

# THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

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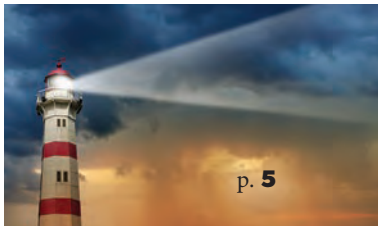


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## ISAY

# Christopher Emdin

Associate professor of science education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and director of science education at the Center for Health Equity and Urban Science Education



“Teaching, to me, is about when a teacher reaches that point where they understand the performance in their craft and can connect all the technical knowledge with that soul knowledge — the merging of the intuitional with the institutional, it’s at that point that you begin to teach. And I think that you can teach teachers how to make that magic, but it first must come with a recognition that teaching is a performance art and that we should hold it in the same esteem that we hold the performances that capture our imaginations in a way that we know that there’s something special about that.”

**Source: Gonzales, L. (2021, September 7).** *Tim talks with Chris Emdin.* [www.carnegiefoundation.org/blog/tim-talks-with-chris-emdin/](http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/blog/tim-talks-with-chris-emdin/)

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## HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

**As they always do, school and system leaders are rising to the challenges and steering their teams with creativity, commitment, and compassion.**

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

## LEADERSHIP SHINES A LIGHT IN DARK TIMES

**W**hen I told a colleague we were focusing our fall issue of *The Learning Professional* on how leaders can thrive in stressful times, she astutely asked, “When is working in schools *not* stressful?” Constant stress notwithstanding, she recognized what we all do: School and system leadership is especially challenging right now.

Even as we try to regain some semblance of normalcy, education leaders are finding themselves in situations unimaginable even a year ago. Many of last year’s challenges remain, but they are compounded by new ones.

Amid staffing shortages, principals and superintendents are substituting in classrooms and filling in for cafeteria workers and bus drivers. They are working to accelerate students’ learning while dealing with ongoing absences due to illness and quarantine. Many are also caught in heated debates over whether and how to implement COVID-19 mitigation measures. Meanwhile, fear, loss, and trauma are still very real.

As they always do, school and system leaders are rising to the challenges and steering their teams with creativity, commitment, and compassion. This issue is dedicated to sharing how principals, superintendents, coaches, and others are shining the light of leadership in these dark times.

In this issue, we highlight lessons about what’s working — and not working — and what kinds of support leaders need to keep going strong. The authors’ insights can be applied in whatever space and whatever role you work, whether at the classroom, school, district, state, province, or national level.

Leaders who succeed in stressful times approach complexity with clarity, the authors show. They step back and see the big picture, even while addressing the specific details and emergent needs of daily life in schools, to pave a clear path through tangled terrain. That starts with a coherent plan for professional learning.

Articles explain how a districtwide professional learning plan connects educators and initiatives across levels (p. 9), how leaders can create an ecosystem of learning (p. 62), how high-quality instructional materials can shape a systemwide plan (p. 58), and more.

Social and emotional support is also high on the list of leadership priorities. Authors help us all remember to keep extending the “grace and space” we heard so much about last year, both to our colleagues and ourselves. They explain why leaders should pay attention to teachers’ well-being, sense of purpose, and feelings of burnout (p. 48). They describe concrete strategies for supporting teachers and other staff with compassionate leadership (p. 26). And they explain how social support is a fundamental part of responding to crises, including racist incidents (p. 16).

Leaders need social and emotional support, too, especially in times like these. Authors recommend strategies for leaders to cultivate their own resilience (p. 48), hone their roles as learning leaders (p. 34), connect with peers through cross-district networks (p. 42), and keep growing as they keep going (p. 52).

School and system leaders have an undeniable impact on schools and students — and the pandemic is having an undeniable impact on leaders. For example, as we highlight in this issue’s At a Glance infographic (p. 89), national surveys show that 62% of principals reported lower morale in December 2020 than before the pandemic and 45% of U.S. principals reported that pandemic working conditions are accelerating their plans to leave the profession.

While we can’t change the stresses leaders and other educators are facing, we hope we can help you navigate them with thoughtful, practical, and diverse strategies so you can keep shining your light for schools and students. ■

# THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

## 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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# VOICES

## RESET YOUR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING VISION

**“D**istrict leaders have an opportunity right now to reset their professional learning efforts, thanks to new funding from reinvestment and recovery programs as well as a mandate for innovative solutions to unprecedented challenges.

“Instead of adopting piecemeal programs, leaders should be focused on a cohesive vision and on aligning resources and efforts to address common goals.”

— *“No more random acts  
of professional learning”*

p. **9**



**At all levels — in schools, districts, states, provinces, and charter management organizations — leaders who embrace high-quality professional learning enable teachers and students to fully experience its benefits.**

**Tracy Crow is chief strategy officer at Learning Forward.**

## CALL TO ACTION

Tracy Crow

# LEADERS PLAY KEY ROLES IN IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS

**A**s Learning Forward continues the process of revising the Standards for Professional Learning, an enduring focus of our conversations is the roles and responsibilities of leaders in using the standards.

At all levels — in schools, districts, states, provinces, and charter management organizations — leaders who embrace high-quality professional learning enable teachers and students to fully experience its benefits.

Although we believe that all educators, no matter their job title or role, are responsible for applying the standards to plan, implement, facilitate, experience, and evaluate professional learning, we recognize that leaders play a special part.

Leadership for professional learning is multifaceted. Leaders prioritize, enable, support, model, and uphold expectations for high-quality professional learning. Therefore, while both current and revised Standards for Professional Learning include a dedicated leadership standard, multiple standards are inclusive of and directly relevant to leaders.

Below are several key areas where leaders take actions to implement standards.

### Establish expectations

School and system leaders establish a vision for teaching and learning, in collaboration with educators, students, and community members. They make explicit the role of professional learning in achieving that vision and connect professional learning to strategic priorities and initiatives.

They articulate the expectation that achieving excellence and equity for each student is the purpose of professional learning. Through their decisions, actions, and relationships, leaders create cultures that center continuous high-quality learning for educators.

### Engage as learners

Leaders apply the Standards for Professional Learning for themselves as learners as well as for other educators they serve to build the knowledge, skills, and practices that are responsive to their contexts. For example, school leaders emphasize instructional leadership along with deepening their expertise in leading learning for the educators in their buildings.

Across levels, leaders identify networks and learning teams with role-alike colleagues within and beyond their systems. They communicate about the purpose of their learning and its results and articulate their expectations for other educators to do the same. In continually and visibly engaging as learners, school and system leaders model the importance of job-embedded collaborative learning.

### Provide resources

Leaders prioritize and secure resources for professional learning, including money, time, personnel, technology, and materials. For example, they make decisions about the curriculum and

*Continued on p. 10*







## WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Frederick Brown and Sharron Helmke

# NO MORE RANDOM ACTS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

**Districts need a comprehensive approach to professional learning that aligns goals and strategies across the entire system.**

**Frederick Brown is chief learning officer/deputy and Sharron Helmke is acting vice president, professional services at Learning Forward.**

**For more information about our professional services, contact Sharron Helmke, acting vice president, professional services at Learning Forward, at [sharron.helmke@learningforward.org](mailto:sharron.helmke@learningforward.org).**

**A**s schools seek to heal their communities after more than a year of disruption, professional learning is key to ensuring that educators at every level have the knowledge and capacity to meet students' and staff members' needs.

It may be tempting to address the list of needs one at a time, from academic catch-up to student mental health to teacher burnout. But random acts of professional learning do not ensure student success. Districts need a comprehensive approach to professional learning that aligns goals and strategies across the entire system.

District leaders have an opportunity to reset their professional learning efforts, thanks to new funding from reinvestment and recovery programs as well as a mandate for innovative solutions to unprecedented challenges. Instead of adopting piecemeal programs, leaders should be focused on a cohesive vision and aligning resources and efforts to address common goals.

As Sean Worley and Scott Palmer (2021) wrote in a recent blog post for The Wallace Foundation about how to use American Rescue Plan funds, "Don't just fill holes, plant seeds." When you plant seeds, you are investing in the long-term future of your district and your students.

At Learning Forward, we are encouraged by the number of districts reaching out to us for comprehensive professional learning planning and support. Through our professional services work with these districts, we have learned that the following elements are key for success.

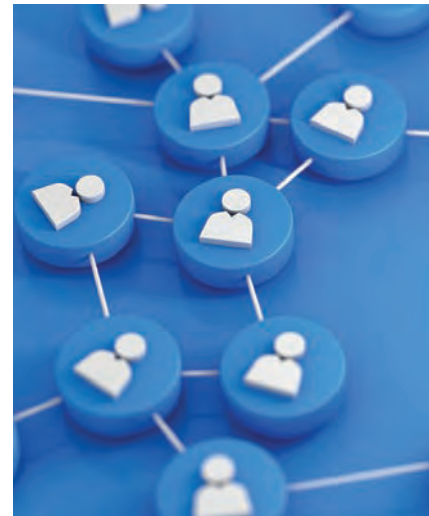
**A districtwide approach to professional learning starts with a logic model.** Logic models have a defined set of student goals and connect all initiatives and the work of all staff, from upper-level leaders to cafeteria workers and everyone in between, to those goals. In districts who have worked with us on developing a common logic model, like South Bend (Indiana) Community School Corporation, we observe shared purpose and consistent language that leads to powerful change for teaching and learning.

In contrast, when we observe districts where the mission and goals, strategic plan, and campus improvement plans are treated as separate efforts, leaders often struggle with prioritizing attention and effort, leaving teachers confused about how to implement improvement efforts that may feel disconnected and overwhelming.

Top-level leadership is essential. In the districts where we see the most traction with comprehensive professional learning for improved practice, like in Fort Wayne (Indiana) Community Schools, the superintendent is directly and consistently involved.

Through more than 10 years of work in Fort Wayne, then-superintendent Wendy Robinson participated alongside teachers and central office staff in planning and professional learning. That kind of engagement sends a powerful message and cements the commitment to common goals and language. This commitment is needed to scale and sustain best practice.

**Vertical alignment is as important as horizontal alignment.** Leaders often recognize the importance of all teachers engaging in consistent professional learning community (PLC) structures, using common assessments, and other strategies for horizontal alignment. But less commonly do



they recognize the importance of vertical alignment, making the work at one level contribute to and set up the conditions for the work at the next level.

Although the work of central office is ultimately in support of students, teachers often say they don't see the district's work as relevant to their classrooms — or they believe it is actually causing more problems and stress for them. Connections among the levels must be clear and consistent. That kind of alignment is the glue that holds a districtwide professional learning approach together.

We are seeing this approach in Arlington, Virginia, where the district has identified leadership competencies for the entire organization and is considering working toward them in communities of practice designed for everyone from bus drivers to teachers to central office staff.

**Thoughtful problems of practice create cohesion across levels.** Problems of practice focus educators' attention on specific needs and goals and drive the collaborative identification of strategic

steps to improvement. Engaging staff from all levels in identifying common or connected problems of practice is the glue that brings all of the professional learning work into alignment and turns organizations from a series of silos into learning systems.

Although specific problems of practice may look somewhat different for district leaders and teachers' PLCs, they should be aligned and focused on common goals to ensure success for all students.

These elements put districts on the path to a systemic approach to professional learning and therefore improving all educators' practice to meet students' evolving needs. Recovery and reinvestment funds can be a major asset for these efforts, but only if they are invested strategically and systemically.

The Council of the Great City Schools (2021) created a tool kit to help districts make those decisions wisely. It includes six questions that start with how the investments you're considering address current and long-term student needs and how they advance the

strategic plan, instructional priorities, vision, mission, and goals of the district.

We encourage you to engage in this kind of strategic thinking across your entire system, with professional learning as the backbone that builds capacity to address your goals and the initiatives that support them.

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## CALL TO ACTION

 / Tracy Crow

*Continued from p. 8*  
instructional materials educators use with students and dedicate time and funding to ensuring that professional learning aligns with and supports implementation of high-quality instructional materials.

System-level leaders hold primary responsibility for resource allocation and coordination (in collaboration with policymakers and leaders at other levels), while school leaders often make decisions about their schools' use of those resources.

### Address learning systemically

Leaders, particularly at the system or district level, create coherence by ensuring that professional learning aligns with priorities and strategic plans. This involves making connections and encouraging alignment across initiatives

and departments so that all educators are building their capacity to meet the vision and goals for every student.

When all educators are focused on continual learning, for themselves as well as their students, leaders succeed in creating a true learning system — that is, a system that learns and evolves to serve the needs of learners and a system where ambitious learning thrives.

Learning Forward is committed to building leaders' knowledge about and capacity for professional learning. Research continues to affirm the vital role of leaders for student success. A recent research synthesis commissioned by The Wallace Foundation found that the impact of principals in schools is greater than previously reported (Grissom et al., 2021).

Recognizing leaders' central role in professional learning is therefore

essential for fulfilling the aspirations of the Standards for Professional Learning — and the goals of educators, families, and communities more broadly. When we release revised Standards for Professional Learning in spring 2022, we will also publish several role-specific resources for putting the standards into practice. Look for our action guides for leaders and our ongoing investment in and supports for leaders.

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- 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](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/principalsynthesis) ■



## SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT

Gloria Ladson-Billings

# WE NEED TO DO A BETTER JOB TALKING ABOUT RACE

*The Learning Professional* recently spoke with Gloria Ladson-Billings, a keynote speaker for Learning Forward's 2021 Virtual Annual Conference. She previewed themes she'll be sharing with us in December about culturally relevant teaching in a COVID and post-COVID world.

Ladson-Billings is the former Kellner Family Distinguished Professor of Urban Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and faculty affiliate in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

The recipient of many awards for her work on culturally relevant pedagogy and success for marginalized students, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences in 2018. She is a past president of the American Educational Research Association and the author of the critically acclaimed books *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* and *Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms*.

### What do you tell educators about why it is important to talk about race?

I start by asking, "What do you believe education is meant to do?" Usually, people will say it should help us all improve and make us better. I push them to talk about what that means. Eventually, someone will say it means that superficial differences don't make a difference in student success.

So then I ask, "What if I told you I could predict your success by your ZIP code?" Eventually, they get where I'm going with this. We are allowing these superficial differences to make a difference. If that's not what we want, we have to address it.

I also point out that, as people who are participating in a deliberative democracy, talking about things is the way we get the work done. The Constitution came about as a result of talking about democracy, not just wishing for it. It took hard conversations, deliberating over every single world. This is our mechanism. We need to talk.

The discussion about race is not new. So why are we so exercised about it now? Because our children have brought this to our doorsteps. They've asked us questions: "Why was that man killed in the street?" "Why are people marching?" "Why do we have to say Black lives matter — do they matter?"

That discussion didn't come from schools. It couldn't have, because school wasn't in session. It came from the environment our kids are living in, what Carlos Cortes called the societal curriculum. He said that if we don't teach it, the world in which they exist will teach it to them.

That's why our children raised the questions. And they started telling us, "This isn't right, this isn't fair." While kids may not understand all the fine points of justice, they do understand the notion of fairness. And although the conversation didn't come from schools, the immediate response among educators was that we have to do a better job of talking about this.



**The Constitution came about as a result of talking about democracy, not just wishing for it. It took hard conversations, deliberating over every single world. This is our mechanism. We need to talk.**



**What advice do you have for education leaders who are navigating heated conversations about race?**

I've told my students for 40 years: You have to know the community in which you are working. When educators do this work skillfully, they say to their community, "This is a change we want to make, and we need your input."

You have to build the relationship before you can go anywhere with anti-racism. And you have to set the parameters, to say, "Here are the things I hope to take up, and the things I hope you will have a conversation about, too."

But it's also important to understand that many of the people we see protesting at school board meetings right now aren't parents in those districts. They're activists and operatives. We need to really know who are the parents in our communities.

It's also important to remember that we should start with what's important to students. We can't just come in with our agenda because the things that we care about might not be the things that students care about.

Here's an example of how to make the conversation about race meaningful to students and families, from a teacher I worked with in North Carolina. He asked students to go home and find out who in their families had benefitted from the GI bill. When they came back and discussed it, they noticed that all the white kids and none of the Black kids had stories about how their families had benefitted.

So he said, "Now let's go back and look at what the GI bill says." That was a powerful way to teach about discrimination. He didn't start with a lecture. He started with the students and the community.

**To engage in culturally relevant teaching, you recommend that educators do all three pillars of your framework: focus on students' academic success, develop their cultural competence, and increase their critical consciousness. How**



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**can educators weave those pieces together?**

Teachers need to understand the big picture about the work they're doing, not just how to get through the work on Monday. Here's an example of that, from a 4th-grade teacher. At the beginning of the year, she took pictures of every one of her students standing in the exact same place and made a bulletin board with the 25 pictures next to each other.

She had the kids move closer to the board from the back of the room and asked them every five steps, "What do you see?" From far away, they said that everybody looked the same. As they got closer, they saw more and more differences. Her point was that that's how humanity is — from the long view, we're very much the same, but the closer you get and the better you see us, you can see our differences.

Then the teacher said, "All year, we'll be grappling with these ideas of what it means to be the same and different." Those are big-picture concepts that are important for academic learning. Students will use that concept in chemistry when they talk about how bases and acids are similar and different and in biology when they compare mammals and amphibians.

And she brought in culture and the concept of cultural differences while she did it, so she built cultural competence. Later, she built on that to ask students what's different about living in different

places — for example, about Madison versus Milwaukee — to help students see that where you live shapes who you are and how you are in the world.

To introduce the critical consciousness piece, a teacher today could say, "What's different on the Gulf Coast than where we live? What's different now because of Hurricane Ida?" From there, she can ask, "What do you want to do about it? How can we help?" That's a critical consciousness question.

**That example shows how important it is to engage deeply and thoughtfully to do this kind of teaching. How can we help educators build those habits?**

I always ask teachers to do self-archaeology to learn about themselves and who they are in this work. Don't worry that you don't speak Spanish or Farsi. What *do* you speak, and why do you speak it? How long has it been spoken in your family? Doing that digging is important for teachers to decenter themselves and learn that the way they see the world is not the only one way to see it.

When I ask my college students "What is your culture?," they often say, "We don't really have a culture. We're just normal." It's hard for them to really look at themselves and understand that not everyone does things the same way. To do that digging is the heaviest lift that most teachers will have.

Also, teachers should always be asking themselves, "Why am I doing this, and why am I doing it this way?" That should become a driving question as an educator. We have to be much more mindful of the decisions we're making because they have consequences for students.

**That's more important than ever now, isn't it?**

This pandemic provides us with some opportunities, and I don't want us to squander them. It's the first time we've been asked to come to a full stop. We should not just go back to normal. Let's go to new. ■



## ADVISOR SPOTLIGHT

Beverly Hutton

# FUTURE LEADERS NEED OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND GROW

Beverly Hutton is chief programs officer at the National Association of Secondary School Principals and an advisor to *The Learning Professional*.

### What is your professional learning focus?

I am always thinking about how to grow the leadership pipeline, from teacher leaders to assistant principals to principals and up. We need to strengthen the whole pathway to leadership, and, to do that, educators need opportunities to learn and develop at every stage.

In districts, professional development staff tend to work mostly with teacher leaders around building teachers' capacity. But we need to also build those teacher leaders up for the future. How many districts include teacher leaders on horizontal leadership teams? They should include them so those future leaders can learn and grow into new roles.

### You have said that supporting assistant principals is key to school success. Why?

I was an assistant principal for half of my career in schools, and it was my favorite role because I got to create, ideate, and implement with the principal, but I had a little bit more freedom. But assistant principals are often underused. They are credentialed principals, so you're wasting your time if you're using them for menial tasks. And as future lead principals, they should be learning how to take the next step.

Lead principals have a responsibility to nurture, mentor, and prepare assistant principals. You do that through job-embedded opportunities to lead. That's what people did for me, and what I did for others when I was a principal. This is why the leadership pipeline is so important to me. I know how important it is to have a solid assistant principal experience, because otherwise, people become principals and they say, "Now what?" They have to run double time to catch up to their new responsibilities and expectations.

### What is one powerful professional learning experience you had as an assistant principal?

In my last assistant principalship, the principal and I would often sit and ideate about an issue. I learned so much from that. In one of those conversations, we talked about how parents were not coming to our monthly parent meetings, and we thought about what would engage them.

Our school was a career and technical education school with many wonderful programs, but I realized the parents only knew about the career majors of their own children. I decided to feature one or two of the career majors at every meeting, and since we were holding the meetings at a time of day when people were hungry, I featured our culinary arts program every time.

The parents and community members were so engaged that we ended up having great



**We need to strengthen the whole pathway to leadership and, to do that, educators need opportunities to learn and develop at every stage.**



conversations that led to partnerships with higher education, resulting in several dual enrollment opportunities for students. Reflecting with the principal helped me learn what our community needed. And the principal gave me the freedom and autonomy to run with it.

**What are some of the biggest challenges school leaders are facing today?**

Social and emotional support is a big need for school leaders, not only for their students and staff but also for themselves because they are dealing with a lot of stress. One of the biggest challenges is balancing work and family. School leaders deal with one crisis after another, and it's not easy to balance the competing priorities.

School leaders often sacrifice their

family lives. They miss out with their children, and their spouses often pick up a lot of it. Since the pandemic, many are realizing that they were not giving the time to their personal and family relationships that they thought they were. COVID-19 has forced us to recognize that we can't go on like this. It's why we're not as well as we could be.

**What advice do you have for education leaders navigating those challenges?**

I encourage principals and assistant principals to be more intentional about your time. Time runs over all of us, but we can be more intentional about our days. We can create more time for our work, our learning, and our personal lives by looking at all the moments we could repurpose from other things.

I've come to love this Zoom

world we live in now because there are so many ways we can use it for collaboration. But too many of us are having back-to-back meetings all day long. We're not making time for our work during the day, so we work into the evening to get our work done, which is not wise.

In education, we used to say it was a badge of honor to work 80 hours a week, but now that seems silly and unhealthy. I ask my staff not to schedule five or six meetings a day, to put 30 minutes between meetings, and to consider scheduling lunch into their calendars.

Some people really struggle with that, but it's important that the opportunity is there. And if you do it as a leader, it shows people that you care about them and you are modeling the behavior you are expecting. ■

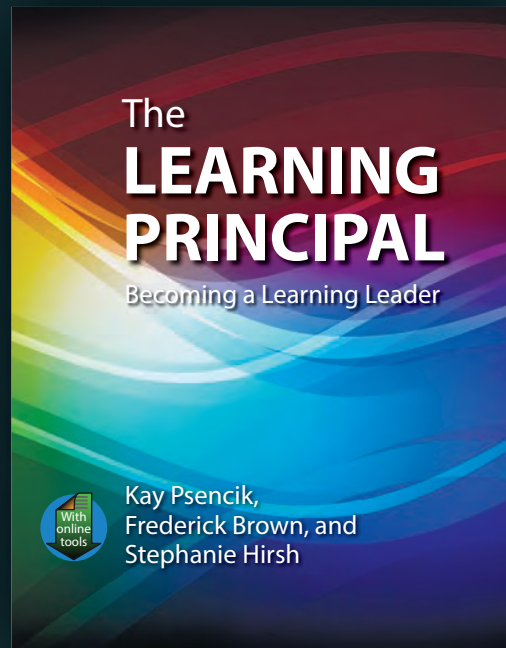
## *The Learning Principal: Becoming a Learning Leader*

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## COACHES CORNER

Sharron Helmke

# A COACH'S TASK IS TO PLANT THE SEEDS OF CHANGE

**A**s this issue's articles make clear, these are highly stressful times for schools. Of course, education is always a stressful profession. Even without a pandemic, educators navigate ever-evolving expectations in the form of shifting learning standards, student needs, governmental and societal expectations, and performance evaluations.

Instructional coaches play an important role as schools navigate those evolving demands. We are sometimes described as “catalysts for change” because we both inspire and support the implementation of change (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Our role is unique because we are positioned to be responsive to both leaders' and teachers' needs.

This can create tension. We are often tasked with developing positive relationships with teachers from a position as equal partners, while simultaneously advancing administrative and central office initiatives for improvement. We sometimes feel like each group of stakeholders expects us to advocate for its needs over others. Objectively speaking, the goals of teachers, administrators, and policymakers are not in conflict because they are all moving in the direction of student growth, but it may not feel that way in the day-to-day process of change.

These competing demands can leave us feeling stressed as we work to balance the urgency for improved results and the emotional needs of the teachers we support. Not only can this stress lead to feelings of overwhelm, decreased resilience, and eventual burnout, it can also lead to a very real decrease in our impact as coaches. Our own rising levels of stress can leave us less available to support the incremental growth of teachers and less patient with the process of creating sustainable change.

Too often, we may respond to this tension by making more demands of others or moving from responsive coaching into problem-solving or quick-fix solutions. But as Killion and Harrison point out, “Coaches acting as catalysts for change must be satisfied with planting seeds rather than being the director of every change effort” (2017, p.116). No seed has ever become a thriving plant because it was directed to grow faster.

Instead of trying to resolve the tension, we must recognize that it is an inherent part of change and focus on helping others negotiate it. We do that by clarifying expectations and helping teachers identify strengths and current practices that can underlie a series of manageable steps forward.

Effective coaches help teachers understand and tackle ambitious district and campus improvement goals by collaboratively working with teachers to consider questions like:

- What does this change look like in my content or grade level? In my instruction? With

*Continued on p. 18*



**We must recognize that tension is an inherent part of change and focus on helping others negotiate it.**

**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*.**





## EQUITY IN FOCUS

Angela M. Ward

# MEET RACIST INCIDENTS HEAD-ON WITH A CRISIS PLAN

**W**hen a racist incident occurred at one of the schools in my district, the community was unprepared to deal with the ensuing crisis. School leaders had a crisis intervention plan at their disposal, which worked well when a student attempted suicide or a member of the community died, yet no one considered it as a tool to intervene in this situation.

As an antiracist leader, I've always strived to make connections and not give people one more thing to add to their plate, so I set out to make the connection to the crisis plan explicit. Immediately, I recognized that there was a breakdown in communication and a lack of processes and protocols.

The strife and stress among the students, teachers, families, and community members were palpable. Throughout the process, I would need to keep our focus on supporting the social, emotional, and mental health of the student body and staff, including the students who caused harm.

I was particularly concerned about and responsive to the needs of the students and staff to whom the racial offense was directed. I identified with those who felt harmed, and I owned my position as a black person who was deeply impacted by the incident.

I reviewed the crisis plan and walked through the quick reference steps to determine the expected degree of trauma in the school, based on the who, how, and where of the situation. Who? The students were popular, everyone knew them. How? The incident was enacted through social media. Where? The incident had occurred off campus, but the reach of social media had made the issue visible and the harm repeatable across the community. The expected degree of trauma based on the simple formula in the quick reference steps was off the charts.

Because stress and tensions were high and the trauma pronounced, I knew I had to address the highly charged racial incident head-on and hand in hand with both school leadership and the community. I met with the campus principal, assistant principals, their leadership team, parents, students, and community members.

I then did a deep dive with leaders because my role in the district was one of antiracist professional learning design, implementation, and coaching support for leaders. I discussed the crisis intervention process with the principal, and we worked to adapt it for this situation.

I asked the leaders whom they had called the week before to support the community when the campus was dealing with a suicide attempt. How could we get their support with this incident as well?

I knew that our work had to go beyond responding to understanding what enabled the incident in the first place. One major barrier was that the principal, teachers, and staff were not comfortable discussing the taboo subject of race. That discomfort was paralyzing to them, and they saw no way to address the volatile situation that the racist incident had caused.

I engaged the leaders in critically self-reflective activities designed to bring issues to the surface and uncover the true campus culture. We found a campus culture that led students involved in

*Continued on p. 18*



### LEARN MORE

For more on the importance of and strategies for self-care for antiracist leaders, see my blog post at [learningforward.org/blog/](https://learningforward.org/blog/).

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## KEEP GROWING

Jim Knight

# WHAT I'VE LEARNED FROM A TRAUMATIC ACCIDENT

**From the moment that I was lifted into the ambulance, I recognized that I was about to learn a lot. When everything about your life gets disrupted, you can always expect to start learning.**

**T**he morning of July 4, I went for an early morning bike ride on my usual loop around my hometown. Just after starting, I hit a slippery patch on the trail, causing my wheels to go out from under me, and I crashed, shattering several bones in my hip and pelvis. I had to have extensive surgery, and I spent three weeks in two different hospitals recovering. In a flash, on that bicycle path, my life was turned upside down.

From the moment that I was lifted into the ambulance, I recognized that I was about to learn a lot. When everything about your life gets disrupted, you can always expect to start learning.

The change I experienced tangibly and quickly taught me the obvious lesson that each day, each experience, each person is precious, and we need to value all of it because everything can change in a moment. But there are a few other lessons I have been taught as I've recovered.

**Be patient — progress takes time.** For the first eight weeks of my recovery, I saw very little progress. I was discouraged, and I worried that I might never get better. However, as I write this, I am getting ready to walk without crutches, and each day, I am taking tiny steps forward.

Progress, I've learned, especially at the start, can be hard to see. Wise people stop doing things that aren't working, but they also need to guard against recklessly giving up before seeing results. Our obsession with quick fixes can keep us from seeing real fixes.

**Disrupt your routines to find new inspiration.** Like most people, I have a long list of tasks I need to complete, and each day I put my head down and try to do them all. After my crash, I couldn't do any of my scheduled tasks. Suddenly I had time to think, and that led to an explosion of ideas like I've never experienced before. Sometimes doing nothing might be the best work we can do.

**Plan to be inclusive.** My injury helped me see how easy it is to unintentionally exclude people we want to include. I often had experiences that were designed for everyone, but which I couldn't enjoy. For example, I read a short column on self-care, and every suggestion involved walking, something that was impossible for me.

As I move forward, I hope that I will think more carefully about how to include everyone. A simple act, such as using a microphone to ensure that everyone hears, can make a huge difference.

**Look for beauty.** When I got home from the hospital, I decided to fill my days with the music of J.S. Bach, listening to different compositions each day as I went about the dull, slow work of healing. My daily music ritual has done more than distract me — it has fed my soul.

Whether we experience beauty in the still, quiet of the morning, or in Captain America comics, or in the laughter of a 2-year old, beauty breathes life into us. Especially when times are tough, we need to make time for beauty because beauty will get us through.

**Remember that people are good.** One of the hardest parts of my injury was that I couldn't

*Continued on p. 18*



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do the tasks I had planned to do. It's hard to give a Zoom workshop when you're in a hospital bed taking painkillers. Within hours, my colleagues selflessly volunteered to do my work, adding more to their plates to take everything off my plate. They told me, "Don't worry, we've got this. Just get better."

Recognizing the fundamental goodness of other people might be my most important lesson. Throughout my injury, family, friends, coworkers, and complete strangers have put down what they are doing to help me do what I need to do. This was important for me to see.

I've seen so much hatred, division,

and fear in our world that I had begun to wonder whether human compassion no longer existed. But since my crash, I have no doubt that people care deeply for each other. Caring is our default mode. That's a lesson I hope I never forget. ■

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**COACHES CORNER** / Sharron Helmke

*Continued from p. 15*

- my students?
- What aspects of this change, even small ones, are already emergent in my current teaching? What would the next step into this aspect of the work look like?
- What upcoming learning objectives or standards offer a chance to practice or lean into this work in a way that would benefit learners? Is the coach available to assist in planning this upcoming work, offer classroom support during these early efforts, or reflect on the impact of these changes?
- What are the early indicators

of success for both change in teaching practice and in student outcomes? The more immediate and accessible these indicators are, the more quickly we can either see progress or adjust our approach.

Additionally, coaches can help build teachers' resilience for change by occasionally helping them look backward to reflect on the changes that have already been mastered and become seamlessly incorporated into current practice. In doing so, we remind them that these changes, now part of current practice, were once also new, unfamiliar, and perhaps even felt a bit out of reach. Each time we step toward change, we build resilience and

confidence to tackle the next change, and the next — because we know they will keep coming. It's the nature of the work.

A coach's task is to facilitate growth, not to eliminate the need for it. Those are two very different tasks, and mistaking the nature of the work will undoubtedly lead to coaches experiencing burnout and teachers missing opportunities for improvement.

**REFERENCE**

**Killion, J. & Harrison, C. (2017).** *Taking the lead: New roles for teacher and school-based coaches* (2nd ed.). Learning Forward. ■

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**EQUITY IN FOCUS** / Angela M. Ward

*Continued from p. 16*

the racial incident to think their actions were harmless.

As we reflected and planned to support all students and shift the culture moving forward, black staff members wondered aloud why I was the only person to show up to support them, noting that a contingency from central administration shows up to their campus when a staff member or student dies or commits suicide.

An additional focus of my work districtwide was to implement antiracist professional learning to all staff. I designed professional learning as an entry point to help staff build capacity to address racist issues and issues involving other social identities using actual scenarios that we were dealing with in our schools.

This process eventually led to a shift. The district has revised its crisis response plan to implement a strategic

response to issues arising from race that includes antiracist professional learning as a proactive strategy. Supporting this process was intense and highly stressful.

As an antiracist leader, I knew that self-care is critical to my ability to find meaningful connection and provide supports to my colleagues. I continue to prioritize self-care and encourage other educators to do the same as we lead in stressful times. ■

EXAMINE. STUDY. UNDERSTAND.

# RESEARCH



## THE FAMILY FACTOR

**D**uring remote schooling related to COVID-19, families became an even more salient factor in student learning. How can schools build on that to engage families meaningfully?

The Center for Public Research and Leadership conducted a study of how schools and districts can expand the traditional concept of the instructional core (teacher, student, and curriculum and instructional materials) to include families as a fourth component.

The researchers documented four key lessons for moving forward:

1. Ensure that instructional materials are accessible to, informative for, and culturally responsive to families;
2. Leverage instructional materials to coordinate the learning activities of teachers, families, and students;
3. Prioritize professional learning about how to use high-quality instructional materials with students and families; and
4. Include families and students in designing, monitoring, and improving learning experiences.

**Source:** Center for Public Research and Leadership. (2021, July 27). *Fundamental 4: Pandemic learning reveals the value of high-quality instructional materials to educator-family-student partnerships*. [cprl.law.columbia.edu/content/fundamental-4-pandemic-learning-reveals-value-high-quality-instructional-materials-educator](https://cprl.law.columbia.edu/content/fundamental-4-pandemic-learning-reveals-value-high-quality-instructional-materials-educator)



## RESEARCH REVIEW

Elizabeth Foster

### ► THE STUDY

**Reich, J. & Mehta, J. (2021, July 21).**

*Healing, community, and humanity: How students and teachers want to reinvent schools post-COVID.*  
doi.org/10.35542/osf.io/nd52b

**Elizabeth Foster (elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org) is vice president, research & standards at Learning Forward. In each issue of *The Learning Professional*, Foster explores recent research to help practitioners understand the impact of particular learning practices on student outcomes.**

# WHAT'S NEXT FOR SCHOOLS? INSIGHTS FROM STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

**A**s the COVID-19 pandemic continues, educators, students, families, and community members are seeking ways to ensure students' needs are met across a range of academic, social, and emotional considerations. They are also looking ahead to the future, recognizing there may be opportunity for innovation after the last 18 months reset expectations for teaching and learning and made us think differently about what students need to help them learn and thrive.

Recent research by Justin Reich and Jal Mehta offers information, insights, and recommendations from students and teachers about ways to reinvent schools and improve learning environments for everyone's benefit.

## METHODOLOGY

In spring 2021, the researchers undertook three strategies to understand teachers' and students' reflections about the previous school year and their thoughts about what they needed for the year ahead.

First, they invited elementary, middle, and high school teachers from across the country to interview groups of their own students and document what they heard. They used these five questions:

1. What have you liked about learning from home?
2. What has been hard about learning from home?
3. What do you hope adults will do (or not do) to make school better next year?
4. What did you lose or miss out on because of the pandemic?
5. What are you most proud of from this past year?



This portion of the study drew on findings from 200 teachers who interviewed more than 4,000 K-12 students. This represents a convenience sample of the first 200 teachers who responded to the research team's virtual outreach. (It is worth noting that there is an overrepresentation of teachers from Boston and the surrounding metro area.)

Next, the researchers interviewed 50 classroom teachers representing a wide range of grade levels, content areas, geographic locations, and types of schools (public, private, charter).

Finally, the research team conducted 10 sessions, called design charettes, with students, teachers, school leaders and family members to gather their ideas and recommendations for the 2021-22 school year. In these sessions, the researchers used a process that guides participants in thinking creatively about solutions to a defined problem.

Stakeholders participated in a series of structured activities designed to identify what worked well in the pandemic, what can be discarded, and what needs to be created. The researchers



advised participants to engage in thoughtful reflection and planning about innovative strategies that would meet their needs moving forward.

## FINDINGS

The researchers used what they refer to as “an emic, grounded theory approach to identify key themes in the data,” meaning that they analyzed the data in an inductive approach of identifying emerging themes, rather than seeking alignment with an existing framework or theory.

Overall, teachers and students feel that healing, community, and what the researchers call “humane reinvention” will be central to future academic and overall success. The research found students and teachers appreciated the opportunity to slow down and pay attention to relationships among teachers, students, families, and the community.

Both students and teachers said they would advise policymakers to focus not on remediation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but rather on longstanding structural issues such as uncomfortable learning environments, restrictive curricula, lack of opportunities for interest-based learning, dress codes, discipline policies, and early start times that are challenging for adolescent brains.

### **Student and teacher interviews**

The research revealed two main themes among students and teachers. The first centered on relationships and social development. Students felt a profound and complex sense of loss of social connection during the pandemic.

While some students enjoyed the respite from social activities and

### **JAL MEHTA TO SPEAK AT CONFERENCE**

Jal Mehta will be a keynote speaker at the Learning Forward 2021 Virtual Annual Conference. For more information and to register, visit [conference.learningforward.org](https://www.learningforward.org).

appreciated fewer distractions and more support while working from home, they also missed their peers, sports, activities, and academic and social milestones. Students expressed concern about how that isolation will impact their social skills going forward as well as relationships that might have floundered due to lack of contact.

Similarly, teachers emphasized relationships and community, acknowledging the need to build relationships and integrate social and emotional learning into classes. They reported appreciation for changes like reduced schedules that afforded them more time to slow down and build deeper connections with their students and said they would like to make community building and relationship building more of an integrated, systemic part of their teaching.

The second theme centered on the development of student autonomy during the pandemic. Students reported that the separation from teachers and school supports encouraged them to be more independent, and they enjoyed the comfort and flexibility that learning at home afforded them.

They developed new skills, coping mechanisms, and resiliency because of having to complete work without

a teacher in the room, manage new technology and schedules, and adapt to different learning environments. And students, like many of us, appreciated the ability to wear what they wanted, eat and drink when they needed to, and move around at will.

For their part, teachers recognized the opportunity in students’ newfound autonomy. They expressed confidence in students’ ability to manage certain freedoms and interest in building that into their classes in the future. Many recognized that the closed schools over the pandemic meant freedom from overdirection, disciplinary practices, or negative peer dynamics for some students.

The researchers, too, noted that “the self-directed learning skills that students developed during emergency remote schooling are assets that teachers will be able to build upon for years to come.”

The question of learning loss was not top of mind for students or teachers. Students commented more about their lost year of childhood or adolescence than a lost year of academic content. Similarly, the researchers pointed out, “Not once did we hear teachers describe remediating lost learning through assessment and targeted remediation as their top priority for next year.”

The researchers suggest that policymakers would do well to consider the input of educators with regard to focusing on learning loss and prioritizing remediation or, in fact, to any one-size-fits-all plan for the year ahead.

Teachers and students alike shared their opinions and feelings not only about the return from the pandemic but also about longstanding inequities

in schools that became more apparent during the pandemic. Prompts by the researchers about potential federal investments in schools invited discussions about underinvestment in infrastructure such as labs and classrooms and quality-of-life issues, including school lunches, dress codes, and flexible seating.

Students reported wanting to return to the routines and social aspects of school but not to the constraints they had been experiencing long before the COVID-19 pandemic, such as discipline policies they perceived as unfair and lack of attention to social and emotional needs.

Overall, teachers reported a commitment to taking the lessons learned and professional growth from the past year into the new year to build on lessons learned and innovations, but they also acknowledged the need to recover from the demands of the past year.

### Design charrettes

The researchers describe design charrettes as “an intense, collaborative, design-focused in-person or virtual meeting with a mixture of students, teachers, principals, district administrators, and parents.”

They began with facilitators asking participants to discuss what they believed other stakeholders would identify as their most pressing needs

### Students reported wanting to return to the routines and social aspects of school but not to the constraints they had been experiencing long before the COVID-19 pandemic.

and reflect on practices they wanted to keep, let go of, or create. Participants considered how different education stakeholders viewed the challenge of reopening by answering this question: “What are students/families/teachers/administrators hoping to solve next year?” Their answers were collected via virtual posters and sticky notes.

In the second activity, called Amplify, Hospice, and Create, participants discussed what to keep, what to discard, and how to best move forward. The researchers summarized and sorted the themes that emerged in virtual chats and a shared virtual document.

Echoing the findings of the interviews and focus groups, reconnecting and strengthening relationships came up as a prominent theme. For students, the most pressing issues were rebuilding relationships and social connections. Among teachers, the researchers noted that feelings of pain and frustration were often couched in constructive comments about a desire

for more community building and a call for time and support for healing.

To help participants think beyond the current realities of school structures and imagine how schools might be different in the future, the researchers asked participants to think metaphorically and creatively about the future of schooling. To summarize the ideas that emerged, the researchers grouped and described three metaphors based on the conversations:

- Schools as church and temple in that they are a community bound by ritual and shared identity;
- Schools as place of healing in their focus on mental health check-ins and caring conversations; and
- Schools as family reunion with a recognition that individuals who grow and experience life differently come together to recognize and celebrate each other.

### IMPLICATIONS

Based on these findings, the researchers recommend three guiding principles for the year ahead. The recommendations are grounded in the researchers’ appreciation of the complexity of change, especially in schools and among those who have experienced pain, grief, frustration, and disconnection due to the pandemic.



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THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

1. Don't define this year as a return to normal. For too many students, normal schooling wasn't meeting their needs.
2. Amplify key ideas from pandemic schooling, and let go of things that don't need to come back. Have the school year start with a few noticeable changes.
3. Engage in a year of reflection to celebrate the successes from pandemic schooling, grieve our losses, and harness the energy from the emergency to continue to build back better.

Putting the researchers' recommendations into practice will require collaborative learning among everyone involved in schools, and that work should be guided by the **Standards for Professional Learning**. This qualitative research study offers strategies and several tools to help

**Don't define this year as a return to normal. For too many students, normal schooling wasn't meeting their needs.**

educators in that work.

A tool kit is available as an appendix to the report that includes the interview protocol, a data visualization tool, a protocol for an activity to generate specific action from stakeholder input, and a visioning exercise to turn stakeholder feedback into a set of principles to guide planning for schools.

The tool kit can help educators apply the **Implementation** standard. For example, the thoughtful structures and activities that guide the Amplify, Hospice, and Create exercises are an example of an effective use of change management principles to lay out a plan for an anticipated change.

Understanding what people want to hold on to versus what they are willing or eager to get rid of helps guide planning for the period ahead.

The tool kit and the findings from the research also highlight the importance of attending to the **Learning Designs** standard. For example, this research points to the need for ongoing, focused, embedded professional learning about how to integrate social and emotional learning into educators' daily work, invite and encourage more student voice and agency, and sustain and deepen relationships built during the pandemic between families and educators. Respecting and nurturing these facets of students' learning experiences requires well-designed professional learning that draws on research about how adults learn and how to effect change. ■

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# DATA POINTS

## 61% OF DISTRICTS PLANNED TO USE ARP FUNDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

In July 2021, the School Superintendents Association surveyed hundreds of U.S. district leaders about their plans for American Rescue Plan (ARP) and other federal COVID-19 relief funding to address pandemic-related student learning recovery. More than half (61%) planned to invest in professional development, especially in urban and rural districts, and nearly a quarter planned to build a “diverse teacher preparation pathway” to address teacher shortages. Other ways districts planned to build staff capacity included hiring more specialized support staff and improve data systems and data literacy among educators.

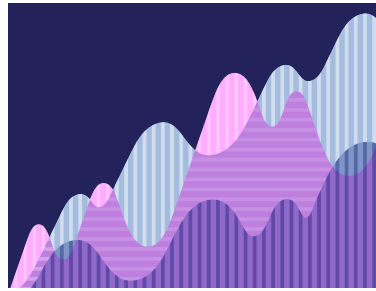
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## 25% OF DISTRICTS RELIED ON TEACHER-DEVELOPED CURRICULUM MATERIALS DURING THE PANDEMIC

According to a survey of more than 2,000 administrators and teachers, most districts constructed their curricula during the COVID-19 pandemic from multiple sources. More than 85% of districts said teachers developed some of their own material, and 25% reported such materials to be their main source of curriculum.

A slightly higher percentage of districts (37%) relied primarily on commercial curricula, while only 4% relied on curricula designed for online teaching and 2% relied on open educational resources. Although 70% of teachers engaged in professional learning about online or remote teaching during the year, only 51% participated in learning directly related to their curricular materials.

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## 2 LEADERSHIP FACTORS PREDICT TEACHER WELL-BEING DURING COVID

In a spring 2020 study of 325 Australian teachers, researchers examined the impact of different types of school leadership on teachers’ well-being and adjustment during COVID-19. When teachers reported that principals engaged in autonomy-supportive leadership (e.g. inviting their input and listening to their opinions), teachers were less likely to feel stressed, experience physical manifestations of that stress, and experience emotional exhaustion. Those relationships were partly explained by an increase in teachers’ “workplace buoyancy” (a concept similar to resilience that is specific to a workplace context). In contrast, autonomy-thwarting leadership was associated with more emotional exhaustion.

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## 74% OF PARENTS BELIEVE TEACHERS ARE PREPARED TO HELP KIDS CATCH UP

According to PDK’s latest annual Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, most parents approve of how their children’s schools and teachers have handled learning during the pandemic. Sixty-three percent of parents say they would give their children’s teachers an A or B rating for their pandemic response last year. Looking ahead, 74% believe their children’s schools are prepared to help students catch

up on academics they missed last year, and 69% believe they are prepared to help students cope with the social and emotional impact of the pandemic school year.

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## 2.2 PERCENTAGE POINT INCREASE IN TEACHER RETENTION THANKS TO MENTORING

In a Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest study of district supports for improving teacher retention, teachers were significantly more likely to remain in their positions in districts with: new-teacher mentoring programs (92% of teachers with mentoring versus 90% without); regular, supportive communication from school leaders (92% versus 90%); a school orientation program (92% versus 90%); and opportunities for teachers to set goals in their evaluations (92% versus 87%). The availability of these supports varied across type of support and school and district characteristics, with such supports more available in more advantaged communities.

[bit.ly/2YbFepj](https://bit.ly/2YbFepj)

## 2 PERCENTAGE POINT INCREASE IN TEACHERS OF COLOR

A study by Brendan Bartanen and Jason A. Grissom published in the *Journal of Human Resources* found that the race of the school principal predicts the racial composition of the school’s teachers. Using data from Tennessee and Missouri, the researchers found that principals increase the proportion of same-race teachers in the school by 1.9-2.3 percentage points. This effect appears to be attributable to both hiring patterns and retention rates of same-race teachers.

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INFORM. ENGAGE. IMMERSE.

# FOCUS

LEADERSHIP UNDER PRESSURE



## WHAT IT TAKES TO THRIVE IN A CRISIS

**T**he unprecedented nature of the [COVID-19] crisis has forced all educators to become learners. For many educators, this process has felt chaotic and uncertain. But leaders who committed to being learners themselves and supported their teachers to do the same were able to rise to meet the needs of the moment.

— *“From survival to opportunity: 3 leadership capacities allow schools to thrive during times of crisis”*

p. **30**



# As crises mount, respond with compassionate leadership

BY WENDY E. BARON, ARTHUR L. COSTA, AND ROBERT J. GARMSTON

In August 2020, when schools were plagued with uncertainties about opening, we talked with Juan, a middle school principal. He was exhausted after a full day of meetings with teacher and parent groups. Although we had planned to talk about the school's intended professional development, we instead listened as he described his situation.

"You can't believe the stress I'm

experiencing," Juan said, collapsing into the swivel chair in his office. "Welcome to the house of equal opportunity in the land of stress. How to open school this fall is a nightmare. Teachers are anxious about keeping their students safe. At the same time, they are concerned for their own health and that of their families. I'm feeling tremendous empathy for parents, teachers, and kids."

Tears welled up in his eyes. "They

have two lousy choices: open classrooms to in-person learning and risk student and teacher health or have students stay home with all difficulties of distance learning. One dad who was trying to teach his kids last spring while managing the household and a job said it was like living in a popcorn machine. I'm worried that the quality of learning and relationships will suffer at home."

Taking a tissue from the box on his



## Compassionate responsiveness may be the most powerful motivator known, as it gently encourages a deeper discovery of ourselves.

desk usually reserved for a disturbed teenager, a disillusioned teacher, or a perplexed parent, he wiped the moisture from his eyes. “And like a set of Russian nesting dolls, inside each one is another demand. How can I respond to the incredible complexity that is constantly changing shape?” Choking up, he cleared his throat. His overwhelming fatigue and compassion were evident.

These are unusual times. Old ways of doing things are gone, never to be regained. Compassion and adaptivity are the leading edges of today’s professional development for school leaders (Garmston & Wellman 2016). Our intention is to provide prospective and current leaders with understandings about responding compassionately.

### WHY NOW?

The COVID-19 pandemic is a reminder that schools are complex systems in which everything affects everything else and that more important than materials and schedules are energy, commitment, and community. New priorities emerge, with the mental and physical health of every student and educator being the most important.

Chaotic and volatile conditions require leaders who are committed to clarity, creating a positive, healthy climate with connected relationships with every student, teacher, and parent. A compassionate mindset is a prerequisite to productively addressing family crises and social issues such as

equity, racism, illness, and weather-related disasters.

### THE MEANING OF COMPASSION

The Latin root for the word “compassion” is *pati*, which means “to suffer” and the prefix *com-* means “with.” Compassion, originating from *compati*, literally means “to suffer with.”

Compassion is a willingness and desire to be kind to others. It means being thoughtful and aware of what others’ lives and experiences are like. At its root, it describes a deeper sense of understanding — rather than seeing others as separate entities, seeing them as a part of yourself and relating to what they are experiencing at a much deeper level.

Compassion exists when you are confronted with another’s suffering and you feel motivated to relieve that suffering. Compassion comes from the heart and offers kindness, empathy, generosity, and acceptance. Other leadership qualities like vision, decisiveness, and navigating multiple time horizons come from the head. Both are essential, especially now.

Above all, compassion opens us to the reality of suffering and aspires to its healing — a tangible expression of love.

### COMPASSIONATE LEADERS

We consider the term “leader” as descriptive of actions and not limited to title.

Compassionate leaders influence

others through inspiring, encouraging, empowering, and embodying. Who has not recalled a time when they were listened to with warmth and caring? Such occasions were likely associated with personal growth, seeded by empathic exchanges with a person of respect. Compassionate responsiveness may be the most powerful motivator known, as it gently encourages a deeper discovery of ourselves.

Compassionate leadership is a mindset and set of behaviors that anyone and everyone can embody. Leadership behaviors, even when unnoticed and unspoken, affect the climate, character, and destinations of schools. They are catalysts to building strong communities with harmonious, clear values and beliefs. Their members listen deeply, think critically and creatively, and are open to growing and learning — inescapable requirements for addressing concurrent global and local crises.

### CREATING A CULTURE OF COMPASSION

Humans spend enormous energy managing the impression others have of them. In cultures of compassion, they can let go of that, reveal vulnerabilities, and bring their most authentic selves to one another and students (Edmonson, 2019).

In compassionate cultures, members expose their confusion, doubts, worries, and failings as much as their convictions, successes, and joys. Leaders

might be heard saying “I’m not sure what to do now” or “I don’t know how to ...” and even “forgive me, I made a mistake,” confident that acceptance and nonjudgment are cultural norms.

As leaders openly examine their own biases, feelings about others, predispositions, beliefs, mindsets, and past experiences, they open the door for other group members to examine their own biases and judgments. This openness and acceptance of one’s understory paves the way for more difficult conversations about such issues as equity, racism, environmental destruction, and social justice.

As a result of creating a culture where adults and students can speak up, the group may marshal the resources and build coalitions that enable lasting change for the greater good.

Compassionate leaders seek inclusiveness and work to create cultures of belonging. They express and affirm feelings and support the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of the group with self-care and stress management strategies. Small yet thoughtful actions such as saying thank you, helping one another, remembering birthdays, and expressing gratitude are evidence of a compassionate culture. Belonging words such as “we, our, us” are heard often instead of “me, mine, my.”

Leaders roll up their sleeves, volunteering to work with others, and foster collaboration by listening deeply, sharing responsibilities, and making space for others to lead. Knowing how to listen to and explore ideas as well as make decisions with engagement from all stakeholders, compassionate leaders embody responsiveness to the diverse needs of the group. They create a culture characterized by caring, respectful relationships among adults and with students in which a sense of belonging and attention to equity and social justice is evident.

Most importantly, in compassionate cultures, leaders listen to understand, they suspend judgment, and respond with curiosity — inviting



others to think, reflect, learn, research, create, innovate, share different points of view, and gain insights from one another.

In cultures of compassion, leaders encourage others to express their ideas fully, empathize with expressions of emotion, and show a willingness to let others influence and change them.

**COMPASSIONATE RESPONSIVENESS**

Over time, we explore and deepen our understanding of compassionate responsiveness and become more attuned to situations in which compassion is essential. We become more skillful, strategic, and critically self-reflective of our own behaviors and work to continuously improve, realizing that learning to use compassionate responsiveness is always a work in progress (Costa & Kallick, 2020).

The journey of compassionate leadership can be understood as a series of progressive steps that include the following. (See diagram above.)

**Awareness**

Through reading, learning, and

interacting with others, we deepen our understanding of compassion. We expand our language of compassion: empathy, forgiveness, consideration, and kindheartedness. We distinguish from what it is not: indifference, contempt, disrespect, insensitivity.

We recognize emotions in others and connect them to our own feeling experiences. We celebrate the achievements and successes with others who are celebrating, mourn with those who are mourning, and cry with those who are crying. We reflect on times when we have felt these emotions and had others respond to us with compassion. We remember when we wished for compassion from others.

Labeling emotions, understanding the underlying causes for those emotions, and recognizing behaviors related to those emotions means we are developing awareness of self and others. We are becoming more observant — the first step toward being able to regulate our emotions and choose our actions.

**Expanding capacities**

Noticing is key. Observing our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors

as well as those of others enables us to make wiser, more compassionate decisions in the moment. For example, when in a brainstorming meeting, we may want to assert our own ideas and judge others' ideas. Consumed with our own thinking, we fail to predict that those actions will irritate others or even stop their participation.

When we pause to observe what we are thinking and feeling before acting, we quickly realize we should listen with curiosity and empathize with others rather than judge their ideas. We put our ideas out on the table gently, respectfully, with an invitation for others to consider.

As we learn and practice compassionate responsiveness, we become more skillful, with a larger repertoire of strategies. We begin to notice our own "self-talk" and become increasingly able to replace negative and critical self-talk with more positive, optimistic, and loving thoughts.

As we expand personal capacities, we are more able to call on and employ different responses more effectively. We learn when and how to listen deeply, to identify emotions by observing body language, facial expressions, eye movements, tears, posture, and intonations.

As we cultivate the emotional skills of noticing, reflecting, and regulating, we also grow in our understanding of perspectives. We look beyond a particular situation to appreciate the conditions, injustices, oppression, inequities, and feelings of powerlessness that may be producing certain emotions and actions. We replace the energy of despair with the exuberance of hope and offer a response of compassion.

### **Increasing alertness and recognizing opportunities**

Increasingly, we become more sensitive to cues from others and the environment, recognizing when a challenging situation may be causing an emotional reaction. Initially, we may find it easy to engage in compassion in familiar, often simple contexts.

Over time, we become more alert to opportunities in new and complex situations.

The act of paying repeated, purposeful, and focused attention creates chemical and physical changes in the brain which, in turn, shapes our personal identity. As we become more alert, we respond compassionately more consistently and intuitively in ever more complex social situations. We learn that responding to one emotion may activate the expression of others, and we remain present and attentive when this occurs. Denial may be expressed with anger, rejection may produce feelings of fear, and brooding may be a product of grief.

As a result, we become better able to predict situations that may surface more intense emotions and are more skillful in facilitating an exchange of diverse perspectives, revealing underlying beliefs and experiences, and encouraging others to listen, empathize, and join together in responsive, compassionate actions.

### **Extending values**

As we reflect on our own and others' experiences, we recognize that responding compassionately leads to better relationships and builds community. We observe that others are more able and likely to reveal and describe their feelings. We notice a better sense of self-confidence and optimism when facing difficult situations.

Recognizing the value of compassionate response strategies, we make a commitment to using them even more widely. Compassionate responsiveness is important not only in particular situations, but also more transcendentally as a pattern of behavior in our lives — to disadvantaged, disempowered populations, to other living creatures, and to the environment.

### **Building commitment**

As we recognize the effects of compassionate behaviors, we become

advocates for their use. For example, during a meeting to address a complex issue, a leader may begin by surfacing feelings about that problem. When in a difficult conversation, we may suggest that we each listen to one another with empathy and respect. We commit to compassionate responsiveness in our own behaviors as well as promoting the same in others.

Compassionate responsiveness grows as we become more alert to opportunities to respond with compassion and extend our values to feel the suffering of others. We set goals for improvement, monitor our progress, and make adjustments along the way. Through our demonstrable commitment, we improve our relationships with others, build a culture of compassion in our communities, and become increasingly effective as leaders.

### **Internalization**

Compassionate responsiveness can never be fully mastered. However, it can mature into more than just sets of learned behaviors and become more like a mindset. When we internalize compassionate responsiveness, we require no prompting. Instead, we demonstrate and urge others to enrich their environments with acts of caring, concern, and tenderness.

It becomes an internal compass to guide our actions, decisions, and thoughts. When confronted with complex decisions, we ask ourselves, "What is the most compassionate action I can take right now? What strategies do I have at my disposal that could benefit others? Who else do I need to think about? What intrigues me about this situation, and how might I learn from it? How might I use this opportunity to reaffirm my pledge for justice, dignity, hope, and love?"

Compassionate responsiveness is contagious. If leaders, teachers, and parents were to embrace, internalize, and teach these responsive practices, the world might experience the spread of

*Continued on p. 33*





# From survival to opportunity

## 3 LEADERSHIP CAPACITIES ALLOW SCHOOLS TO THRIVE DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

BY JENNIFER AHN AND ELIZABETH SHAFER

**A**s schools grapple with the daunting challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, some leaders are galvanizing their staff to maintain focus on instruction, while others are overwhelmed by the operational logistics of constant change. What makes the difference? And what types of support can help struggling leaders to thrive despite the challenges?

Through our work at Lead by Learning, a nonprofit organization of Mills College's School of Education that partners with schools and districts to provide educator professional

learning, we have identified three essential capacities that are key to school leaders' ability to lead effectively through change. These capacities are learner, partner, and visionary.

These capacities emerged primarily through working with two large urban school districts in the San Francisco, California, Bay Area: West Contra Costa Unified and Oakland Unified. Throughout the pandemic, we worked with these districts, coaching leaders and working with their teachers, working with and observing principal communities of practice, interviewing principals, talking to teachers about

high-impact leadership moves from their principals, and talking to district leaders about effective school leadership.

### THE LEARNER

At the heart of change is learning. This may seem obvious, but we frequently forget this when we are swept away by the urgency to change, especially to address vital issues like inequity. Action is important. But when we don't pause to learn — to examine what is going on around us and make sense of what teachers, students, and families are experiencing — we plan

blindly. We jump to solutions without understanding root causes. In our urgency, we forget to engage in the deep learning and awareness-building that leads to lasting, impactful change.

When leaders embody a learning stance, they get curious about what's happening around them. They wonder about what their students and teachers are experiencing, and they lean into the questions that emerge as they try to meet their community's needs. They strive to see the whole child, teacher, or community member — who they are, what strengths they possess, and what they need.

Leaders who are learners don't assume that they have all the answers. Instead, they share their questions and uncertainties with those around them and invite others to push their thinking and supportively challenge their assumptions. They see data as an important ally, not only to measure success, but also to understand their learners' strengths and needs to adapt their leadership and work toward equity-seeking change.

This way of learning publicly encourages teachers to be curious, too. When leaders model asking courageous questions and inviting colleagues to help them confront blind spots, they are creating space for teachers to do the same. When leaders become learners, they model what it looks like to honestly investigate one's practice instead of maintaining the appearance of success. They inspire others to learn by learning alongside them, naming

their learning process aloud.

This powerful leadership move supports schools to become learning communities that continuously ask: What's happening for our students? Is that what we want to see happening? What do we need to do to better support our students, especially those who are most vulnerable?

This kind of leadership has been especially important during the pandemic. The unprecedented nature of the crisis has forced all educators to become learners. For many educators, this process has felt chaotic and uncertain. But leaders who committed to being learners themselves and supported their teachers to do the same were able to rise to meet the needs of the moment.

For example, in one of Lead by Learning's partner schools in Richmond, California, teachers and leaders credit a culture of learning publicly with their successful effort to pivot quickly and effectively to remote learning, with powerful results for their students.

The teachers and principal came together weekly to openly discuss their challenges and uncertainties and support each other to change their practice based on what they were learning from students. The principal cultivated this culture by continuously modeling learning herself.

Through these conversations, the teachers and the principal created innovative ways to understand student progress, such as gathering

## A LEADER WHO IS

### A LEARNER:

- Publicly models a learning stance (curiosity, vulnerability, trust, flexibility, adaptability);
- Uses data to make adult and student learning visible;
- Adapts and improves by deepening self-awareness; and
- Leads collaborative learning by experiencing and reflecting on conditions that have supported their own learning.

## A LEADER WHO IS

### A PARTNER:

- Values multiple perspectives and seeks thought partnership;
- Listens deeply with empathy and care, looking first for assets and connections;
- Builds relationships that cultivate a culture of professional respect, trust, agency, and distributed leadership; and
- Supports rigorous learning steeped in social and emotional learning.

## A LEADER WHO IS

### A VISIONARY:

- Puts students at the center of learning by identifying and returning to high-leverage goals that target students' needs;
- Communicates purpose and progress in humanizing, authentic ways to build awareness and support continuous improvement;
- Creates space to move beyond transactional compliance to curiosity and collective efficacy; and
- Is driven by a moral imperative.

video recordings of students doing science experiments in their homes, and prioritized small-group virtual instruction as a way to differentiate.

### THE PARTNER

The work of a principal can be isolating. Often, school leaders grapple with crises and dilemmas behind closed doors, waiting until they have made a decision or action plan to share their thinking with teachers and their community. But, in many cases, it would be more effective for principals to invite teachers and key community members into the messy thinking and sense-making that typically happens behind closed doors. Strong leaders recognize that complex problems cannot be solved by one person alone.

Strong leaders take a partnership approach that leverages multiple perspectives and local expertise to develop shared vision and collective responsibility. They invite those around them to grapple with authentic challenges that emerge in real time. They deeply listen and view their thought partner's perspective as important data when identifying a path forward.

The pillar of any partnership is relational trust, which develops by routinely engaging in honest conversations and working hand in hand with others to make decisions and drive action. Sometimes leaders think relational trust is built apart from work, even going so far as to shield people from work to develop a relationship with them. We work with leaders to see that professionalizing relational trust happens when we collaborate and lean into complex and important work. When we do this, we signal to one another that we value each other's contributions.

By cultivating trust and involving others in their leadership, leaders communicate to teachers and community members that they are valued and that their experience matters. As a result, they develop buy-in and the support of their community

needed to implement the decisions successfully.

During moments of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, partnership is a game changer. In our work with school leaders this past year, we found that the leaders who were accustomed to working in partnership with their teachers and nurturing collective efficacy were more able to pivot and adapt than those who worked in isolation.

For example, a principal from one of our partner schools realized that he was having a hard time understanding what students were learning. He could no longer just pop into a classroom to see the instruction taking place and learn which assessments departments were using. He invited teacher leaders at the school to think about this dilemma with him.

At a staff meeting, he expressed why it was important to him that the school identify clear ways to understand student progress and shared his wonderings about how to do so. Then he listened and asked probing questions. He learned that teachers shared his concerns, and together they constructed a plan to facilitate similar conversations within their departments, gather data, and come back to the table to identify promising practices to spread.

When principals partner with teachers in this way, teachers feel safe enough to talk to their principals about what is working and what they're uncertain about as they support students. It creates a culture of care, professional respect, and distributed leadership. In addition, strong partnerships support retention and job satisfaction, which are critical for sustaining equitable improvement in schools.

### THE VISIONARY

A visionary leader puts students at the center of learning by identifying and focusing on high-priority goals that target students' most pressing needs. Visionary leaders have both a long-

term picture of success and a practical understanding of what is happening that allows them to make incremental changes to make progress toward their vision.

Although they recognize that logistics are important, they do not get bogged down in them. They are able to delegate and prioritize where to put their energy to remain focused on their vision for student learning.

Phrases we heard from such leaders were: "I did [the operational task], but I didn't spend that much time on it" or "I have very competent support staff."

These leaders' vision connects back to their internal moral compass, their "why." When we asked one effective principal how her vision supported her work throughout the pandemic, she said, "I have always relied on my moral compass and have not wavered. This year, it's even more important to stay true to who I am and show care to my team and stakeholders."

During the stress of the pandemic, the visionary leaders we worked with did not keep their vision to themselves. They were clear on their nonnegotiables, communicated these to staff, and explained the "why" behind them. These leaders made time for their teachers and staff to discuss, make sense of, and ask questions about the vision.

They also were clear on what parts of the vision they wanted teacher input on. These leaders posed questions such as: Why is this our vision or goal? What adjustments need to be made based on what teachers know about their students? How is this serving our most vulnerable students and families?

These discussions led to a strong sense of community and collective efficacy among teachers. For example, last February, one visionary principal who kept returning her teachers to their schoolwide focus on small-group intervention throughout the pandemic, said, "While our teachers feel all the things that educators across the nation feel right now, they also feel an energy around wanting to get better because they are doing it together."



## WHAT CAN DISTRICT LEADERS DO?

These three capacities are not innate. They can be cultivated with support. District leaders' support can nurture and help sustain school leaders' roles as learners, partners, and visionaries. In turn, district leaders benefit from support that helps them value and cultivate those leadership skills.

Here are three ways district leaders can support these capacities in their school leaders.

**Experience: Give leaders the opportunity to experience these capacities themselves.** Identify district leaders who can provide school leaders with models of each of the capacities. Think broadly and involve multiple leaders. For example, the chief academic officer might model the partner capacity by inviting principals to co-design their own professional learning; the director of curriculum and instruction might model the learner capacity by bringing an authentic dilemma to a group of principals and ask for their thought partnership to move forward.

When you provide an experience, make sure to also provide a moment of meaning-making for principals to reflect on the experience and connect it back to their own leadership. Allowing school leaders to experience what it's like to have their leader exhibit these dispositions is a powerful first step in

building their own capacity.

**Practice: Give leaders the opportunity to plan how they will practice leading with these dispositions in mind.**

We use a framework that describes elements of each capacity as an anchor as we support leaders to grow in these capacities. We ask them to focus on one capacity and plan how they will incorporate that capacity into their next leadership moves.

Will they bring back the school vision and goals at the next staff meeting and invite teachers' perspectives on progress (visionary)? Will they focus on seeking multiple perspectives and listening to teachers before making decisions (partner)? Will they look for the kind of data that will help them understand their learners' experience and bring that to the decision-making table (learner)?

Providing leaders time to be intentional about developing these leader dispositions is essential.

**Reflect: Give leaders the opportunity to reflect on the impact of their changes in practice.** Just like teachers need time to reflect on the impact of their instructional decisions, so do leaders.

After leaders have decided what capacity they are focusing on and made a plan for moving forward with that capacity in mind, give leaders

the chance to reflect on how their leadership moves impacted teachers and students. Ask them how they know whether they have succeeded in growing as a partner, visionary, and learner.

Invite leaders to bring data to their own leader collaboration meetings (e.g. notes from leadership team meetings, classroom observations, instructional coaching discussions, etc.). Provide them with time to discuss their data with colleagues, with guiding questions such as: Are you seeing what you were hoping to see? What leadership move do you want to make next to support teacher/student learning? How will you know if it works?

Providing leaders time to reflect on their own leadership moves is a crucial element of developing leader capacity.

Even before the pandemic, leaders experienced stressful times and there will continue to be stressful times ahead. Our learner-partner-visionary framework offers leaders a clear and simple anchor to lean on in any crisis. This framework allows leaders to prioritize what matters most and galvanize their staff as they identify a path forward together.

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As crises mount, respond with compassionate leadership

*Continued from p. 29*  
yet another highly infectious pandemic — a pandemic of compassion.

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Crises bring along challenges, and sometimes terrible consequences, but it is important for future leaders to recognize that crises can also help explore innovations considered impossible before.

# How to prepare leaders for a crisis

LESSONS FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BY ANDREA HYATT CUTT, DAVE MILLER, RAFFAELLA BORASI, AND ZENON BORYS

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic found many K-12 school leaders unprepared to deal with the magnitude and duration of this emergency. Dealing with sustained crises is not sufficiently addressed in most K-12 leadership programs, nor in the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards (NPBEA, 2018). What can we do to better prepare leaders for similar situations in the future?

We interviewed over 50 school

leaders in the 2020-21 school year to better understand their experiences during the pandemic. Their stories enabled us to identify distinct challenges they experienced — and felt ill-equipped to address — at three different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. The **immediate emergency** as schools closed in spring 2020, which necessitated quick decision-making;
2. The **continuing crisis** of the 2020-21 school year, which

called for sustained solutions; and

3. The **long-term response to the crisis** as schools reopened in fall 2021 and planned for the future.

## THE IMMEDIATE EMERGENCY

When the pandemic first hit and state governments mandated a sudden closure of school buildings, school leaders had only a few days to figure out what to do in an unprecedented situation that challenged their ability



to fulfill most of the fundamental functions of schools. Here were some of their key challenges.

**Making quick decisions with incomplete information.** School leaders had to make an extraordinary number of critical decisions very quickly and with limited information, including what services could be delivered and how (such as supports for students with disabilities or food usually provided in school); what teachers, students and families would be expected to do and be accountable for (such as whether new content would be covered or what students would be tested on); and how to deliver instruction remotely and in hybrid mode.

**Managing effective communication.** Leaders had to communicate those difficult decisions effectively, taking into account everyone's roles, needs, and concerns. One consideration was how to structure communication so that it was consistent and avoided confusion when conveyed through multiple channels.

**Dealing with the most immediate needs first.** Many school leaders felt torn between attending to the school's role of supporting learning versus other primary needs such as ensuring health and safety, dealing with trauma and emotional issues, and providing food to students who depend on school meals.

Many school leaders felt unprepared to address these initial challenges. The decision-making models usually taught in school leadership preparation programs assume leaders will have time to collect information, engage key stakeholders to make thoughtful decisions, and communicate back to them. The pandemic revealed a need to better prepare leaders for meeting the immediate and urgent needs caused by an emergency.

### THE CONTINUING CRISIS

As it became clear that the pandemic was not going to be quickly resolved, school leaders had to make different kinds of plans to deal with this sustained crisis. For example, some schools had decided not to pursue any "new learning" for most of the remainder of the 2019-20 school

year, yet such a decision could not be continued.

Leaders needed to develop new solutions that ensured access and learning opportunities for all students, especially those in unique and suboptimal circumstances. This involved even more difficult decisions than encountered in early 2020. Here are some of the challenges they faced.

**Solving problems in a new context.** School leaders found that old approaches to problems they had previously relied on did not work, and they needed to engage in innovative problem solving. Principals had to work collaboratively within collective bargaining groups to revise work roles, such as bus drivers delivering home learning materials and food to families, and main office receptionists instructing parents over the phone how to solve technology issues.

**Leveraging technology.** Leaders struggled with the breadth and depth of technology needed for delivering instruction remotely, maintaining school operations, communicating with staff, and more. Most school leaders did not know enough about possible technology solutions to use them effectively, let alone find solutions for training teachers, staff, students, and families to use them.

**Attending to social and emotional needs of the school community.** While many leaders recognized the importance of students' social and emotional needs before the pandemic,



they often considered it the role of school counselors and social workers to attend to those needs. The pandemic extended and exacerbated social and emotional needs not just for students but also their families, teachers, staff, and school leaders themselves. Addressing these needs became a new priority.

**Addressing inequities exacerbated by the pandemic.** It became clear that the pandemic affected some students more severely than others, such as students without reliable internet access, English learners, students with disabilities, and students whose families weren't able to support their learning at home.

Effectively dealing with sustained crises is rarely addressed in school leadership preparation programs, yet the challenges leaders encountered during the pandemic make clear the need for a new kind of decision-making process and different considerations and priorities.

The pandemic made many leaders more aware of longstanding issues in their schools, including inequity, but they were not prepared to address them, especially in this new context. These gaps reveal there is more work to be done in leadership preparation and professional learning to ensure that leaders are ready to meet students' social and emotional needs and build equity in an ongoing way, not just during a crisis.

## THE LONG-TERM RESPONSE

As the advent of new vaccines made the leaders we interviewed in spring 2021 hope for an "almost normal" return to school for the 2021-22 school year, they still identified a number of major challenges they expected to face given the many implications of a crisis of this magnitude. These challenges fell into two main categories: responding to the learning gaps due to the pandemic and sustaining the innovations made during this time.

**Responding to uneven learning due to the pandemic.** One of the

**Effectively dealing with sustained crises is rarely addressed in school leadership preparation programs, yet the challenges leaders encountered during the pandemic make clear the need for a new kind of decision-making process and different considerations and priorities.**

biggest concerns school leaders raised during our interviews was how to deal with the reality that students' learning had suffered from the disruptions experienced over a period of over 15 months.

Teachers could no longer assume the same starting point or baseline knowledge they expected of students in the past — a situation that will likely have a ripple effect on curriculum and testing for years. Furthermore, different students in the same class or school will likely begin the new school year with more varied skills than usual, due to the ways they and their families have experienced the pandemic.

**Sustaining innovations made during the pandemic.** The unique challenges of the pandemic have forced schools to institute new strategies and solutions that were inconceivable or unconsidered before. For example, several school leaders we interviewed were pleasantly surprised by the significant increase in parents' attendance to school meetings once they became virtual and the reduction in discipline problems when they changed school schedules.

They recognized that these new experiments have the potential to lead to major improvements if adopted for the long-term, yet some identified a new challenge of deciding what innovations to keep and how because they expected pressure to return to a pre-COVID status quo as a way to ensure normalcy.

The challenges identified in this phase point out the importance of preparing leaders to identify and address the potential long-term impacts a sustained crisis may have. Equally important is helping leaders recognize the potential of crises to force innovations that may be valuable to continue even once the crisis is gone, along with what it takes to realize that potential. Indeed, the pandemic showed us the need to think differently and prepare leaders to foster innovation.

## PREPARING FUTURE SCHOOL LEADERS

What can we do to better prepare future school leaders to face the challenges identified above? Addressing this question is important because crisis management mindsets and skills will serve school leaders well when dealing with other crises in the future.

As we examined our own school leadership preparation program at the Warner School of Education at the University of Rochester, we felt we had not done enough to prepare future leaders to deal with the diverse challenges of long-term crises, and we believe other programs are in the same situation.

The insights gained from the school leaders we interviewed suggest ways to strengthen leadership preparation programs and offer valuable learning opportunities to help K-12 school leaders manage crises better.

**Pay explicit attention to the social and emotional needs of the school community and cultivate empathy.** School leaders need to be better prepared to attend to the social and emotional needs of their stakeholders, especially during a crisis. Building empathy should become an important component of the preparation of school leaders, ideally using case studies, simulations, and role-plays.

It is also important for leaders to learn strategies that address social and emotional needs at times of crises. Some of these may be appropriate at all stages of a crisis, such as having times

and spaces for everyone within the organization (staff as well as students) to come together and share their experiences and feelings.

Other strategies may be more specific to a stage — for example, having protocols and tools in place for quick communication in an emergency. Several of the leaders we interviewed pointed out the value of having these structures already in place *before* a crisis happens. Learning how to establish these structures should become an expectation for all school leaders.

**Prepare for a different kind of innovative problem-solving and decision-making during crises.**

Current and future school leaders need to recognize that different approaches to problem-solving and decision-making are needed in crisis situations at different stages and that crises can motivate innovation.

In an immediate emergency, leaders need to make decisions quickly and with limited information. In a sustained crisis, there is more time to gather input and information but still a high degree of uncertainty. Furthermore, the novelty of the situation will mean abandoning traditional solutions and looking for outside-of-the-box ones.

Sustained crises also provide powerful opportunities to experiment with new solutions, as resistance to change from stakeholders is naturally lowered in these situations. Recognizing these opportunities for innovation requires a special mindset as well as strategies to decide which innovations should be continued after the crisis and how to address the resistance that may ensue.

School leadership preparation programs have not historically focused on this kind of innovative thinking, but we can look to other fields that have. The field of entrepreneurship has a lot to offer about how to build the mindsets and skills needed to be successful in innovative problem-solving and decision-making.

**Develop strategies for two-way communications and community-**

**Current and future school leaders need to recognize that different approaches to problem-solving and decision-making are needed in crisis situations at different stages and that crises can motivate innovation.**

**building during crises.** School leaders should have sustainable ways of authentic communication with community members, including ways of soliciting input from families and the broader community. While this is especially critical in immediate emergencies and sustained crises, it is important and should be part of leaders' skill sets more generally.

Interestingly, several school leaders reported that developing better and more frequent two-way communications during the pandemic resulted in stronger community building and even allowed schools to use community resources that had not been accessible before — as, for example, when local companies offered to provide new services or resources.

**Tune in to equity.** Inequity is an urgent problem in schools, and crises are likely to exacerbate inequities for students who are already marginalized, both during the crises and after. School leadership programs must prepare leaders to be alert to and proactive in addressing inequities, not only when responding to a crisis but in persistent problems like achievement gaps and inequitable discipline.

**Be able to evaluate the potential of technology to provide new solutions.** As demonstrated during the pandemic, technology has the potential to provide new solutions that may help address sustained crises. Yet this potential will be fully realized only if leaders are able to quickly recognize and seize possible applications when the need arises.

School leaders are ultimately

responsible for making decisions about whether and how new technology will be incorporated in instructional models, communications, and operations, so they need to be able to identify new technology solutions and evaluate their advantages and disadvantages.

We don't recommend adding a lot of technology training into school leadership preparation programs. Rather, we suggest that leadership courses incorporate effective uses of technology to model and develop appreciation. Leadership courses should also teach future leaders how to leverage outside resources as well as the technical knowledge of other people within the organization — as a form of distributed leadership — by learning what questions to ask and how to evaluate the received responses.

**Appreciate the critical role of professional learning during crises and strategies to attend to it.**

During the shift to remote learning, school leaders we interviewed came to appreciate the value of dedicated staff professional learning time for learning new instructional models and tools and navigating other challenges. This is especially important during a sustained crisis. But leaders should prioritize professional learning at all times, not just during a crisis. Leadership preparation programs should play a role in building school leaders' commitment to and knowledge about high-quality professional learning.

We have already started revising our K-12 school leadership curriculum and instruction to ensure students have better preparation for emergencies and unprecedented events, and we will continue these changes during the 2021-22 academic year.

We have started adding discussion prompts for immediate decision-making and communication during crisis. We are developing case studies focusing on innovative problem-solving in response to achievement gaps and inequitable discipline. We will also be adding content and skills development

*Continued on p.41*



# Cultivate a culture of coaching

BY VASSILIKI (VICKY) ZYGOURIS-COE, KAREN NOLEN, AND PAMELA S. FERRANTE

**A**t all times, but especially in today's shifting contexts created by the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers benefit from differentiated professional learning support. One way school leaders can ensure such support is to nurture a culture of coaching. By embracing instructional coaching and establishing it as part of the school culture, leaders can help teachers address

their evolving challenges and therefore meet students' needs.

To understand how to create a coaching culture, it's important to understand the overarching concept of school culture. School culture is a way of characterizing the teaching and learning environment. Consisting of the norms, values, expectations, and habits of the school, it can be described as "how things are done."

Culture lives and grows in the actions and interactions of the people who are part of the school. Although school culture is not always visible, it is easily and deeply felt. It can range from authoritarian and fearful to flexible and participatory — and everything in between.

School culture can either support or impede coaching work, sometimes in subtle ways. For example, in a school




culture that is rigidly hierarchical or highly focused on evaluation, teachers and staff may feel fearful about sharing their challenges and asking the questions that are vital for effective coaching.

Schools can also have a specific coaching culture, which is often dependent on the tone set by school administrators both explicitly and unintentionally. In a school with a supportive coaching culture, administrators model effective coaching in their relationships with their teachers. They ask questions that create opportunities for productive conversations — for example, using student data to probe teachers' thinking about their instructional practice and its impact on student learning.

By doing so, these school leaders nurture hidden talents and natural abilities of educators to grow their instructional expertise through meaningful reflection. These leaders may also explicitly empower coaching by collaborating with instructional coaches, ensuring that their role is supportive rather than evaluative, and encouraging teachers to meet with them.

On the other hand, some school administrators create a stigma around the work of coaches by using coaching conversations to inform evaluation or push forward an agenda that is removed from a teacher's student data. For example, when an administrator



### **In a school with a supportive coaching culture, administrators model effective coaching in their relationships with their teachers.**

chooses the focus for a coaching conversation instead of allowing the teacher to choose the focus based on his or her student's data, the conversation loses authenticity and the practice undermines the coaching culture and inevitably results in a system failure.

Leaders can also unintentionally undermine coaching by failing to make time for coach-teacher conversations, asking coaches to fill in as substitutes or perform administrative tasks, or ignoring coaches' needs for support and growth.

In the following section, we use a gardening analogy to present strategies for how leaders can root instructional coaching in the school culture.



### **PREPARE THE SOIL**

Establish healthy soil and you will grow beautiful things. That's as true in schools as it is in gardens. Think about your school culture as the soil in which your teachers and students grow. How does it feel? Is it hard and rocky? Is it soft and rich in nutrients? Now, how

do you need to improve that soil so that the seeds of success can blossom?

Preparing the soil means considering the attitude, philosophy, and actions needed to produce healthy coaching relationships. A supportive coaching culture starts with valuing people, identifying their strengths and needs, and having focused and open conversations about growth and support. A supportive coaching culture has shared positive accountability, relevance, and strong engagement and learning.

This involves uncovering the hidden talents, natural abilities, and gaps in knowledge of staff, and empowering teachers' voices. It also involves modeling a mindset of collaboration and coaching.



### **PLANT THE SEEDS**

Once the ground is ready, it's time to plant the seeds. This means tending to the early stages of the coaching work. Invest in hiring a knowledgeable and well-prepared instructional coach. Then introduce the coach or coaches to the entire faculty and explicitly share your vision for coaching's role at your school. It's always a good idea to revisit roles and responsibilities as the teachers' and their students' needs arise or change.

The value of coaching at your school needs to be seen, heard, modeled, supported, and lived by all. If a coach is viewed as an extra body at the school,

coaching relationships will end up being a chore. On the other hand, if you value coaching, connect it to your school's goals and culture, and keep it specific to the students' learning and the teachers' instructional needs, it will flourish.

 **PROVIDE NOURISHMENT**

Just like a plant's roots need a balance of air, water, and sun, coaching needs a balance of space, support, and attention.

To give coaching air and room to grow, commit to it. Do not cram it in here and there whenever time allows it. Provide dedicated time for coaches and teachers to work together and for coaching relationships to flourish.

How can we water coaching? Start by choosing coaches with care — coaches who have the right skills and experiences to build relationships grounded in mutual respect. Then provide time for coaches to sharpen their craft by engaging in their own professional learning and time for teachers to learn together with their coach.

Coaching, like gardening, requires ongoing care and attention. Asking the right questions and providing the appropriate resources are nutrients for the roots of the coaching culture. Just as coaches should ask teachers reflective and supportive questions, leaders can grow the coaching culture by asking questions and dialoguing with coaches. Here are questions administrators can ask their coaches to shift instructional coaching conversations.

**Questions to understand the coaching climate at your school.**

- How do you build relationships with the teachers you coach?
- How can I help support those relationships?
- What are you learning about students and the school culture/needs from your instructional rounds?
- How will you measure the impact of your coaching on teacher practice? On student learning?

**Coaching, like gardening, requires ongoing care and attention. Asking the right questions and providing the appropriate resources are nutrients for the roots of the coaching culture.**

- What would you like to adjust (e.g. role, schedule, focus)?
- What resources do you need to best support teachers and your coaching work?
  - o What time do you need for conversations?
  - o What time do you need for data collection?
  - o What time do you need to research and learn with the teacher to address instructional practice related to student needs?

**Questions to understand the support your teachers and coaches need.**

- How can I support you in your work with your instructional coach?
  - o Provide dedicated time for conversations?
  - o Create opportunities to research/learn about meaningful strategies to address student needs?

 **GIVE IT TIME TO GROW**

A culture of coaching will not grow overnight. It takes time, patience, and some experimentation. You'll plant some seeds that grow quickly into beneficial practices, other that take time to develop, and perhaps some that aren't a good fit for your soil, climate, or season.

As you experiment, keep in mind that school administrators, coaches, and teachers are all on a learning trajectory, and they all have valuable information to share with one another. A teacher may not know what type of support he or she needs but will know what his or her students need.

An instructional coach can help a teacher identify his or her instructional needs and the kinds of support needed to meet the students' needs. Coach-

teacher conversations about what practices and actions connect to what students need will also help the teacher become more cognizant of the support he or she needs.

Also, be sure to consider and then remove obstacles to the growth of your school's coaching program. Some common obstacles to establishing and sustaining a coaching culture include:

- Miscommunication about the goals and purposes of the coaching work;
- Lack of clarity about the role of the coach;
- Lack of clarity about the coaching process;
- Not seeing coaching as a priority;
- Lack of time and resources for teachers and the coach;
- Lack of support for the coach; and
- Lack of commitment from the participants.

 **MONITOR THE GROWTH**

Coaching that improves teacher practice and student learning requires progress monitoring. But remember that the coaching process is organic and not mechanical. It's not about "fixing" a teacher, and it's not a one-size-fits-all approach. Monitoring this process requires thoughtful observations and conversations with coaches and teachers about the process and its impact on student learning.

Monitor the growth of the coach through deliberate communication and reflection with the coach. You may also wish to conduct observations with and receive feedback about the coaching process from teachers.

Much of the monitoring should be about leaders reflecting on their own practices with regard to coaching. Administrators should reflect on and

seek feedback about whether they are prioritizing coaching, using coaches for their unique skill (rather than administrative tasks), and honoring the importance of coaching relationships.

### DO'S AND DON'TS

To create a healthy and strongly rooted instructional coaching culture that will yield positive results for teacher, student, and school growth, it's worth keeping in mind a few additional do's and don'ts.

- Do make the instructional coaching visible to all. Don't create a culture of uncertainty about instructional coaching.
- Do align the coaching with the students' and the teachers' unique needs. Don't communicate a one-size-fits-all message.
- Do focus the conversations on

student learning. Don't focus on arbitrary teacher practices determined without regard to specific student data.

- Do capitalize on momentum. Coaches working with small groups of teachers is an important step toward creating a schoolwide coaching culture. Start with the willing teachers and support organic growth.

Most importantly, nurture a coaching culture — don't demand it. If the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic have taught us anything, it is that educators are resilient, patient, and willing to maintain a growth mindset. Much as a gardener patiently waits for seeds to sprout, we must be patient and open to the possibilities and outcomes provided through coaching.

The kind of growth that moves us

forward as educators doesn't happen overnight, but rather it grows over time and with the delicate and diligent care of a coach tending to the needs of the students through the needs of the teacher like a gardener patiently caring for seedlings.

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### How to prepare leaders for a crisis

*Continued from p. 37*

and role-plays focused on social and emotional learning, listening, and empathetic response.

We hope these recommendations will be useful for school leadership preparation programs as well as educators designing professional learning for current school leaders. Ultimately, we hope that some of these considerations will motivate and inform a revision of the NELP standards, which heavily influence content in school leadership preparation programs, to include more explicit attention to preparing school leaders to respond to both short-term and long-term crises in the future.

### CRISIS CAN BE A CATALYST FOR INNOVATION

At the heart of all of the changes we have recommended is helping leaders develop a positive mindset of seeing crises as catalysts for innovation.

Crises bring along challenges, and sometimes terrible consequences, but it is important for future leaders to recognize that crises can also help explore innovations considered impossible before.

Several of the school leaders we interviewed recognized this potential. A disruption of this magnitude precluded people from relying on what they used to do and thus opened the consideration of new alternatives. Interestingly, though, while many of our interviewees expressed the desire to maintain some of the innovations tried during the pandemic, some also worried about resistance from staff and community members.

We will miss valuable opportunities for school improvement unless we help current and future school leaders see the potential of building on what was learned from this crisis to address unsolved problems in new ways.

### REFERENCE

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# Professional learning for a virtual world

NETWORK HELPS DISTRICTS NAVIGATE CHALLENGING TIMES

BY MICHELLE BOWMAN

In March 2020, emergency school closings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic initiated a sudden widespread use of virtual learning and brought new challenges that affected teaching and learning across multiple contexts.

The complex change caused school district leaders to make plans to reinvent and reimagine schools (Transcend, 2020) and created a need for teacher professional learning on effective techniques for teaching

remotely (Lieberman, 2020).

An effective professional learning system is essential to improving teaching and learning in this and all contexts and removing inequities in students' access to opportunities that lead to their success as productive adults and citizens (Hirsh & Brown, 2018). Facilitating these complex changes and supporting leaders to build equitable systems requires transformation at every level of the education system (Learning Forward, n.d.).

As education leaders around the world faced the same problem, Learning Forward responded with a deliberately designed community of practice to facilitate community learning and shared problem-solving (Wenger et al., 2002). The community of practice, called Design Professional Learning for a Virtual World, enables members to share expertise, resources, and knowledge, pursue a common purpose, and learn from one another.

I studied the community of

<b>6 CORE ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE</b>	
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Detail</b>
Shared problem of practice	The community is in alignment on the clearly articulated problem of practice and impact goals shared by all affiliated systems. This shared focus and expertise amplify efforts.
Active learning anchored in a continuous improvement process	The community has process and support in place to engage in a cycle of inquiry to implement improvements, capture key lessons learned, and share best practices.
Collective ownership	Partners and hub organizations have clear expectations of one another and personal ownership of the collaboration process.
An appropriate mix of partners	The community includes the right mix of committed systems and engaged personnel to participate actively.
A sufficient commitment to support the implementation of new ideas	System partners have sufficient dedicated capacity to participate meaningfully and actively; the hub has sufficient capability to facilitate.
An effective structure of governance and decision-making	Systems engage in standard processes that enable continuous improvement and effective decision-making.

**Source:** King, 2016.

practice model and found that when school district leaders engaged and collaborated in the community of practice specifically focused on designing and implementing a comprehensive professional learning system, their professional learning knowledge, skills, and leadership behaviors changed significantly (Bowman, 2021). They learned more, collaborated more effectively, and became more proficient in leading professional learning.

**ABOUT THE NETWORK**

The Design Professional Learning for a Virtual World network built on Learning Forward’s history of and expertise in leveraging networks and communities to support improvement in school systems and education agencies.

In 2015, Learning Forward established a model for interdistrict collaboration in a community of practice, building on Wenger’s (1998) community of practice framework as well as the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011). Through that work, we identified six core elements for a successful community of practice in education (see table above; King, 2016), which served as the foundation for the Design Professional Learning for a Virtual World network.

The network included district and state teams, addressing their current challenges related to the design, implementation, and measurement of professional learning in virtual and digital models. A team of Learning Forward staff and consultants facilitated

**PARTICIPANTS**

**IN THE DESIGN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR A VIRTUAL WORLD NETWORK**

The Design Professional Learning for a Virtual World network had two cohorts.

- Teams in the first cohort (September 2020 to June 2021) were from seven school districts and one state education agency: Alaska Department of Education, Broward County Public Schools (Florida), Fort Sam Houston (Texas), Fort Wayne Community Schools (Indiana), Frederick County Public Schools (Virginia), Miami-Dade County Public Schools (Florida), Tulsa Public Schools (Oklahoma), and Stafford County Public Schools (Virginia).
- The second cohort began in January 2021 and concludes in December 2021. The school districts include Cobb County Schools (Georgia), Loudon County Schools (Tennessee), Northshore School District (Washington), and Parkway Schools (Missouri). Each cohort also included a team of Learning Forward Affiliate leaders from the participating states.

members’ learning through virtual convenings, customized coaching, resources, and organizational management tools.

The work occurred in three stages: supporting ongoing success in virtual and hybrid learning environments,

responding to maximize learning during the school year, and reinventing professional learning to acknowledge and embrace new learning models.

Participating teams created contextualized, comprehensive professional learning plans focused on outcomes, with solutions aligned to district/province and state strategic plans that work across departments.

The network’s shared problem of practice centered on leveraging the current environment to develop an equitable and sustainable professional learning system that maximizes the potential and impact of digitally mediated learning. After confirming the shared problem of practice, each team described the problem in its local context, then used common templates and protocols to set a vision for success. The vision established the desired future state to ensure equity through innovative professional learning strategies. (See table at right.)

Next, each team assessed the status of the professional learning system against the intended future state. The analysis used four focus areas: coherence and relevance, ensuring equity, measuring impact, and virtual environment and resources (see figure on p. 45). Then the team set goals to include in the professional learning plan.

The goals aligned to district and state strategic plans and intended to increase capacity to create policies and practices for effective professional learning with sustainable solutions that work across departments. For each goal, the teams identified milestones and metrics to measure use, change, implementation, and impact. In the last step, teams drafted short-term activity plans.

Throughout the process, the community of practice design engaged the team members as collaborators and critical friends. Teams shared lessons learned from the emergency shift to virtual and digitally mediated educational models and used them to inform the improvement of the

<b>EXAMPLES OF CONTEXTUALIZED PROBLEM OF PRACTICE AND VISION</b>	
<b>Shared problem of practice</b> How do we leverage the current environment to develop an equitable and sustainable system of professional learning that maximizes the potential and impact of digitally mediated learning?	
<b>Problem of practice in the local context</b>	<b>Vision for success</b>
<p><b>FORT WAYNE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS</b> How do adult learners leverage districtwide professional learning to enable and sustain instructional practices, both academic and social and emotional, that provide equitable learning experiences for students learning in remote and in-person modalities by 2020-21?</p>	Empowering educators to change practices and improve equitable outcomes for adults and students.
<p><b>TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS</b> How do we ensure professional learning in Tulsa Public Schools is designed and [implemented] to develop anti-racist educators, intentionally notice, name, and interrupt issues and practices that perpetuate inequity, and support the use of liberatory, culturally sustaining practices?</p>	Educators will authentically engage in aligned learning opportunities within safe learning spaces that hold them to high standards as they move forward in their growth and develop the practices and mindsets that result in safe, care-centered, liberatory, and joyful learning environments necessary to enable the high levels of student engagement and learning required to achieve educational justice.
<p><b>BROWARD COUNTY SCHOOLS</b> How do we plan, design, and [implement] an equitable and sustainable system of professional learning that is cohesive and includes differentiated and individualized learning that addresses just-in-time needs and maximizes the impact of digital, blended, and face-to-face learning and leverages the current environment?</p>	Provide a cohesive and deliberate plan of action to ensure that high-quality professional learning is intentional, monitored, supported, valued, equitable and sustained to ensure positive impact on teaching, learning, job performance, and career growth and development for all.
<p><b>ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION</b> How do we collaboratively develop an equitable and sustainable system of culturally responsive professional learning that maximizes the potential and impact of digital learning, leverages the current environment, and scales evidence-based practices aligned to identified measurable goals in the Alaska Education Challenge, promoting increased coherence across systems?</p>	A responsive, coherent, and effective statewide system of professional learning based on evidence-based practices for all educators to ensure an excellent education for every student every day.

professional learning system.

The collaboration between like-minded state and district leaders facilitated understanding how short-term lessons from the pandemic can inform long-term professional learning plans and support building a contextualized, comprehensive professional learning plan.

District and agency teams consolidated their work through the network into a comprehensive professional learning plan that can serve as the basis for future professional learning. The plans outlined teams' sustainable solutions to immediate challenges and a professional learning infrastructure that transcends the 2020-21 pandemic. Examples of the comprehensive professional learning plans are available on the Learning Forward website [learningforward.org/networks/virtual-design/](http://learningforward.org/networks/virtual-design/).

### STUDY DESIGN

I studied school district leader engagement and collaboration in the community of practice to examine whether leaders' individual learning and professional learning efficacy changed. The study focused on three research questions:

1. What is the relationship between the three dimensions of a community of practice identified by Wenger (1998) and individual school district leaders' learning? (See box below for information on the dimensions.)
2. Do school district leaders' perceptions of those dimensions change after community of

practice participation?

3. Does school district leaders' professional learning efficacy (knowledge, skills, and leadership behaviors) change after community of practice participation?

The quantitative study used a survey design that focused on members who were school district leaders. Of the 42 members, 35 were eligible for the study. They completed a 20-item survey in December 2020, near the beginning of the learning cycle, and in May 2021, at the end of the cycle.

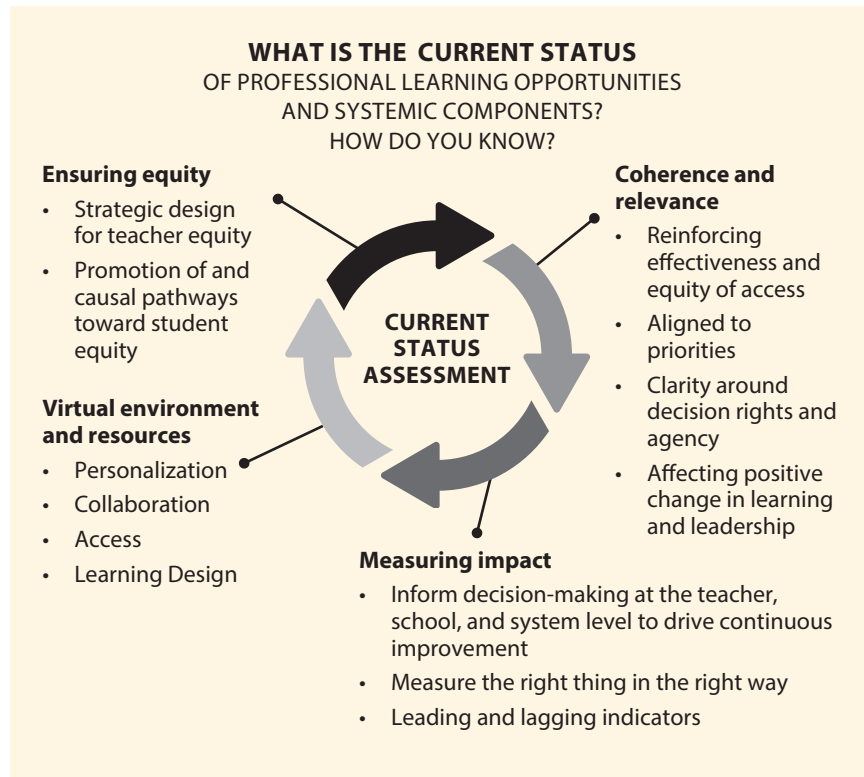
The survey assessed participants' level of agreement with statements

about the community of practice dimensions (shared repertoire, joint enterprise, and mutual engagement) and their agreement with statements about their individual learning. The survey also assessed participants' community of practice experience (Resources for Learning, 2016, 2017) and professional learning efficacy as defined by knowledge, skill, and leadership behaviors about professional learning (Hirsh & Brown, 2018; Killion, 2013a, 2013b; Learning Forward, 2011, 2013).

### STUDY FINDINGS

Analysis revealed that community of practice organization and structure positively impacted school district leaders' participation, engagement, learning and professional learning efficacy. Here are specific findings.

**There was a significant correlation between shared repertoire, joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and school district leaders' learning.** School district leaders who believed the network embodied those three



### 3 DIMENSIONS OF A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Wenger (1998) identified three characteristics of a community of practice:

1. *Shared repertoire* shows up as routines, words, actions, and concepts that become part of the community of practice.
2. *Joint enterprise* is the common identity and interconnectedness among members.
3. *Mutual engagement* is the collaborative action members use to solve problems.



dimensions of a community of practice learned more. For example, the cooperative interactions and knowledge sharing spurred collective action. School district leaders partnered for a common purpose and learned innovative ideas and practices to design and implement a professional learning system.

**The community of practice provided a beneficial structure and environment for interdistrict collaboration.** The community of practice design enabled school district leaders to come together to solve a problem they cared about (King, 2016; Wenger, 1998). Over time, network members became more aware of one another's competence. They engaged in challenging conversations and participated in facilitated interactions such as critical friends protocols, offering and receiving feedback on work such as goals and milestones.

**Leaders' learning and professional learning efficacy changed after community of practice participation.** School district leaders increased their knowledge about their roles and responsibilities to ensure effective, efficient, and equitable professional learning for all educators. They also reported that they developed their own and others' capacity to lead, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

Overall, the community of practice provided a valuable environment for school district leaders to learn and increase their capability to recognize and implement an effective professional

learning system as a key strategy for supporting and sustaining equitable improvements to increase results for all students — even at a time of enormous challenges and rapidly changing learning conditions.

The interdistrict collaboration in the community of practice provided leaders with like-minded thought partners facing similar challenges who, together, built their capacity to address immediate challenges with sustainable solutions that can impact teaching and learning for the long term.

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# Lead with social and emotional support

A POWERFUL LEADERSHIP APPROACH YOU SHOULD BE USING



BY JAMES A. BAILEY AND RANDY WEINER

*“I am not sure what to do. I am not sure how to deal with the emotions my teachers are showing. I don’t feel like we are getting lots of help to know how to help our teachers. I think I am going to lose half of my staff this year.”*

**S**adly, we have heard this refrain over and over in recent months, as we’ve talked with school leaders across the country. School leaders describe, in heartrending detail, the emotional pain and suffering they and their teachers have experienced over the past 18 months.

Educators are dealing with tremendous amounts of stress, experiencing burnout, and feeling a lack of efficacy, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, racism, and ongoing threats to their autonomy as professionals.

Despite their desire to help, school leaders have been caught short on how to provide the support teachers need.

It doesn’t have to be this way. A leadership approach that supports teachers’ social and emotional well-being offers an accessible, research-based way to increase not only teacher well-being and effectiveness, but also student outcomes.

## TEACHER EMOTIONS

Why is it important to support teachers’ social and emotional well-being? Teaching is a form of emotional labor (Kwok, 2011). Emotional labor means investing emotional energy but also suppressing one’s feelings to meet a job’s goals, and it comes in many forms.

Teachers’ aspirations and satisfaction are often fueled by the emotional energy and rewards they

receive by helping their students achieve, but this can come at a price, because teachers often have to push aside their own emotions. Teachers are often warned to avoid extreme emotions like anger, sadness, or even happiness in the name of appearing unprofessional.

For instance, with distance learning, a teacher may feel inadequate internally while simultaneously externally displaying an air of control and happiness so as not to influence students’ moods. Managing emotions this way can be exhausting, and too much emotional labor with too much emotional suppression can lead to depersonalization, a lack of commitment, and enhanced stress (Wang et. al, 2019).

Even before the current set of crises, teachers’ social and emotional



**Teachers need leaders to recognize and support the emotional dimensions of their work, and leaders need strategies and mindsets they can leverage to do so.**

well-being was under threat. One factor has been overreliance on strict accountability measures, which has led to a significant intensification of their work (Lawrence et al., 2019) and considerable stress for educators.

This has led to unintended consequences. Since 2014, the national attrition rate of teachers before retirement age rose to 8% annually, mainly due to challenging teaching conditions such as a lack of collegiality in the workplace, input, and support (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

In 2017, only 50% of teachers in a national survey agreed that they had full administrative support (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In other surveys, a majority of teachers

rated their mental health as “not good” (American Federation of Teachers, 2017) and listed “overwhelmed” as the word that best describes their feelings about their job (Knoblach, 2019).

In the midst of once-in-a-lifetime events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, stress and burnout are even more acute. Teachers are under pressure to do more and perform at higher levels. As they put in more hours to navigate unexpected conditions such as hybrid teaching, many lose a sense of work-life balance and well-being.

**THE EMOTIONAL PATH**

To combat this, teachers need leaders to recognize and support the emotional dimensions of their work, and leaders need strategies and mindsets

they can leverage to do so.

Leithwood et al. (n.d.) argue that school leaders can influence teaching and learning through four interrelated paths, one of which intentionally centers on supporting teachers’ social and emotional well-being:

- The **rational path**, which includes the technical core of curriculum, teaching, and learning;
- The **organizational path**, which includes structures, operating procedures, and culture;
- The **family path**, which guides how a school includes and works with parents and the community; and
- The **emotional path**, which helps guide individuals’ attention, cognition, and perceptions in the school environment.

Though perhaps the least used and



most underdeveloped path (Leithwood & Beatty, 2009), the emotional path may be the most promising approach to increasing teacher commitment and well-being. In a review of over 90 empirical studies of teacher emotions and their impact on teaching and learning, Leithwood and Beatty (2009) found a significant relationship between teachers' internal states — their thoughts and feelings — and classroom practice, engagement, and student learning. Schools benefit when leaders directly and positively address teachers' emotional states.

### **EMOTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

To lead the emotional path to support their teachers, leaders need to recognize emotional leadership as a critical management tool (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021).

School leaders must also engage in their own social and emotional development and strengthen it through their professional learning to model and support it in teachers and other staff.

For instance, school leaders need to understand the impact of their emotions, biases, stress management, and impulse control on all stakeholders in their educational community. Similarly, leaders should also realize the importance of the social competencies such as social awareness, relationship skills, and ethical decision-making and how specific social and emotional learning (SEL) skills such as attunement, perspective-taking, empathy, and relationship building can impact teachers and other staff.

These skills, when used well, become the foundation of the school's culture and can be practiced and supported through a focused and deliberate practice plan.

In addition, leaders should realize that social and emotional competence can be taught, trained, and developed, and they should support their staff to engage in that work.

To help develop those skills and build the emotional path, school leaders can engage in the following strategies

### **School leaders can help teachers build and rebuild their efficacy by providing mastery experiences such as working with highly skilled teachers or coaches and promoting a learning mindset through cycles of deliberate practice.**

to address teachers' affective states and needs.

**Build trust by enhancing empowerment.** Trust is a highly complex affective state that is important for educator collaboration. School leaders and teachers who can work together in a trusting manner can more easily solve the challenges they face in their school.

School leaders can improve trust through being honest and reliable, demonstrating a positive mood, building solid relationships based on shared values, and taking a strengths-based approach. But perhaps the most essential action for leaders is giving teachers the power to make the right decisions for their students to create a sense of agency.

**Develop teacher efficacy through creating mastery experiences.** Self-efficacy here refers specifically to teachers' belief that they can increase student performance. Teachers need to feel both a sense of individual and collective efficacy in their work. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers have been asked to teach in ways that are unfamiliar and often not ideal for student learning, thereby diminishing their self-efficacy.

School leaders can help teachers build and rebuild their efficacy by providing mastery experiences such as working with highly skilled teachers or coaches and promoting a learning mindset through cycles of deliberate practice. Helping build this vital individual and collective belief requires leaders always to be in sync with an

instructional leadership team focused on developing others.

**Build satisfaction and commitment through constant reminders of meaning and purpose.** There is little doubt that teacher satisfaction has decreased over the past decade, and especially over the past 18 months. Our education system is not designed to support teachers very well, even during noncrisis times.

The increased calls for accountability and rapid changes in our society have left many educators with a decreased sense of commitment to their jobs. Commitment reflects a strong desire to accept the school's goals and values, a desire to maintain membership, and a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the school.

To develop a sense of satisfaction and commitment, principals need to become highly skilled in perspective-taking and acting on empathy, as well as reinforcing the higher sense of meaning and purpose inherent in teaching, including communicating to teachers their essential role in achieving common goals.

**Enhance recovery through reframing.** Teachers often face challenging emotional situations with students and families, leading to a sense of loss of agency and control. This loss can lead to an extreme sense of anger, fear, or even sadness. School leaders need to be highly skilled in emotion recognition and reframing techniques to help teachers rebuild a sense of agency and self-determination.

Reframing as a skill, in this case, means assisting the teacher in making sense of an event from different perspectives and regaining a sense of control over the situation. Principals who take the time to help teachers reframe challenging situations help them form this mental habit.

**Rebuild resilience from stress and burnout through reappraisal** (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). Without suitable coping mechanisms, the excessive stress implicit in teaching, when not dealt with, can eventually

lead to burnout. School leaders need to be highly aware of teacher stress levels and use simple reappraisal strategies, such as analyzing the causes of stress, determining what can be controlled, and deciding on a specific coping strategy, to increase emotional regulation.

These approaches are not one-and-done activities. Although we would like to believe that once the emotional path is paved, no other problems will occur, schools are rife with emotional issues that deplete resilience stores over time. A leader should be aware that the emotional path takes constant tending and should anticipate times when extra care is needed.

### EXPANDING THE EMOTIONAL PATH

Emotional leadership is a relatively new entry in school leaders' lexicon. Although much research exists on transformational leadership and its emotive qualities, little is available to help explain which specific leadership skills describe a high-quality emotional leader.

Basic skills like emotional recognition, deep listening, and communicating are necessary but not sufficient to support teachers. Instead, a deeper understanding and specific skill set for building and rebuilding the emotional path has become the essential skill set for school leaders since the COVID-19 pandemic. Competence

### A leader should be aware that the emotional path takes constant tending and should anticipate times when extra care is needed.

in this area must become accessible and concrete to meet the challenges of developing, supporting, and keeping teachers in the classroom.

Although most school leaders, school leader books, and school leader preparation programs advance the need for strong relationships between school leaders and teachers, they lack explicit attention to the role of social and emotional learning for school leaders in creating these relationships.

If we are serious about supporting teachers' social and emotional well-being, then we must better train and support school leaders in developing their own social and emotional competencies. The emotional path provides an explicit and accessible SEL leadership approach to do exactly that.

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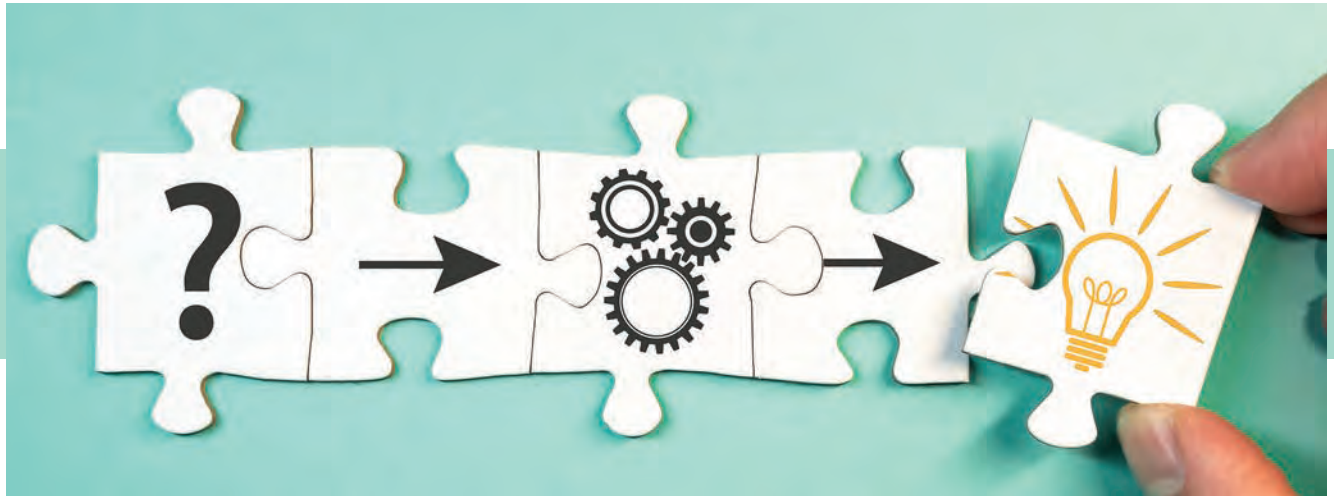
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# What it takes to become a learning system

— *even in a pandemic*

BY PAM YODER, JIM ROOME, MIA ROBINSON, ROBERTA REED, AND JOHN EYOLFSON

**H**ow often have you come away from a dynamic professional learning experience wishing you could maintain that high level of energy, learning, and networking? Our mission as learning leaders in the Learning Forward Colorado affiliate is to make such ongoing engagement and learning the norm.

During remote learning due to COVID-19, we discovered an unexpected opportunity to deepen our work to help schools and school leaders learn from one another in an ongoing way. Three schools spent time learning together in a Learning Forward Colorado Summer Institute focused on

Learning Forward's book *Becoming a Learning System* (Hirsh et al., 2018).

We had originally planned a one-day, in-person session, but when the events of 2020 forced a shift to three interactive online learning sessions, we came to recognize that this shift increased the effectiveness and energy of the professional learning.

Three staggered sessions, spread out over a three-month period, gave participants the capacity to develop a problem of practice and an initial plan, spend a few weeks implementing the plan and using the tools in *Becoming a Learning System*, and return to refine and refocus the plans using a tuning protocol. Three learning sessions also allowed participants to network and

build relationships. Meetings included laughter, sometimes tears, and lots of mutual support.

The book and the sessions with co-author Frederick Brown provided the blueprints and tools for these building-based educational leaders to navigate a process for addressing each school's problem of practice through the concept of a theory of change. One tool in particular immersed participants in the components, such as creating a vision, mission, and beliefs for professional learning, alignment with other systems, and leadership and included the resources and structures necessary to do the work. It also provided essential and guiding questions to engage with along the way.

## Working together in a community of practice helped principals from three schools broaden their perspectives and address their own unique problems of practice.

Because of those strong relationships, the school leaders began meeting on a monthly basis. They became a community of practice and supported, monitored, and encouraged each other. Although they pursued different problems of practice and navigated different challenges, they learned from one another's contexts, questions, and strategies. Working together broadened their perspectives and helped them address their own unique problems of practice.

To highlight the learning from this effort, we asked the principals of the three schools to share their problems of practice, the processes they used to address them, and their key lessons. Their experiences and reflections can guide others to engage in sustained, collaborative learning communities to address problems of practice and improve teaching and learning.

### **MIA ROBINSON, PRINCIPAL** **Village East Elementary School** **Aurora, Colorado**



Mia Robinson

In summer 2020, I had just started my tenure as principal at Village East Elementary School, and major crises were unfolding all around us, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests against systemic racism. As a

Black female leader, these crises touched aspects of my identity that are deeply important to me, and my leadership took on a strong activist stance.

This defining moment in history caused me to seek new and innovative ways to lead my staff with the goal of disrupting a system that for decades has been historically underserving many of our students, especially students of color.

It was at that crossroads that I invited my new leadership team to attend Learning Forward Colorado's Summer Learning Institute. The institute afforded us an opportunity to bond, craft our shared values and purpose, and begin to sharpen our equity lens as a unified team. Suddenly, there was hope and an opportunity to forge our way through a very challenging time.

We identified our problem of practice: to align our practices across grade levels and across classrooms to create more coherence and equity for students. To address this problem, we prioritized teaming and relationship-building. We also committed to defining and refining our practices, focusing on highly effective and culturally adaptive practices.

Our work got off to a strong start. We created professional learning structures to support teachers in refining their practices as well as monthly racial consciousness training. Professional learning communities were functioning well with a data-driven

focus in literacy and math along with a new meeting structure that brought us together once a month to analyze our reading data and regroup our students for intervention support.

But, of course, nothing was predictable in 2020 except the need for flexibility and adjustments, especially in November as we headed into yet another spike in the COVID-19 pandemic. As students and families began getting sick, teachers' morale began to wane. The stress was especially great for families of color and the teachers working with them because members of these communities had higher incidence rates and inconsistent access to health care.

We quickly pivoted to all things virtual. In part because of what we had learned during the summer institute, we were prepared to adapt while staying focused on our goals. We made our annual family event virtual and were thrilled with the engagement from 145 families. We created an opportunity for teachers to showcase their ongoing professional learning in a virtual meeting, at which 17 teachers presented about topics such as how to use math tool kits, question-answer-response methods, and journaling about race.

Throughout this time, we stayed connected with the two other schools we had met during the summer institute. They were an unexpected well of support that nurtured me and my school throughout the year. In



particular, they helped me maintain and develop a courageous leadership stance and stay focused on our goals, as defined by our problem of practice.

**PAM YODER, PRINCIPAL**  
**Dennison Elementary School**  
**Lakewood, Colorado**



Pam Yoder

Even as we navigated the stresses of educating during COVID-19, the leadership team at Dennison Elementary School didn't want to lose sight of our big-picture goals for student learning — our "why." When Learning Forward Colorado offered an opportunity for learning, collaboration, and reflection, our team embraced the chance to look beyond COVID-19 disruptions.

We used it as a way to look more broadly at an ongoing problem of practice: addressing learning engagement inequities for our students, which were exacerbated by, but not unique to, teaching during the pandemic.

To understand the problem of engagement among some of our students, we looked at how students in grades 3-5 accessed and engaged with mathematics instruction in person, in a hybrid setting, and during remote learning. When we looked at students with decreasing scores on a standardized math assessment, we saw that those students struggled to engage with the teacher's instruction whenever they were not learning in in-person classrooms.

Each time this group of students had to pivot to a remote setting, they struggled on the assessment and appeared to have more difficulties in accessing the learning. As they examined this data, teachers realized that they had been blaming the students for their struggles, rather than recognizing the impact of the remote teaching strategies. Our leadership team

recognized the need to address this to live up to our commitment of being a culture of high success and high care for each student.

With this knowledge, we named our problem of practice — to change our instructional practices to ensure all students could access the learning in math — and this was the first step to sharpening our professional learning process. We pushed ourselves to examine how our online practices failed to capture student involvement in the learning.

We then defined our student engagement outcomes and identified success indicators that included attendance and participation in daily instruction and task completion. An evaluation rubric and our remote learning look-fors guided the conversations about identifying highly engaged instructional practices.

Based on our problem of practice, targeted outcomes, and success indicators, the staff discussed and identified the year's professional learning focus on engagement. We wanted to address professional learning at all levels — individual, team, and leadership — so we created a menu of differentiated choices.

To ensure that this menu of options was grounded in our school's mission, vision, and beliefs about professional learning, we looked to our learning during the summer institute and used a guided feedback sheet based on a tool in *Becoming a Learning System*.

The building leadership team met monthly to assess progress, identify barriers, and address interventions such as coaching and supervision for individuals and teams who needed it. For example, we determined that some teachers needed specific professional learning about teaching content remotely and instructional strategies such as working on student focus, checking in frequently for demonstrations of understanding, and increasing communication with parents.

By defining and implementing a structure for professional learning

that supports growth for professionals resulting in growth for students, we established a process we will continue to use well beyond the challenges of the pandemic.

**JIM ROOME, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL**  
**Eaglecrest High School**  
**Centennial, Colorado**



Jim Roome

At Eaglecrest, we recognized that schools must be able to adapt at the speed of change around them, especially during a crisis like COVID-19. A top-down change model could never allow educators in schools and classrooms to move fast enough to meet students' needs.

In our school, we decided the necessary speed could be achieved by empowering professional learning communities (PLCs) made up of three to eight educators who teach a common class, for example College Prep English 9, or groups of educators teaching within a common curricular area such as the performing arts, to alter existing structures without waiting for a top-down directive from the district.

This shift would allow professional learning teams to more quickly help teachers navigate the learning format changes we anticipated (hybrid, fully remote, and fully in-person learning) and recognize and address inequities that exacerbate opportunity gaps between Black and Brown students and their white and Asian counterparts. How to implement this change became our defining problem of practice.

As the first quarter of the school year neared its conclusion, we began to systematically assess this shift to PLC-focused decision-making and its impact on teachers. In particular, we focused on assessing whether our 33 PLCs functioned in a way that embodied collective efficacy and whether teachers'

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level of empowerment increased.

Through this assessment, we learned a lesson that we had not recognized previously: Professional learning teams were more successful in effecting change when they worked collaboratively and understood and implemented the learning cycle outlined in *Becoming a Learning System*, which we had learned about in the Learning Forward Colorado Summer Institute.

Most specifically, teams that understood the necessity for creating professional learning as an integral part of the learning cycle were able to focus on targeted instructional change that directly and positively impacted student learning.

We saw teams that daringly stepped into new grading practices and teams that were able to develop cross-teacher assessment reliabilities with no prompting. These teams would step into conversation saying, “We have been learning together and have this idea, and we are wondering if . . . .” Those requests were met with encouragement — a reminder that, as the professionals, they were the experts and did not need permission to bring about change to improve student learning.

A more cautious team, after learning about standards-based grading practices, presented a proposal for implementing this grading practice. Their plan included multiple levels of communication with students and parents on how students would be assessed, an outline of the many opportunities students would have for demonstrating their learning, and the way that parents and students would be able to see a student’s level of achievement. Their proposal was met with excitement. The energy and empowerment were palpable.

Teams that invested in understanding and using the learning cycle felt empowered to effect change without the need for a schoolwide directive. Teams that were not functioning at a high level either in an interpersonal or structural fashion did not experience the same actualization

of collective efficacy. They found themselves mired in issues that didn’t and couldn’t impact student learning.

Our focus in creating a feeling of empowerment in decision-making led us to seek to further support teams that were not yet there. In doing so, we discovered that, in a school of 3,100 students, a one-size-fits-all support structure doesn’t work. Teams needed differentiated and targeted support.

In one instance, this new learning required bringing in the expertise of members of multiple departments to support facilitators in becoming more skilled using protocols, identifying potential underlying areas of tension, and selecting focus areas of learning and growth.

Observing multiple teams and debriefing the observational experiences created a foundation of collaboration within the teams, a greater understanding of professional learning’s role in the learning cycle, and a clear understanding of and commitment to collective efficacy — the empowerment sought in our problem of practice.

The learning from this work was profound and, at the same time, straightforward. To support students at a speed equal to that of change in our society, the agent of change must be small, target-focused learning teams that:

- Identify the area for change;
- Identify the adult learning necessary to effect change; and
- Take their learning and implement processes to make the change.

For this to happen, facilitators require support to pinpoint the differentiated needs of individual teams and effectively grow a facilitator’s capacity for leading and identifying the early indicators that a team might need support.

### COMMON GROUND AND CONTINUED LEARNING

As the three school teams worked together, they found common ground in the need for an accelerated cycle

of learning caused by the frequent need to pivot, a focus on developing and trusting shared leadership, and a commitment to accessing the collective efficacy and professional capital within their organizations to grow teachers’ and students’ learning. This common ground allowed them to support one another and grow together.

Our three-school community of practice, which began with the summer institute and developed organically over several months, has experienced initial success. The three schools identified important problems of practice and leveraged their learning systems to address them.

But initial success is not enough, and the leaders of these schools see the system changes they’ve made so far as a beginning. The three schools will continue a community of practice in 2021-22. As our challenges and opportunities evolve, the community of practice members will continue to apply their learning from *Becoming a Learning System* to new problems of practice this year and beyond.

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# IDEAS

## SUSTAINING THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

**"E**cosystems that support professional learning have multiple complex components and function in a dynamic manner. For professional learning to stick, leaders must attend to those components, shifting attention away from designing and implementing professional learning in isolation and toward sustaining the entire ecosystem."

— *Leaders play key roles  
in the professional  
learning ecosystem*

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## New curriculum demands new support

CHICAGO SCHOOLS EMBRACE CURRICULUM-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

BY STEPHANIE HIRSH AND JONATHAN BEN-ISVY

In 2017, Chicago Public Schools administrators were debriefing what they had observed while visiting several schools. They wondered why the focus of instruction was so vastly different not only from school to school but classroom to classroom in the same school. They grew concerned that some students had more access to high-quality learning opportunities than others.

Soon, their discussion homed in on curriculum. Several administrators referred to a research report they had studied that examined the importance

of grade-appropriate assignments to student success. The researchers found that “[w]hen students who started the year behind had greater access to grade-appropriate assignments, they closed the outcomes gap with their peers by more than seven months” (TNTP, 2018).

Others referred to research studies linking the quality and rigor of instructional materials with student outcomes. Some noted the efforts of the nonprofit organization EdReports to assess and rank curricular materials in the marketplace.

Continuing discussions led

to a decision to assess the quality, availability, and accessibility of curriculum materials across the district. Until this point, most decisions regarding curriculum and instructional materials had been left to principals and teachers at each school, and many schools, in turn, had left the decisions up to teachers.

In 2019, Chicago Public Schools asked 500 teachers if their school provided curriculum in the area that they teach. Almost 50% said their schools did not provide these resources, and 35% reported spending more than



five hours each week searching for instructional resources. A staggering 85% felt it was very important that the district provide unit plans, lesson plans, and resources for teachers. Chicago leaders knew they had to take action.

## A VISION FOR CURRICULUM REFORM

With the visionary leadership of then-chief education officer LaTanya McDade, Chicago Public Schools made it a priority to make high-quality, grade-level instructional materials available to all teachers and students and provide effective curriculum-based professional learning to support successful implementation.

The district dismissed an off-the-

shelf option because available curricula did not meet the district's expectations for cultural responsiveness and equity, including connecting learning to the identity and culture of young people, representing students' cultures, languages, and literacies, and drawing on students' lived experiences. Building from scratch, estimated to take five to 10 years, was a problem given the urgency of the situation.

The leadership team opted for a hybrid approach. The team created a request for proposals for curriculum publishers to customize their materials to meet the district's needs and priorities and partnered with EdReports to develop rubrics to evaluate potential curricula on alignment with academic standards as well as the district's access and equity principles.

These principles include incorporating support for English learners, Universal Design for Learning, and social and emotional learning, as well as drawing on students' lived experiences and valuing their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic assets as tools for learning.

District staff — including content specialists, curriculum designers, and over 300 teachers — engaged in feedback and review cycles based on the content developed by the curriculum vendors, who then revised the content.

Within two years, the new Chicago Skyline curriculum was complete for six content areas in pre-K-12 (mathematics, English language arts, social studies, science, French,

## ABOUT THE ELEMENTS

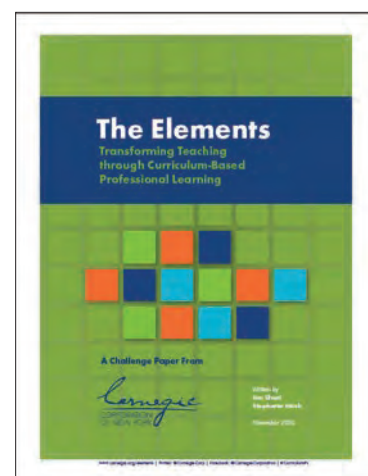
*The Elements: Transforming Teaching Through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning* is a report from Carnegie Corporation of New York that explores how professional learning anchored in high-quality curriculum materials can improve teaching and learning for all.

Its aim is to guide teachers to experience instruction as their students will, change instructional practices, and lead to better student outcomes. Growing out of Carnegie's grantmaking work, it details the following key elements of curriculum-based professional learning and essentials that underlie the processes of change:

- **Core design features:** curriculum, transformative learning, and equity;
- **Functional design features:** learning designs, beliefs, reflection and feedback, and change management;
- **Structural design features:** collective participation, models, and time; and
- **The essentials:** leadership, resources, and coherence.

For more information, visit

[www.carnegie.org/elements](http://www.carnegie.org/elements).



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and Spanish) and its resources were centralized within the Chicago Public Schools technical ecosystem.

With the development of the Skyline curriculum underway, other district staff turned to designing support for school adoption and implementation. As with any curriculum, teachers would need to be prepared and supported to implement the curriculum well. No matter how well-designed, the curriculum will not benefit students unless teachers have confidence and skill in using it.

Skyline's rollout had to be especially stellar because the district isn't mandating its use. Ultimately, each school makes its own decision about which subjects and grade levels of the Skyline curriculum to adopt, guided by a self-assessment tool about needs and staff readiness.

Schools then receive different levels of support based on the results of their readiness assessment. Using this self-evaluation, schools requested one of three levels of support. The district matched the level of support to the level requested based on demonstrated need according to equity indicators.

## CURRICULUM-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

During the early planning phase, several Chicago district leaders came across *The Elements: Transforming Teaching Through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning*, a report from Carnegie Corporation of New York (Short & Hirsh, 2020).

The report, which describes essential components of support for effective curriculum implementation, arrived just in time to support the administrators with their curriculum effort. It details the core, functional, structural, and essential components that need to be in place for professional learning to effectively build capacity for high-quality implementation of curriculum.

One of the functional elements was particularly relevant for the district's current phase of curriculum

## HOW THE ELEMENTS SUPPORTS TEACHERS

"Our investment in Skyline demands that we provide our teachers with the support they need to successfully implement Skyline in their classrooms," said Jonathan Ben-Isvy, manager of professional learning for Chicago Public Schools. "This means supporting and building content knowledge and instructional practices by rooting these in the Skyline materials they will use in their classrooms and with the very students they will be teaching in mind.

"*The Elements* has guided our vision for successful implementation of Skyline," Ben-Isvy said. "Each decision is made with the intention of being as true to the framework as feasible within the complexity of a school system the size of Chicago."

work: the change management plan. "Change management is a functional design feature that addresses individual concerns and group challenges, including opportunities to discuss and troubleshoot issues that arise when implementing new instructional materials," the authors wrote (Short & Hirsh, 2020).

Building awareness and addressing personal concerns are priorities for successful launches of major curriculum reform efforts, especially when a new initiative means change for everyone, as it did in Chicago's shift to curriculum-based professional learning.

## STARTING WITH LEARNING LEADERS

Like most large districts, Chicago Public Schools has long dedicated resources to professional learning, including over 300 central office and school-based staff members to support teachers and classroom instruction.

But, for the first time, those staff have curriculum to anchor professional learning. Helping district leaders make this shift is key.

The first step is ensuring that professional learning leaders experience the same kind of curriculum-based professional learning they are now expected to design and execute for their teachers.

Consistent with the process outlined in *The Elements* (Short & Hirsh, 2020), learning leaders identified different models of professional learning to first build awareness of the curriculum and later refine expertise. The key models to be used include individual investigations of the curriculum and self-paced learning modules, coaching, technical assistance, institutes, workshops, and study groups.

The authors of *The Elements* report, Jim Short of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and former Learning Forward executive director Stephanie Hirsh, facilitated three learning sessions to introduce the core (curriculum, transformative learning, and equity), functional (learning designs, beliefs, reflection and feedback, and change management) and structural (collective participation, models, and time) design elements that they would be using in their future efforts.

Short and Hirsh also addressed how leaders' changing roles and responsibilities relate to what the report calls the essentials (leadership, resources, and coherence) elements. It was an important beginning step to develop a shared understanding for what the work ahead required.

In addition, professional learning leaders have access to self-paced modules to build technical expertise in the Skyline technical platform (SAFARI Montage), Google Docs/Classroom, and the Checkpoint Student Assessment System. Participants have opportunities to earn credentialed badges.

Dr. Gholdy Muhammad, associate professor of language and literacy at Georgia State University, facilitated professional learning on the culturally

and historically responsive pedagogical approaches integrated into the instructional materials.

Professional learning leaders appreciated the intensive attention to their needs and interests and feel better prepared to support teachers. One leader said, “Diving into the lessons was extremely helpful, especially walking in the students’ shoes.” Another said, “The scenarios were powerful, actually thinking about how I would use this with a teacher team I support.”

### EXPANDING LEARNING TO TEACHERS

While district professional learning leaders continue to engage in their own learning, they are also focusing on building and executing curriculum-based professional learning for their schools and teachers.

For the 2021-22 school year, the type and level of that support is tied to the adoption commitment made by each school, but each level incorporates components of the framework outlined in *The Elements*, especially collective participation, time, models, and reflection and feedback.

All schools have access to Skyline 101, a series of learning sessions that leverages synchronous and asynchronous models to support implementation throughout the school year. These include professional learning with content specialists and unit-specific modules that delve into the core content knowledge and high-impact instructional practices aligned to each Skyline unit.

In addition, school leaders are encouraged to give grade-level and subject-matter learning teams time to use the Skyline unit-specific and

instructional practice modules to promote study, planning, lesson rehearsal, and reflection and feedback cycles for each unit.

Because Skyline is not a scripted curriculum, this helps teachers collaboratively plan and make important decisions like how to best enable their English learners and diverse learners (those who receive special education services) to achieve the grade-level standards.

This commitment to collaborative professional learning is grounded in the district’s recognition of the importance of the collective participation structural element in encouraging all teachers and all students to buy in and benefit.

Thirty-five schools are receiving the highest level of support offered, which includes partnering with a school improvement organization skilled in supporting curriculum-based professional learning and implementation. Participating school improvement organizations are TNTP, Leading Educators, ANet, and Public Consulting Group.

These schools receive additional resources and time to support ongoing curriculum study, implementation and reflection cycles, curriculum-focused coaching and feedback sessions, and leadership development. Staff members receive additional compensation for committing 60 minutes a week to the professional learning agenda.

### CELEBRATING CHANGE

Chicago Public schools released Chicago Skyline with a celebration during which education policymakers, researchers, curriculum developers, district leaders, and teachers gathered to remember why they had launched

this journey, acknowledge their accomplishments to date, and highlight the path forward. Creating moments for reflection and celebration are key to successful change management.

Change management is a critical element in curriculum-based professional learning. A comprehensive change management plan attends to the macro and micro, organizational and individual, technical, and subject-matter changes that need to happen.

Launching, ongoing implementation support, monitoring, reflecting, celebrating, and reporting are all important phases of the plan. Chicago Public Schools has the essential elements in place for long-term success.

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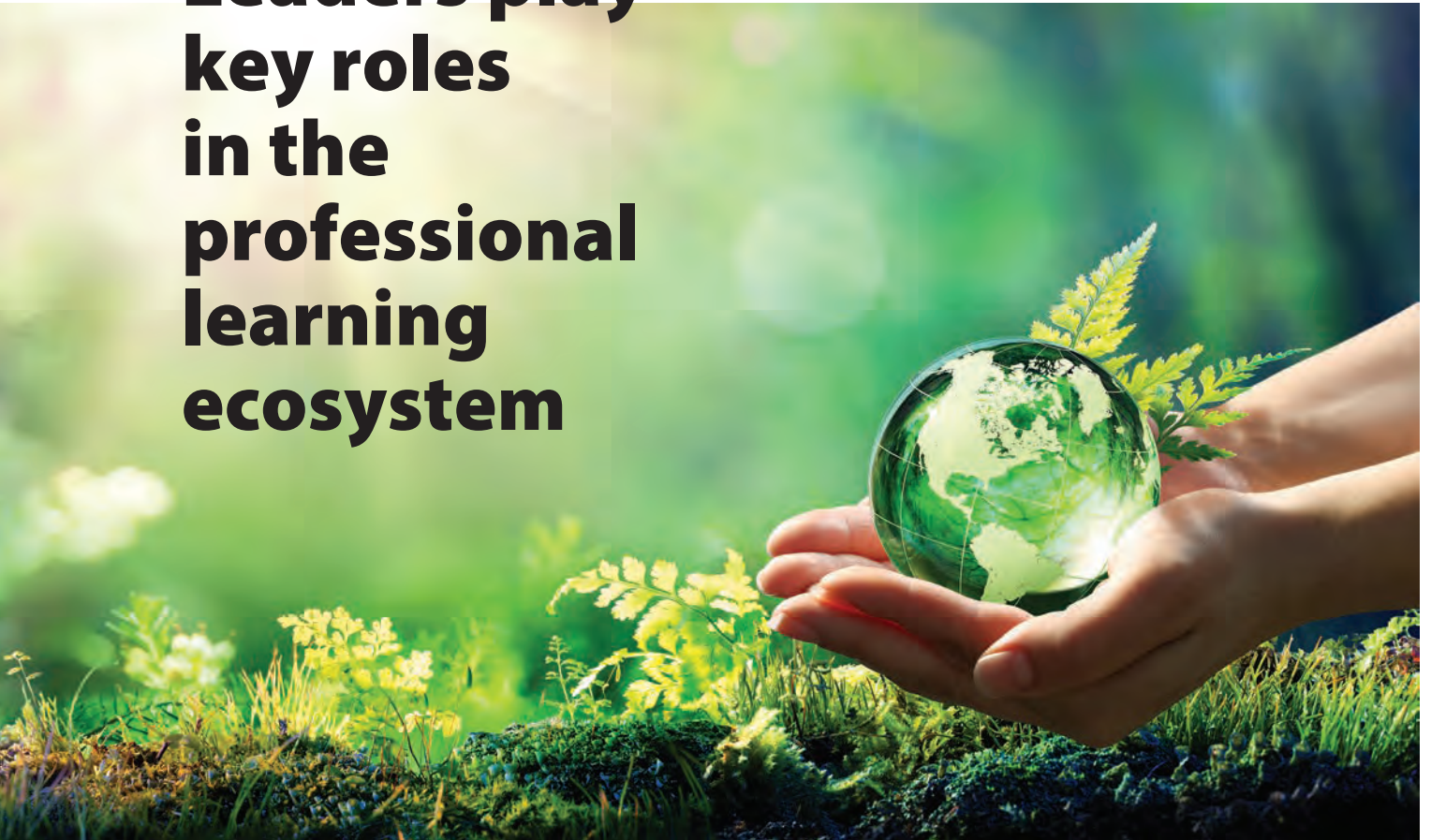
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**UPDATE**





## Leaders play key roles in the professional learning ecosystem



BY SARAH L. WOULFIN

**A**tiger in the arctic. Sunflowers in a coral reef. Would they thrive — or even survive — in those ecosystems? Probably not, despite being strong and resilient species. Similarly, even well-designed, evidence-based professional learning must occur in a supportive, rather than endangering, ecosystem to take root and thrive.

In my experiences as a researcher and a practitioner across states and districts, I have observed and engaged in ecosystems that support high-quality professional learning and

promote improvement. But I have also seen situations where professional learning is dropped into schools, with high expectations for learning and change, but with little consideration of the nature and vitality of the wider ecosystem.

Sometimes, reformers and administrators may neglect to account for how organizational structures and conditions shape adult learning, or they neglect to align professional learning with existing programs and priorities in the school.

Ecosystems that support professional learning have multiple

complex components and function in a dynamic manner. For professional learning to stick, leaders must attend to those components, shifting attention away from designing and implementing professional learning in isolation and toward sustaining the entire ecosystem.

### COMPONENTS OF THE ECOSYSTEM

The professional learning ecosystem includes an array of educators, ranging from the superintendent and other district leaders to coaches to teachers and paraprofessionals to student support staff. As in other kinds of

ecosystems, schools thrive when their members not only coexist but cooperate.

There are benefits when leaders and teachers participate in professional learning together (Woulfin, 2016). For instance, when principals, instructional coaches, and teachers engage in professional learning on mathematics instruction together, it builds capacity in a unified direction, assisting with school improvement (Neumerski, 2013; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017).

Ecosystems also have vital, nonliving components, including soil and water or, in the case of schools, funding, time, space, and other resources (Grubb & Allen, 2011). For professional learning to stick and catalyze change, we need to bolster these resources.

When designing and facilitating professional learning, leaders should check whether resources and goals are aligned. For example, they should examine how schedules and routines enable or inhibit collaborative professional learning. They should also consider the strengths and limitations of available or needed online platforms to optimize learning opportunities, especially in the era of COVID-19. They should ensure that classroom resources, such as science kits, arrive in time for teachers to engage with them during professional learning — for example, about implementing lessons aligned with the Next Generation

**The professional learning ecosystem includes an array of educators. As in other kinds of ecosystems, schools thrive when their members not only coexist but cooperate.**

Science Standards.

Unfortunately, invasive species can proliferate and damage an ecosystem. A notable example in schools is racism (Annamma et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006). More concretely, racism can have a limiting effect on who leads and participates in professional learning, lead to deficit-based messages about students of color, and poison the ecosystem in other ways.

This damages working conditions for educators of color, impedes change efforts, and hampers efforts to develop anti-racist, equity-centered educators (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020) and achieve equity and social justice. For these reasons, it is critical to analyze and dismantle racism in professional learning structures and activities.

#### **DYNAMICS OF THE ECOSYSTEM**

Ecosystems rely on flows of energy to sustain life. In the professional learning ecosystem, that energy comes from many directions. For example, a district leader's presence signals the importance of learning

and collaboration. A coach's sustained support for new practices keeps the learning going. Teachers' ongoing collaboration helps knowledge and practices grow.

Ecosystems are dynamic; they change over time. A professional learning ecosystem might prioritize phonics instruction at one point in time and elementary science instruction at another, or middle school social and emotional learning at one time and writing instruction at another. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a shift toward professional learning on remote learning strategies as well as health and safety procedures (Wan, 2020). District and school leaders should chart these waves of professional learning and clearly explain shifts.

Interconnections among components of the professional learning ecosystem nourish development and change. Leaders nourish learning when they promote coaching and work alongside teachers and other leaders to tailor professional learning (Woulfin, 2016). Teachers nourish learning by sharing their practices with colleagues, supporting other staff, and communicating openly with district and school leaders (Horn & Little, 2010). Across roles, communication and collaboration feed adult learning and school improvement (DuFour, 2004).

The professional learning ecosystem can be damaged, preventing

professional learning from sticking. Leaders should tend to the ecosystem, for example, by considering how policies and events might shock the system and harm relationships. On a brighter note, ecosystems can heal, so leaders can actively work to rejuvenate the learning ecosystem if it is harmed.

## IMPROVING THE ECOSYSTEM FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Leaders play several key roles in ensuring a thriving professional learning ecosystem, not only in allocating time and space but also in the messages they send and the practices they model.

**Leaders should set clear expectations for professional learning and articulate roles and responsibilities.** For instance, they should explain how teachers will engage with instructional coaches and how teachers will interact in data team meetings. They should also celebrate educators' learning to elevate and encourage continued growth. This entails leaders commending the ways in which teachers, other leaders, and staff have gained capacity and shifted practice. By broadcasting these steps, leaders invite other educators to learn and change.

**Leaders should model how they are learning, especially regarding central issues such as culturally responsive pedagogy, remote learning, and family engagement.** Additionally, leaders should celebrate educators' growth to encourage continued learning among the whole community. This includes publicly acknowledging educators' new knowledge and skills, inviting educators to share their learning and lead additional professional learning, and accepting mistakes as part of the learning process rather than penalizing staff for making them.

**Leaders should demonstrate care and compassion and attend to educators' well-being so they will be ready to learn, grow, and improve.**

## To attend to all of these dimensions, leaders should develop and communicate a clear vision.

Caring school leadership improves conditions for adult collaboration and learning while increasing educator retention (Louis et al., 2016). In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and rapid shifts across the education system, it is especially critical to tend to multiple facets of educators' well-being and encourage multiple forms of interaction.

All of these steps can help the professional learning ecosystem thrive so that best practices can take root and grow. To attend to all of these dimensions, leaders should develop and communicate a clear vision. They might create a visual of the professional learning ecosystem that details the ecosystem's members, the major professional learning goals and tasks, the resources required, and how the components fit together.

While developing and communicating this vision, it is essential that leaders listen to and learn from diverse members of the community, including special and general education teachers, parents, students, district leaders, school psychologists and other student support staff, and researchers. The members and components of thriving ecosystems live and grow in symbiosis. School communities should do the same.

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BY SANDY CAMELI

**W**hen the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted in-person education in spring 2020, learning leaders urgently needed collaborative professional learning — to take deep breaths, reflect on how to shift their practices, and support one another emotionally and logistically to survive and eventually thrive in this unfamiliar learning environment.

However, many traditional growth opportunities became impossible amid requirements for social distancing, remote teaching, and other health precautions. Some educators wondered

if there was even space for professional collaboration during a pandemic while instructors prioritized students' and families' basic needs. If so, how might teachers and leaders carve out time from their overloaded days (and nights) to concentrate on a new skill set?

Hawaii's Na Kumu Alaka'i Teacher Leader Academy, a year-long professional learning experience for school- and district-level teachers, addressed this challenge with online cluster coaching. Cluster coaching is a collective partnership in which a mentor works with a cohort of teacher leaders.

The use of cluster coaching in the

academy was twofold: Provide just-in-time support and resources for teacher leaders who were guiding others at their respective schools and decrease the distance between opportunities and collegial inquiry by using online platforms to connect learning leaders during unpredictable times.

Previous coaching structures, while effective, were based on traditional one-on-one sessions between an assigned mentor and teacher leader with a heavy emphasis on consultancy protocols. For teacher leaders working on an action research project as part of the academy, this approach allowed for depth of knowledge to guide and support the

teacher leader’s targeted outcomes at the school level. But it did not give them the benefit of learning from their peers.

In the updated cluster coaching model, teacher leaders participated in online group sessions with peers from similar school communities or geographical areas with an assigned mentor. The online platform approach decreased the physical space between participants — who previously would have to travel longer distances for in-person professional learning — and increased the opportunity to share resources and experiences from pre-K-12 peers who might not routinely work together.

### STRUCTURE OF THE CLUSTER COACHING

Educators in the teacher leader academy engaged in professional learning aimed at nudging master teachers out of the classroom and into leadership roles where their effective influence can impact school or district-level initiatives.

Coupled with the Teacher Leader Model Standards (NNSTOY, 2017), the Hawaii Department of Education uses its leader competencies (Hawaii Board of Education, 2015) to provide a strong foundation for innovation, collaboration, and personal and

professional growth for all its aspiring and practicing leaders.

Participants worked in groups of four to six people, most of whom had not interacted or engaged in thought-partner conversations with colleagues outside of their own schools. The cluster therefore lent itself to networking and partnerships previously unavailable to these teacher leaders, expanding their influence beyond traditional boundaries.

Educational specialists from the Hawaii Department of Education’s Leadership Institute served as mentors for each group. The mentor provided individual coaching as needed but mainly served as the logistics coordinator for the cluster coaching sessions.

The groups met virtually twice a year in a fixed-meeting format and then independent of their mentors as touchpoints for ongoing collegial conversations. The mentor-led sessions, structured around a 75-minute agenda, included the following elements.

#### **Inclusion activity (five minutes).**

The virtual coaching session began with the mentor offering a leadership-based quote and inviting teacher leaders to share their interpretation or application of the message to their own practice. This inclusion activity (Garmston & Wellman, 2009; Dolcemascolo

## A-B-C PROTOCOL

### A SHARING PROTOCOL FOR PEERS

#### **A is for audiences/alliances:**

- “Your targeted audience is ...”
- “The stakeholders who will benefit from this project are ...”
- “The individuals who will help support this idea include ...”

#### **B is for barriers/boundaries:**

- “Would \_\_\_\_\_ be considered a barrier or obstacle to your goals?”
- “Are there limitations or boundaries for ...?”
- “What considerations have you made for roadblocks related to ...?”

#### **C is for compliments/celebrations:**

- “This is what really excites me about your project ...”
- “Your proposal provides a strong foundation for ...”
- “The identified goals will add value by ...”

Source: Professional Development & Educational Research Institute, Hawaii Public Schools.

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& McKanders, 2014) established a proactive tone and honored all voices and perspectives.

**New learning (20 minutes).** Next, the mentor introduced a new concept or strategy for effective leadership. One example was viewing the video *Locating Yourself: A Key to Conscious Leadership* by the Conscious Leadership Group (n.d.) in which the theme focused on how mindset translates to effective or ineffective practices as a leader. The group self-assessed its practices based on the content and posed thought-provoking questions to continue the discussion as a team.

**Independent sharing (20 minutes).** Each participant shared updates and progress aligned to his or her action research project, which was tied to a need at the school or community of schools and focused on collaborative action with school-level peers. Using an A-B-C feedback protocol with intentional prompts, cluster peers posed wonderings to guide their colleague toward his or her targeted goals. (See sidebar on p. 67.)

**Think-tank discussions (20 minutes) and next steps (10 minutes).** The group discussed topics relevant to their continued collaboration and proposed next steps for implementation. Starter prompts included: “Brainstorm ideas for school partnerships and/or collegial collaborations within your community of schools” and “What ideas/proposals would you want to share with your superintendent about growing teacher leadership?” A shared electronic document captured ideas and proposals to guide future conversations and ongoing collaboration.

The cluster peers quickly embraced the opportunity to celebrate and collaborate with each other as the school year progressed and often connected outside of scheduled meeting times to exchange resources, test ideas, participate in unbook clubs (Cameli, 2020), and connect nonprogram colleagues with a budding network of teacher leaders.

The cluster coaching model is unique in its approach to bridging teacher leaders from outside their own schools to share, learn, and grow as professionals together and expanded the concept of a professional learning community (PLC) to that of a professional learning network. Similar to the concept of “it takes a village to raise a child,” the power of teacher leadership across campuses elevated leading and learning within a community of schools.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Through debriefing and reflective feedback, participants identified key takeaways from the cluster coaching experience to help inform future implementation of the practice.

First, the structure became an opportunity to connect and collaborate with peers outside of one’s own school and with whom collegial conversations might not have happened otherwise. Next, networking within designated school communities allowed for horizontal and vertical conversations across various disciplines and grade levels to best serve students within the same community. Also, the opportunity modeled an effective virtual structure for teacher leaders to replicate within their own school-level PLCs.

Additionally, the cluster coaching model provided a springboard for independent peer coaching (without an assigned mentor) and led to partnerships between schools and stakeholders independent of the teacher leader academy.

Finally, a limitation of cluster coaching ultimately became a goal for the new school year. Teacher leaders often hosted school visits to share systems and structures with peers and engage in thought-partner discussions about strengths and growth areas.

Before school closures due to COVID-19, these visits might include data-informed discussions modeled through a fishbowl protocol by grade levels, campus tours showing how resource rooms and specialty services

are coordinated and arranged to support all learners, and viewing on-site farm-to-school partnerships between agricultural experts and students, which invited interaction from guests.

These types of observations were not easily showcased via an online platform and hindered comprehensive views of teacher leaders’ impact on school and student success.

One idea for adaptation includes making video recordings of specific events to share during cluster coaching online sessions until safety protocols are lifted and visitors may return to campuses.

## WHAT’S NEXT?

The 2020-21 school year drained educators of energy, opportunities, and sleep and will be remembered for the challenges it brought and lessons it taught the field of education. However, by providing support and information and identifying bright spots and nuggets of hope from the dedicated teacher leaders in the trenches, cluster coaching was able to provide encouragement.

What happens next in the post-pandemic world of education for cluster coaching? For Na Kumu Alaka’i Teacher Leader Academy participants in Hawaii schools, the practice will continue to bridge ideas, new learning, and partnerships that support students, staff, and stakeholders from the teacher leaders’ respective campuses, across the islands, and throughout the state.

Graduates of the 2020-21 cohort continue to use the cluster coaching model in the 2021-22 school year by collaborating with peers implementing distance learning options, sharing resources and experiences from summer professional learning, and onboarding beginning teachers and new staff to their respective campuses. The cluster coaching model’s strongest attribute is that it can and will adapt to meeting the evolving needs of learning leaders who serve as change agents in Hawaii schools.

*Continued on p. 72*



## 3 challenges new coaches face — and how to overcome them

BY LISA L. ORTMANN, KATHERINE BRODEUR, AND SUSAN L. MASSEY

Instructional coaches provide a unique and powerful form of support that can help teachers transform their practice, tackle new initiatives, and learn from one another. But coaches themselves often lack access to the support they need and

deserve for coaching to have maximal impact.

Typically, coaches have minimal preparation for the job and receive little ongoing guidance once they have started. Even with a clear understanding of the logistics and goals of a coaching

program, many novice coaches still face challenges finding their stride.

We work with practicing teachers learning to become coaches in graduate programs and through professional learning initiatives in multiple school districts. We are also engaged in an



# IDEAS

ongoing research study of new coach development. Over the last five years, we have observed some common patterns in coaches' learning (Ortmann et. al, 2020).

Regardless of their years of teaching experience, school and community contexts, and specific coaching goals, coaches tend to move from scripted, tentative conversations with teachers to more fluid, targeted dialogue about teaching. In this process of growth, we have found that new coaches tend to struggle with common challenges. That pattern creates an opportunity to address those challenges proactively and systemically so that coaches can have productive relationships with teachers right away.

## NAMING THE CHALLENGES

In our work, we have seen three areas where novice coaches tend to struggle the most.

First is the challenge of taking a collaborative stance during coaching conversations with teachers. In a collaborative stance, the coach works with the teacher to identify problems of practice and co-create strategies and next steps (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012; Lipton & Wellman, 2007).

A collaborative stance can be distinguished from a facilitating stance, in which the coach asks open-ended questions and follows the teachers'

**If a struggling teacher does not feel heard, he is less likely to hear the coach's message or place trust in the coach going forward.**

reflections, and a consulting stance, in which the coach takes the lead in providing information and strategies for the teacher to consider.

The collaborative stance signals respect because it helps to equalize power dynamics, and it is essential for professionally rich, collegial relationships to flourish (Lipton & Wellman, 2007). While successful use of all three stances is most effective at supporting the aims of coaching (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012), the collaborative stance has the most potential for supporting innovation in the classroom.

New coaches are often surprised that the collaborative stance is challenging because teachers who become coaches typically value collaboration, have strong bonds with their teaching colleagues, and engage willingly in cooperative learning and problem-solving. But the change of role from teacher to coach dramatically shifts the dynamics of existing relationships. For example, teachers may now perceive the coach, who was

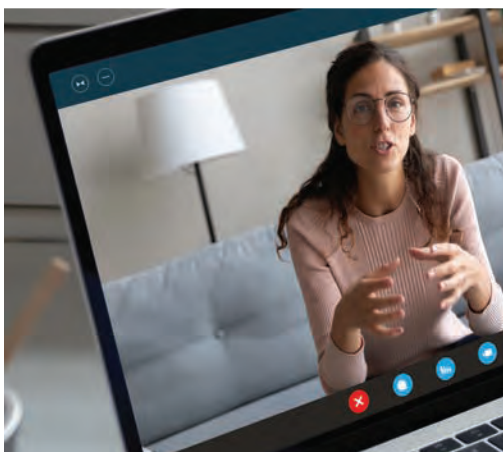
once a confidant, as an "authority" and feel intimidated or vulnerable.

The second challenge is being responsive in a collegial conversation, and it is also more of a struggle than many novice coaches expect. New coaches initially tend to stick to a coaching "script" to set and reach goals in the precious, limited time they have with teachers rather than listening carefully for teachers' cues.

Such listening is an important skill because initial goals sometimes must take a backseat to pressing needs in a teacher's classroom. If a struggling teacher does not feel heard, he is less likely to hear the coach's message or place trust in the coach going forward.

The third challenge is providing constructive and directive feedback. It is layered with interpersonal challenges, so it is no wonder that new coaches often struggle with it. New coaches may doubt that they know enough about the subject area, grade level, or students to offer meaningful feedback. They may also worry that their suggestions will be interpreted with offense.

As a result, we sometimes see them default to a cheerleader role. While starting with the teacher's strengths is an essential coaching practice (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012) and coaches should seek to balance directive and responsive feedback on instruction (Ippolito, 2010),



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avoiding directive feedback altogether is counterproductive to the goals of professional learning because it can confuse teachers, skirt important issues, and ultimately make the coaching process irrelevant.

## HOW LEADERS CAN SUPPORT COACH LEARNING

Leaders can support coaches' development first and foremost through conversation and reflection. For starters, talking through the inevitable shift in relational dynamics can help new coaches relax and discover new ways to collaborate with their colleagues.

To help coaches feel comfortable providing directive feedback, leaders can encourage them to plan and write down their feedback before the conversation with the teacher, perhaps using visual displays of observation data, such as tallies of questions asked or flow maps of a teacher's movement in the classroom.

Just as importantly, leaders should encourage new coaches to trust their instincts and celebrate successes, both of which can begin to build coaches' self-efficacy. For reflection questions and discussion prompts to guide these conversations, see the sidebar at right.

In addition to dialogue and reflection, leaders can incorporate professional learning designed to enhance new coach development. We have used all of the following methods in our work with new coaches (see Massey et al., 2020) and have been amazed at the impact a few purposefully designed learning experiences can have on coaching effectiveness.

Video analysis of coaching practice is just as valuable as it is for teaching practice because it provides an objective way to examine coaching practice and focus the coach's reflection on his or her practice (Tripp & Rich, 2012). It is particularly helpful for examining subtle and nonverbal forms of communication that influence the coach-teacher relationship.

During a coaching conversation, a coach may be so focused on the goals

that she loses sight of the way in which she is communicating those goals. She may also fail to see teachers' subtle cues about lack of trust or disengagement, which can include shifting of eyes, leaning back in the chair, or passive statements of agreement ("uh-huh").

Video analysis gives the coach a chance to examine those forms of nonverbal communication to course-correct and be more aware in the future and also to recognize and disrupt any misunderstandings that might evolve from cross-cultural communication differences.

Analyzing the written transcript of a coaching session provides a complementary perspective because it homes in on the content and dialogue of the coaching conversation and focuses inquiry on the discourse patterns in which the coach tends to engage (Kucan, 2007). The coach can examine the pattern of communication, including how questions were posed and how the teacher responded, and reflect on the specific language moves that did and didn't help the conversation progress toward the goals of the coaching cycle.

Studying the language patterns of other effective coaches also provides coaches with new models for moves to add to their repertoire and builds a broader awareness of the art in the coaching conversation itself.

Role-playing is an active learning strategy in which pairs or groups of coaches take turns in the position of teacher and that of a coach. It provides an opportunity to practice and reflect. For example, practicing the shift between responsive questions and directive suggestions can help new coaches get a feel for how to facilitate a balanced conversation (Ippolito, 2010).

Debriefing after the role-play can include identifying whether the method in a given coaching exchange was more directive or responsive and whether it fit the situation. Taking time to consciously step between the roles of coach and teacher is especially valuable for helping coaches recognize how they

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

### Questions for coaches to reflect on coaching stance

- What was the ratio of coach talk to teacher talk in the conversation?
- Whose ideas are driving the conversation?
- How are you and the teacher developing goals and determining progress toward the goals?
- Is there a balance in responsibility for next steps?

### Questions for coaches to reflect on responsiveness

- When and how did the teacher cue for support? How did you respond?
- Did the conversation go off track? If so, was it addressing the teacher's concerns?
- What happened immediately after the conversation went off track?

### Questions for coaches to reflect on feedback

- What did you notice about your nonverbal communication? The teacher's?
- What specific, observable details from the lesson did you seek to incorporate into the feedback?
- What was the ratio of affirmations to observations?
- How did the teacher respond to coaching questions and suggestions?

are positioning themselves as coaches.

Further, experiencing both sides of the coach-teacher dynamic will also allow coaches to explore the emotions that might come up in coaching conversations for teachers when they feel they are or aren't being listened to and practice effective ways to respond.

Professional learning networks are a valuable resource for coaches. School administrators may feel ill-equipped to answer new coaches' questions and respond to their specific dilemmas, so helping coaches seek out others in similar positions can help fill the gap.

Not only can professional networks provide mentorship for novice coaches, they are a much-needed avenue for ongoing professional learning and deep reflection about coaching practice (Bean et al., 2015; Peterson et al., 2009). They can help counter feelings of isolation that are common among coaches, especially in a school or district with only one or a few coaches, strengthening coaches' self-efficacy and motivation to persevere through challenges.

Providing informal and formal opportunities to support coaches' ongoing development is a powerful way to support the learning culture of the school or district at large. Coaches are uniquely positioned to engage in dialogue with teachers that can move

professional learning forward through meaningful conversations. School leaders who invest in supporting coaches are also supporting individual teachers' development and, ultimately, students' learning.

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Group coaching builds connections

*Continued from p. 68*

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DISCUSS. COLLABORATE. FACILITATE.

# TOOLS

## FOCUS ON YOUR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

**D**iscover your priority areas for professional growth and find the time to pursue them with this issue's tools.







## Find your growth opportunities

BY JENNIFER ABRAMS

**W**hile the concept of being a professional prominently features in teaching standards worldwide, as a profession we don't devote much time to the study of what it takes to be one. In schools, the idea of defining, and then supporting, the emotional and psychological development required to be a professional remains on the periphery — it's an expectation without support.

While research finds collective efficacy is essential for the collaborative work we do (Donohoo, 2017; Hattie, n.d.), we rarely have the opportunity to learn the hows of being a professional: how to be an effective team member and how to be a supportive colleague.

**Five key facets can help us become more socially aware, psychologically mature, and cognitively capable.**

Schools must get better at supporting all adults in terms of their personal development — at supporting faculty and staff to grow (up) at work. As Felipe Fernández-Armesto said in *So You Think You're Human? A Brief History of Humankind*, “If we want to go on believing we are human and justify the special status we accord ourselves — if, indeed, we want to stay human through the changes we face — we had better not discard the myth but start trying to live up to it” (Fernández-Armesto, 2005).

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## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EDGES

This tool asks us to consider our development as a professional. What are the skills, dispositions, and mindsets we need to develop to become professionals and do the important collective work we do in schools?

A group's growth and a school's effectiveness rely on individuals within the group stretching at their edges to become more socially aware, psychologically mature, and cognitively capable. In this way, our personal efficacy can contribute to developing that psychologically safe environment we know is important in our work in schools.

Continually stretching at our learning edges will allow us to work more productively, more purposefully, and in healthier ways for everyone.

While not an exhaustive list of capacities, abilities, and skills, the following five key facets encompass a great deal of what an educator, in every role, could work on in terms of personal and professional development. These facets are further described and explained in *Stretching Your Learning Edges: Growing (Up) at Work* (Abrams, 2021).

### 1. Know your identity.

What should we know about ourselves to work more effectively and humanely with others? How can we learn about our history, upbringing, strengths, biases, limitations, motivations, and values so we become better and more aware colleagues and teammates?

### 2. Suspend certainty.

How do we stretch beyond ourselves and build our intellectual humility and perspective taking? How do we suspend our certainty that we are "right" and reflect on and critique our own decisions and value systems?

### 3. Take responsibility.

How can we take responsibility for our own work product, language, actions, and development? How can we face challenges directly and humanely with an intent to work out solutions?

### 4. Engage in reciprocity.

What skills do we need to live with a sense of equality and mutual respect in our team and supervisory relationships? What do we need to do to show our belief in the worth and dignity of those with whom we work and the communities we serve?

### 5. Build resiliency.

What emotional and psychological hygiene must we practice to be healthy for ourselves and for others? How do we sustain commitment, energy, and health for ourselves and our work? How do we build the bandwidth to feel more comfortable with life's ambiguities and disappointments?

## SELF-REFLECTION

Review the five facets above and complete the self-assessment on pp. 76-77. Once you have done so, use them as part of self-reflection after meetings or part of professional growth plans. For example, at the end of every meeting, each team member can take a minute of quiet time to reflect on how he or she demonstrated the mindsets, capacities, and skills of the five facets.

- Did I see how knowing myself (or not) impacted my work with my colleagues in helpful or unhelpful ways?
- Did I suspend my certainty and not just advocate but also inquire?
- Did I take responsibility for my language choices? If so, how?
- Did I demonstrate mutual respect for all? If so, how?
- Did I manage myself so I could be supportive within the group? If so, how?
- How did keeping these five facets in mind support my learning and the learning of my teammates?

# LEARNING EDGES SELF-ASSESSMENT

## DIRECTIONS

Look at this set of questions that provide “learning edges” — areas you can stretch yourself to grow as a professional. Write your responses on a separate sheet of paper or electronic device. If you are unable to answer the question fully and feel comfortable doing so, ask a colleague what he or she thinks might be an appropriate response. If you don’t have an answer, make note of that fact. It’s OK to have a stretch edge.

When you have completed the self-assessment, review your notes and ask yourself:

- What do I see in terms of how I do or don’t demonstrate these five facets of being a professional?
- If I’m having trouble answering a question, do I notice what is getting in the way of doing so?
- How might I address the challenges I face within each facet?
- What can I do to help me progress, stretch, and grow (up) in my personal development so I can support my teams and my school?

### 1. Know your identity

• How do I articulate my connection to various parts of my identity (gender, race, ethnicity, faith, etc.), and do I see how these parts of myself impact my choices and actions on teams and in the classroom?

• What are my values, work styles, and preferences? How do they affect my work and leadership?

• Where are my blind spots in terms of how I see the world? What don’t I notice?

• Which parts of my identity have the strongest effect on how I see myself in my personal life and in my professional life?

• What do I know about how I see the world differently than others? How do I work effectively with those differences?

### 2. Suspend certainty.

• In what ways do I demonstrate keeping an open mind and listening without defensiveness to another point of view?

• In what situations should I be asking, “What am I missing?” or “Where could I be wrong?”

• In what situations do I admit mistakes easily and apologize if defensiveness gets the better of me? In what situations should I be doing more of this?

• What surprises me most when others have a different perspective? What is my response (internally and externally), and how might I respond even more effectively?

• How do I seek others’ input so I have a fuller picture of any given situation?

• In which situations have I realized I didn’t have the whole picture, which resulted in less than optimal outcomes? What can I do to improve my ability to see the whole picture?

### 3. Take responsibility.

- Do I share requests, decisions, concerns, disappointments, and grievances in productive ways? In which situations? In which situations is this a challenge for me?

- Do I speak with care and candor to those below, equivalent to, and above on the organizational chart and using solution-oriented mindsets and language? In which situations do I find this a challenge, and how can I improve?

- Do I acknowledge others who make a positive difference in my work? Where might I do so more consistently?

- Have I crafted a professional development map for myself based on my needs in the workplace and hopes for my career?

- What is something I need to take more responsibility for in my work? How might I do so?

### 4. Engage in reciprocity.

- In what ways do I demonstrate a belief in the worth and dignity of all individuals with whom I work? Do I model supportive and productive team behaviors: active listening, questioning, offering suggestions, and verbal and nonverbal behaviors that exhibit respect, and show personal regard? If so, how?

- Can I share examples of my language choices that demonstrate a belief in each group member and his or her contributions?

- Do I consistently support others and their development as group members and if so, how?

### 5. Build resiliency.

- Do I provide myself time, space, ability, and opportunity to acknowledge difficulties, loss, and disappointment, and do I do so in a healthy way?

- Do I recognize that self-care is inextricably related to team care and provide myself time for self-care? How so?

- Do I cope as well as I can with unexpected chaos and high-anxiety situations? If not, how am I learning to do so more effectively?

- Can I soothe myself when I am dismissed, diminished, challenged, or ignored? What are my strategies for doing so?

- In moments of discomfort, how do I continue to let in information so I make informed, nonreactive choices and keep myself centered?

- Do I have strategies that help me remain centered in my life and at work? What are those strategies?





**A**dequate resources are essential for professional learning to achieve desired outcomes for educators and students (Learning Forward, 2011). Time is one of the most valuable resources for learning, but it is also one of the greatest resource challenges for education leaders, especially in the U.S.

In other nations that outperform the U.S., students have less instructional time and teachers have substantially more time for collaborative professional learning (Wei et al., 2009). But in the U.S., time is the one resource mentioned consistently in surveys of principals and others as a limitation to school staff achieving their learning goals.

In fact, finding time for job-embedded professional learning is one of the most frequently cited challenges with implementing change in education (ASCD, 2012; MetLife, 2012, 2013; Scholastic Press & Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012).

In the recent book *The Learning Principal*, authors Kay Psencik, Frederick Brown, and Stephanie Hirsh (2021) point out that leaders who cultivate a learning culture in their schools are skilled at making and protecting time for professional learning despite the challenges. They know how to balance priorities, allocate tasks, and arrange schedules to make appropriate learning designs available to all educators. Many begin by looking to repurpose existing time to create more

time for learning.

The following tool from *The Learning Principal* can help school leaders (and other learning leaders) assess how time is currently being used — or not used — for learning and continuous improvement. By collaborating with your team to gather the data and reflect on the findings, you can think about learning time differently and begin making changes to prioritize more learning in the future.

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## 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](https://learningforward.org/store).

## MORE TOOLS FROM THE LEARNING PRINCIPAL

- The art of listening: [learningforward.org/journal/starting-strong/the-art-of-listening/](https://learningforward.org/journal/starting-strong/the-art-of-listening/)
- How principals implement change effectively: [learningforward.org/journal/early-learning-2/how-principals-implement-change-effectively/](https://learningforward.org/journal/early-learning-2/how-principals-implement-change-effectively/)

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# PLAN YOUR LEARNING TIME

<b>Purpose</b>	Identify options for adding or refocusing time for professional learning.
<b>Recommended time</b>	1 hour; required time may vary as work continues.
<b>Materials</b>	Time Review, p. 80
<b>Process</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Determine appropriate group with whom to hold this discussion.</li> <li>2. Ensure participants are familiar with the Standards for Professional Learning. To learn more about the standards, see <a href="https://www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning/">learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning/</a></li> <li>3. Ask the group to consider how time is allocated/used for professional learning and reasons/ways to increase or reallocate current uses.</li> <li>4. Use the Time Review on p. 80 to record time used for professional learning and how it is used.</li> <li>5. Use the following questions to guide a discussion of the data:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On average, how much time do teachers, coaches, principals, and others have for individual planning and reflection?</li> <li>• On average, how much time do teachers, coaches, principals, and others have for team learning?</li> <li>• On average, how much time do teachers, coaches, principals, and others spend on schoolwide learning?</li> <li>• Do teachers, coaches, principals, and others have adequate time for professional learning?</li> <li>• What are priorities for using additional time if it were identified?</li> <li>• What are considerations for creating new time or reallocating current time?</li> </ul> </li> <li>6. Debrief the discussion. Determine whether any actions may be taken to address the findings.</li> <li>7. Identify next three actions to take:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. _____</li> <li>2. _____</li> <li>3. _____</li> </ol> </li> <li>8. Over time, collect evidence of impact of the actions and determine whether additional actions are necessary.</li> </ol>

# TOOLS

## TIME REVIEW

	Used for professional learning? Yes/No	Participants	Goals/focus for professional learning time	Evidence of impact collected
Before school				
During lunch				
Scheduled time during school day				
Specific professional learning days				
District meetings				
Late-start days				
Early release days				
Substitute coverage				
Team planning time				
After school				
Teacher planning time				
Summer				

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# UPDATES



## PUT CONFERENCE LEARNING INTO ACTION

**L**earning Forward is committed to helping you apply what you learn at the 2021 Virtual Annual Conference. We want to help you get past the question educators often ask after an inspiring learning experience: “What do I do now?”

We created a Transformation Toolkit to help individuals and teams make sense of everything you learn at the conference and take actionable steps. It includes:

- A preconference goal setting and outcomes planning template;
- A session note catcher;
- A conference debrief protocol;
- Post-conference action planning tools; and
- A guide to turning comprehensive strategic goals into actionable initiatives.

You can find the toolkit at [conference.learningforward.org/conference-action-toolkit/](https://conference.learningforward.org/conference-action-toolkit/).



# UPDATES

## DALE HAIR AFFILIATE GRANT AWARD WINNERS

Two Learning Forward affiliates share the Learning Forward Foundation's 2021 Dale Hair Affiliate Grant Award. They are Learning Forward British Columbia and Learning Forward Connecticut. The grant supports affiliates to rebuild, reorganize, or generate a stronger organization to advance Learning Forward's mission and vision of professional learning.

As a new affiliate, Learning Forward Connecticut will use the funds for strategic planning and an implementation kickoff effort. Learning Forward British Columbia, which has a long history of supporting high-quality professional



learning in that province, will use the funds to mentor and transfer leadership, emphasizing revised Standards for Professional Learning and other Learning Forward resources.

The Dale Hair Affiliate Grant honors educator Dale Hair, who has had a major impact on the success of Learning Forward Affiliates. For decades, Hair has devoted her time and passion to providing personalized support for each affiliate to grow strong organizations that build capacity for thousands of educators to lead professional learning.

## NEW AND RENEWING DISTRICT MEMBERS

Learning Forward welcomes four new district members:

- **Greece Central School District** in Rochester, New York;
- **Jefferson County Board of Education** in Charles Town, West Virginia;
- **Richmond County School District** in Augusta, Georgia; and
- **South Bend Community Schools Corporation** in South Bend, Indiana.

We also look forward to continuing our work with renewing district members.



## YOU ASKED AND WE LISTENED

# New website feature for members

Are you researching a topic or trying to find an article or webinar but can't remember exactly where to find it? The Learning Forward website's new search page allows you to search all of our digital resources — articles, tools, webinars, and blogs — in one place. Explore more than 40 professional learning topics going back more than three decades. Visit [learningforward.org/search-resources](https://learningforward.org/search-resources) to see it in action.



# LEADING EQUITY PODCAST

Suzanne Bouffard, Learning Forward's vice president, publications, was a guest on the Leading Equity Podcast, along with Nancy Markowitz, founder of the Center for Reaching and Teaching the Whole Child. Interviewed by podcast host and producer Sheldon Eakins, Bouffard and Markowitz spoke about creating inclusive school

cultures by helping educators develop a social, emotional, and cultural lens on teaching and learning.

Bouffard and Markowitz are the co-authors of the book *Teaching With a Social, Emotional, and Cultural Lens: A Framework for Teachers and Teacher Educators*. The episode is available at [www.leadingequitycenter.com/208](https://www.leadingequitycenter.com/208).

# Learning Forward Virginia focuses on educator well-being



BY JUDY NEWHOUSE AND BARBARA PATTERSON ODEN

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Learning Forward Virginia is evolving to meet educators' needs.

Before the pandemic, teachers had a sense of their positive impact on students' learning. But as they grappled with new technology and unfamiliar challenges, many felt disconnected and dispirited, unsure of whether they were making a difference. We realized we needed to attend to the well-being of educators, starting with new ways to rebuild necessary human connections.

We began with a focus on the well-being of our board and membership by hosting webinars on social and emotional learning (SEL), informed by the work of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

After learning with and from other educators, we have integrated SEL strategies into our ongoing work. For

example, every board meeting now begins with a member check-in, such as sharing what we are each grateful for.

We also found that, like students, adults need to learn and celebrate what we are good at. Knowing our strengths increases confidence and allows us to build our competence. Our board used Gallup's StrengthsFinder program with a certified trainer to help us identify our strengths and construct a leadership team whose strengths complement one another. This process has contributed to better communication and collaboration among our board members.

Next, we focused on how to develop effective teams and organizations by working with a coach trained in the Dare to Lead approach, which cultivates courageous leadership. Through activities that encouraged us to examine our core values and reflect, we learned three key lessons: Be brave

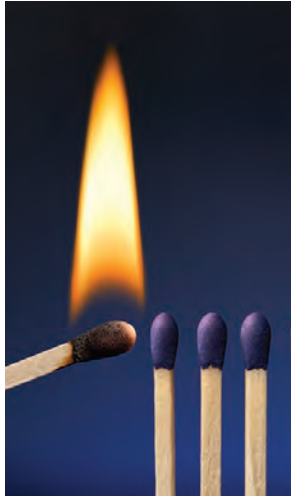
enough to be vulnerable, build a culture of trust, and discover your values and take off your armor of perfectionism.

Learning Forward Virginia's next step is a deep dive into the book *Principal Leadership for Racial Equity*, a joint publication from Corwin and Learning Forward. Based on research and insights from practitioners, this book provides practical, realistic, and useful guidance for developing racial consciousness and supporting that work in schools.

These and other learning opportunities moving forward will focus on developing knowledge and applying it to practice.

•  
**Judy Newhouse is executive director and Barbara Patterson Oden is president of Learning Forward Virginia (lfvirginia@gmail.com).**

# UPDATES



## IGNITING AND ACCELERATING LEARNING

Learning Forward partnered with FHI 360 to host a Twitter chat and webinar about how to accelerate learning during COVID-19 recovery. We heard from district and school leaders about how to support student engagement and implement effective practices.

We also learned together about participants' ideas, strategies, and challenges during this new phase of education. You can view tweets from the Twitter chat using the hashtag #ConnectedandEngaged and Learning Forward members can access the archived recording of the webinar at [learningforward.org/webinars/](https://learningforward.org/webinars/).



## WEBINAR SERIES CONTINUES

Learning Forward's series of webinars responding to the changing needs of educators and students continues through the fall and winter. Each webinar features insightful voices of district and state leaders, school administrators, teachers and coaches, policy experts, and researchers.

Live webinars are always free for members. Learning Forward members also get access to our on-demand library of webinars, including access to the associated resources and tools. For a list of upcoming topics and dates and to register, visit [learningforward.org/webinars/](https://learningforward.org/webinars/).

## TWITTER CHAT ON HOW TO LEVERAGE SEL

Learning Forward co-hosted a recent conversation on Twitter with Kathy Perret (right), instructional coach, trainer, and co-founder of #educoach, about how to leverage SEL so everyone can thrive this school year.

The conversation was based on the August issue of *The Learning Professional*, which focused on the theme "Starting Strong" and included articles about building knowledge about social and emotional learning strategies, fostering educators' resilience, and cultivating the support that school communities need to thrive.

A recap is available on the Learning Forward blog: [learningforward.org/2021/09/20/twitter-chat-recap-coaching-with-sel-for-a-strong-restart/](https://learningforward.org/2021/09/20/twitter-chat-recap-coaching-with-sel-for-a-strong-restart/).



## #TheLearningPro

### FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Follow us on social media. Share your insights and feedback about *The Learning Professional* by using [#TheLearningPro](https://twitter.com/TheLearningPro).



**Kathy Perret** @KathyPerret

Tonight's #educoach & #thelearningpro joint chat has been archived on my website! Thank you @LearningForward

 **Panorama Education** @PanoramaEd

A5. Educators can't pour from an empty cup. Building adult capacity for social-emotional learning is SO important.

In this guide, we analyze the definition of #adultSEL + share best practices to lead, teach, and model SEL: [panoramaed.com/blog/comprehen...](https://panoramaed.com/blog/comprehen...) #EduCoach #TheLearningPro #SEL



**A Comprehensive Guide to Adult SEL**  
Discover strategies and best practices to strengthen adult SEL in this comprehensive guide for district leaders.  
[panoramaed.com](https://panoramaed.com)





## Equity work brings student voices to the table

BY AMY COLTON, JANICE BRADLEY, AND DEB RADI

**H**ave you ever had one of those moments when you hit your head with your palm and say, “Duh! How did I not see that before?” The board of the Learning Forward Foundation had one of those moments recently when we realized our equity work had been missing an essential perspective: students.

The foundation board members have been on a collaborative learning journey about how to build the capacity of educators to establish equitable

learning environments that meet the needs of all students.

Our quest for understanding has included many steps, like book studies, learning from the lived experiences and insights of equity leaders, and ongoing dialogue with each other. In all this work, how had we overlooked students’ voices? How could we have thought that only adults know what’s best for students?

We realized that instead of doing *to* students, we needed to work *with* them.

We committed to incorporating student voice, which Dana Mitra (2006) defined as “the many ways in which youth might have the opportunity to participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers.”

She went on to point out the importance of shared ownership with students: “Student voice opportunities allow students to work with teachers and administrators to co-create the path of reform, it enables youth to meet their



# UPDATES

own developmental needs, and it can strengthen student ownership of the change process.”

The board’s summer retreat provided an opportunity to bring student voices to the table. Each session began with listening to and learning from students. Students told how educators developed meaningful and collaborative relationships with them, engaged in conjoint learning with them, and encouraged them to build their own identity as active, engaged learners.

They described the ways adults facilitated and supported their engagement in issues of social justice and equity within their communities and helped them develop a sense of belonging within educational reform initiatives aimed at equity for all.

Inspired by the voices of students, the foundation is exploring how to design professional learning that results in educators valuing the identities, backgrounds, and perspectives of students. Our goal is for educators to develop the skills to create learning spaces where adults listen to, collaborate with, and encourage leadership from students.

We started by reflecting on the student conversations and asking, “What conditions did educators establish that enabled such powerful

## Inspired by the voices of students, the foundation is exploring how to design professional learning that results in educators valuing the identities, backgrounds, and perspectives of students.

experiences and outcomes for students?” We uncovered three themes:

- Teachers and administrators established safe and supportive spaces for deep learning and relationship building.
- Students collaboratively engaged with adults and their peers around authentic and relevant issues.
- Adults encouraged and enabled student ownership of ideas and actions, providing support only as needed.

Professional learning facilitators need to create similar conditions for educators so that they can experience the empowerment and ownership that we want them, in turn, to create for students. Collaborative, inquiry-based professional learning that is well-facilitated and supported aligns with the learning spaces the students experienced.

Going forward, we plan to center student voices in our work for social justice and equitable education, and we encourage other educators to do the same. When we bring student voices to the table, students become the catalysts to inspire the change we all need.

### REFERENCE

Mitra, D.L. (2006). Student voice or empowerment? Examining the role of school-based youth-adult partnerships as an avenue toward focusing on social justice. *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, 10, 22.

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## WEBINARS

Learning Forward webinars feature leaders in the field. Gain insight from authors, researchers, and practitioners on topics including data-driven professional learning, implementing change, assessing the impact of professional learning, and much more. **Webinars are always free for members.**

Learning Forward members also get access to our on-demand library of webinars, including access to the associated resources & tools.

Visit [learningforward.org/webinars](https://learningforward.org/webinars) to get started.



## 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.

**M**any 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.

<p><b>STANDARD:</b> LEADERSHIP</p> <p><b>IN ACTION</b> During these stressful and uncertain times, leaders' support for professional learning is especially important. Leaders play multifaceted roles in creating learning systems where all educators develop and grow to improve outcomes for students.</p>	<p><b>TO CONSIDER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wendy Baron, Arthur Costa, and Robert Garmston (p. 26) write about the importance of compassionate leadership. What components of compassionate leadership are you taking in your current role, and how might you incorporate others?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pam Yoder and colleagues (p. 52) write about the importance of networks and mutual support for leaders during these stressful times. What learning networks are available to you, internal or external to your organization? If you did not identify any, what steps might you take to create some?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>STANDARD:</b> RESOURCES</p> <p><b>IN ACTION</b> One of the ways school, district, and state leaders support professional learning is by securing and leveraging resources. These resources can include high-quality instructional materials (p. 58), time (p. 78), plans and protocols (p. 16), learning networks (p. 42), and more.</p>	<p><b>TO CONSIDER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What resource(s) did you discover to support professional learning that you hadn't considered before reading this issue?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public dollars from recovery and reinvestment funds can be used to support professional learning and build staff capacity. How will you (or could you) use such funding to improve learning in your setting?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Learn more about Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning at [www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning](http://www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning).

# AT A GLANCE



## The case for investing in principals' learning

### Principals matter.



Students gain the equivalent of **3 months'** more learning with an effective principal<sup>1</sup>

**483**

Principals affect **483 students** on average in one school year<sup>1</sup>



Students of new principals who participated in a principal development and support initiative performed **6.2 percentile** points higher in reading and **2.9 percentile** points higher in math<sup>2</sup>

### Principals are under pressure.



Nearly **1 in 5** principals leave their schools each year<sup>3</sup>



**45%** of principals report that pandemic working conditions are accelerating their plans to leave the profession<sup>4</sup>



**62%** of principals said morale was lower in December 2020 than before the pandemic<sup>5</sup>

### Principals want more learning opportunities.

**85%**

Most principals come to the job without formal preparation in crisis management, and **85%** of principals say that emergency planning is a much higher priority than it used to be<sup>6</sup>



**30%** of principals said they need training to support distance learning<sup>6</sup>



**20%** of principals reported high need for opportunities to network and learn from other principals during the pandemic<sup>6</sup>



**50%** of principals said they would put more emphasis on professional learning for teachers in the future<sup>6</sup>



<sup>1</sup> [bit.ly/3ukQWJU](https://bit.ly/3ukQWJU) | <sup>2</sup> [bit.ly/39KFMoj](https://bit.ly/39KFMoj) | <sup>3</sup> [bit.ly/3zOxo1F](https://bit.ly/3zOxo1F) | <sup>4</sup> [bit.ly/3kKD60e](https://bit.ly/3kKD60e) | <sup>5</sup> [bit.ly/2Y2gjVg](https://bit.ly/2Y2gjVg) | <sup>6</sup> [bit.ly/3ogbHp5](https://bit.ly/3ogbHp5)





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- Technical assistance providers
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