUTHORS FEATURED IN FREE WEBINAR

This issue of *The Learning Professional* focuses on how professional learning can improve early childhood and elementary education. If you'd like to dig deeper into the topic with authors of several articles in the issue, join us for a free webinar at 4 p.m. ET on May 12 with:

- **Iheoma Iruka**, director of the Equity Research Action Coalition at Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (see p. 40),
- **Larrisa Wilkinson,** director of professional development and program innovation for Pre-K 4 SA (see p. 34), and
- **Josephine Appleby,** pre-K professional learning program director at the Ayers Institute of Lipscomb University College of Education (see p. 48).

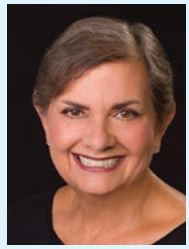
For more information and to register, visit **learningforward.org/webinars**.

Bring your questions and curiosity.

LEARNING STUDIO: A new online learning experience

Just as you are designing new models of learning to meet your students' needs, we have updated our services to offer high-quality professional learning in a virtual learning environment that is interactive, collaborative, and engaging.

Our first course, Powerful Communication Skills for Coaches, filled up in less than two weeks. Led by coaching experts Joellen Killion and Sharron Helmke, this course engages participants through a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning, coaching practice, and deep explorations of critical coaching communication skills.



Joellen Killion

Sharron Helmke

Another cohort is planned for Powerful Communication Skills for Coaches as are future classes for mentor teachers and learning teams. Ideal for districts who may not have the budget or staff to support customized learning academies, these online courses bring Learning Forward's renowned professional services to educators and districts of all sizes.

For districts with larger staff that want to remain in a distanced setting, we are also offering virtual options for the Coaches Academy and Teacher Mentor Academy, all conducted on the Brightspace learning platform.

Contact Tom Manning, senior vice president professional services, for more information: **tom.manning@learningforward.org.**

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN PROVIDES NEW FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS

The American Rescue Plan, the pandemic relief bill enacted in March, includes the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, an almost $123 billion fund to support K-12 schools.

The U.S. Department of Education will reserve $800 million of the funds to identify and provide services to homeless children and youth. The remaining funds will be allocated to states based on the Title I poverty formula.

States must reserve 5% of funds received to address learning loss, not less than 1% for summer enrichment programs, not less than 1% for after-school programs, and no more than 0.5% for administrative costs. States will then be required to allocate 90% of the funds to school districts, also based on the Title I poverty formula. The funds are available until Sept. 30, 2023.

Once the funds have been allocated to local school districts, the districts must apportion the funds in two ways. The first 20% of funds received must be used "to address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions, such as summer learning, extended day, comprehensive after-school programs, or extended school year programs, and ensure that such interventions respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs and address the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on" disadvantaged student subgroups, homeless students, and students in foster care.

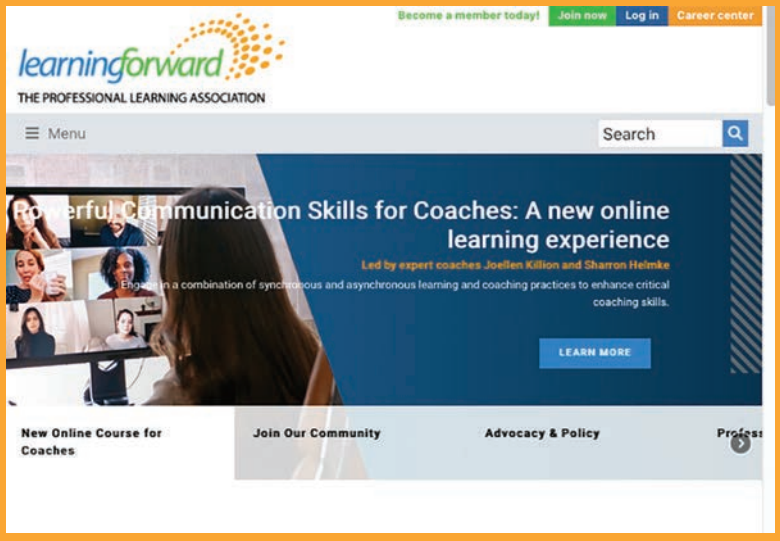
The remaining 80% is where funds can be used for professional learning. These funds can be used for "any activity authorized in the following current laws: Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act and Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006." This includes professional learning activities covered by Title IIA.

We encourage Learning Forward members and stakeholders to elevate professional learning as a needed use of these funds by telling superintendents and school board members that professional learning and support for educators has never been more important. To meet today's challenges, educators need instructional coaching, mentoring, online PLCs, virtual supports for engaging students, and any other ongoing, school-embedded professional learning supports.

Learn more at **learningforward.org/advocacy**.

FRESH LOOK ON OUR WEBSITE

Learning Forward's website has a fresh look. As part of our continuous improvement work, we rebuilt the website to improve your experience with functionality, device-specific responsiveness, and speed while also future proofing it for long-term plans for adding even more features. Other improvements included easier access to articles, tools, blog posts, and webinars; and improved access to more collaboration and networking opportunities. Check it out at **learningforward.org**.



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

FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Scott Eggerding @libertyegg Mar 9

We are all asking these questions as vaccinations and guidance begins to upen up for the fall. #LearnFwd TLP

Learning Forward @LearningForward Mar 9

To help you reflect on what you're learning during the pandemic and how to apply those lessons moving forward, @jal_mehta suggests considering these questions with your team. ow.ly/ZxCn50DU6RX #LearnFwdTLP

WHAT WILL YOU KEEP AND CHANGE AFTER THE PANDEMIC?

To help you reflect on what you're learning during the pandemic and how to apply those lessons moving forward, Mehta suggests considering the following questions with your team.

- What have you learned about your students and their families this year?
- How could that shape the way you connect with families and students next year?
- What has worked well this year, and how could you amplify those things as you transitioin out of emergency education mode?
- What are you not looking forward to about going back to "regular" school?
- What would need to be "hospice" to make space for what you want to amplify?

UPCOMING WEBINARS

The Virtual Teaching, Leading, and Learning webinar series continues at 3 p.m. ET Thursdays on the following dates:

- **April 22:** Instructional Coaches: Critical Support in a Virtual World
- **May 6:** Celebrating Educators: Acknowledge, Honor, Energize, and Renew
- **May 20:** Planning for Summer and Fall
- **June 3:** Unanticipated Challenges of Reopening

Learn more at **learningforward.org/webinars.**

THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL TWITTER CHATS

Our #LearnFwdTLP Twitter chats are a great way to connect with other learning professionals, go deeper on the content in *The Learning Professional,* and gain new strategies and inspiration.

To be notified of upcoming chats, follow us on Twitter @LearningForward and subscribe to our e-newsletter at www.learningforward.org. To review previous chats, check out the recaps on our blog: **learningforward.org/blog.**

RENEWING DISTRICT MEMBERS

- Holmes County Consolidated School District, Lexington, Mississippi
- Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, Kentucky

Learn more about district memberships at **learningforward.org/district-memberships**.

NEW BOOK FROM LEARNING FORWARD INDIA

Sandeep Dutt, executive director of Learning Forward India, recently released the book *My Good School: Where Passion Meets Education.* Dutt writes that the book "will help educators, school administrators and management to build and rebuild institutions and change the future of learning." Learn more at **goodschools.in**.

Learning Forward Foundation's equity journey

BY JANICE BRADLEY, DEB RADI, AND AMY COLTON

The Learning Forward Foundation board is shifting its thinking and language about *equity*. Instead of talking about equity as a noun, we are moving toward a commitment to *acting equitably*.

Due to a convergence of events in 2020 and Learning Forward's formal equity and antiracism responses, we embraced the opportunity to discover how to design professional learning for equitable outcomes and build our capacity and that of the learning leaders we learn with and support.

Fulfilling the Learning Forward Foundation vision and mission requires us to examine our policies, procedures, and practices. Our goal is to develop and apply an equity lens to our work of making grants and scholarships and supporting the recipients through their growth.

The first step is to learn more about our own values, beliefs, and biases. That takes emotional investment, intentional learning, and the development of critical consciousness.

The board members recognize that engaging in equity work requires an emotional investment from each of us as we move toward reconciliation with our own histories and those of our ancestors.

Our values and beliefs are shaped by our families and the systems that we have been raised in coupled with our experiences in community. We need to harvest those experiences to gain a deeper understanding of who we are and how we came to be who we are.

Each of us comes to this equity work in different ways. When we gather to listen and be open to each other's histories and stories, we have the potential to connect emotionally and examine our own thoughts and feelings in response to what we hear and learn. We need to learn what we cannot see — our own biases, our cultural perspectives, and positioning — to see beyond the boundaries of culture and individual experience.

Knowing we could not accomplish inner learning on our own, the board established a community of practice to further our inquiry. We drew on Learning Forward's equity statement and practices of high-quality professional learning. We invested resources and time to engage with external thought partners.

To deepen our understanding of the roots of inequity, we became "readers as learners" through book study sessions using *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Caste,* and *The Inconvenient Indian.* These books have engaged our hearts and minds toward an awareness of where we've been and where we need to go.

We are working to develop an awareness and curiosity about systems of power and privilege and our own places within them. Ongoing examination of the everyday realities of systemic oppression and inequitable social conditions are a prerequisite to taking action.

As we continue to develop our awareness, we will be positioned to take collective action to transform the foundation's policies, practices, and structures so that our work is equitable and contributes to equity in schools.

We look forward to sharing our next steps and the impact on the ongoing work of the foundation in the coming months.

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Learn more about the Learning Forward Foundation at **foundation.learningforward.org**.

learningforward
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

ABOUT LEARNING FORWARD

Learning Forward shows you how to plan, implement, and measure high-quality professional learning so you and your team can achieve success with your system, your school, and your students.

We are the only professional association devoted exclusively to those who work in educator professional learning. We help our members effect positive and lasting change to achieve equity and excellence in teaching and learning.

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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** Bridget Hamre (p. 22) writes that schools and districts need a more coherent and connected vision of high-quality early learning from pre-K through elementary school. Leadership is key for bringing that vision to life and supporting the professional learning that activates it. But as the research in At a Glance shows (see p. 73), many school leaders have no background and little experience in early childhood.	**TO CONSIDER** • What knowledge do your school and system leaders need to develop to lead high-quality learning in pre-K and the early grades? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ • What professional learning opportunities are currently available that you can leverage to build this knowledge? What other learning opportunities do you need to find or create? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
STANDARD: IMPLEMENTATION **IN ACTION** The field of early childhood education has been a leader in providing classroom-based coaching. For example, coaching has been a central part of model early pre-K programs. K-12 educators can take cues and lessons from their early childhood colleagues about this approach to sustained and job-embedded professional learning, as Suzanne Bouffard writes (p. 30).	**TO CONSIDER** • What structures and supports can allow early childhood teachers and staff to share their knowledge with teachers and staff of later grades? Thinking inclusively about the early childhood field, what role might community centers and stakeholders play? _____ _____ _____ _____ • How can you learn from early childhood coaching and other forms of professional learning to implement effective learning designs in your own context? _____ _____ _____ _____

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

AT A GLANCE

ALL IN ON EARLY LEARNING

THE SCOPE

U.S. SCHOOLS SERVE MORE YOUNG CHILDREN THAN EVER BEFORE.

75,000
elementary school principals oversee pre-K classrooms.

1.6 million
children in the U.S. attend publicly funded pre-K programs.

YOUNG CHILDREN PROJECTED TO ATTEND U.S. PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN 2021:

1.18 million **in pre-K**

3.71 million **in K**

10.94 million **in 1st-3rd grade**

THE NEED

MANY ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS DO NOT HAVE BACKGROUND IN EARLY CHILDHOOD.

76%
do not have early childhood certification.

40%
have no teacher or principal preparation in early childhood.

42%
have not participated in district professional learning on early childhood.

20%
of early-career principals do not feel well-versed in early childhood.

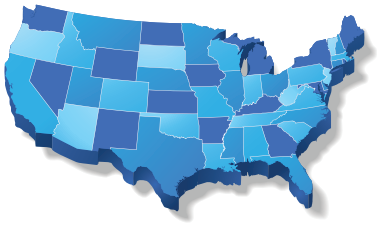
45%
of principals report implementing pre-K programs to be of moderate or high concern.

THE SOLUTION

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CAN CLOSE THE GAPS.

Dozens of model pre-K programs
include intensive professional learning.

1,700+
HEAD START programs require coaching.



25 states require coaching in public early childhood programs.

16 states require coaching plus 15 hours of other professional learning.

Your learning helps children learn.

What will you learn next?

Sources for research cited here can be found at **learningforward.org/the-learning-professional/**

learningforward
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2021 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

DECEMBER 5-7, 2021

This year, the theme of transformation parallels our shared experiences as we respond to the immediate needs of educators and students during challenging times. Join our 2021 Virtual Conference and experience for yourself how high-quality professional learning can transform practice and student results.

SAVE THE DATE:
DEC. 5-7, 2021

SHIFT
YOUR PERSPECTIVE

TRANSFORM
YOUR PRACTICE

POWER UP
YOUR EXPERTISE

IMPROVE RESULTS

VIRTUAL learningforward 2021 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
DEC. 5-7, 2021

TRANSFORMATION