

Prioritizing learning

Tools for this chapter include:

1.1 Running a daily self-check	2
1.2 Forming an equity mindset for learning	4
1.3 Supporting learning teams	11
1.4 Listening to students	19

Running a daily self-check

Purpose	In the rush of the morning, leaders often forget that the principals may be the most observed person at the school. What principals say, the mood they are in, and the attitude they exhibit toward others affect how everyone else experiences the day. Conducting a short self-assessment each morning reminds leaders to pause and determine how they want others to see them.
Recommended time	5 minutes
Materials	Tool 1.1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample Checklist, page 3
Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use the questions on the Sample Checklist, page 3, to support a mental check in — a pause — as you reflect on the person you want to be each day. 2. Keep the small checklist on the computer desktop or print it and place near a mirror. 3. Respond verbally or in writing and keep a record to support reflection over time. 4. Choose the focus of your concentration each day.

Running a self-check, continued

Sample Checklist

Question	Responses	Essential shifts
This morning, what is the single thing you are looking forward to doing that will most advance learning throughout the school?		
What mood are you in? (Excited? Pensive? Joyful? Angry? Frustrated? Stressed? Hopeful?) How will that mood contribute to your success?		
What mood do you seek in order to have a learning day? What will it take for you to move to that particular emotional place?		
Look in the mirror: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you observe about your face this morning? Your posture? Your choice of clothing? • What will others see as you walk into the building? As you greet students entering the building? • How would you describe your energy level? Will others notice? 		
What internal conversations are you having with yourself? Do any of these thoughts tend to be negative about yourself, about the staff, and students? In what ways do you seek a different view or perspective to support a productive, collaborative day with staff and students?		
Make a commitment to yourself about how you will enter the building this morning and how you will greet students and staff. Make notes about what happens next.		

Forming an equity mindset for learning

Purpose	Principal and staff members will deepen their understanding of several meanings of the word “equity” as well as examine potential inconsistencies between and among their beliefs, language, and actions regarding equity in student learning. Please note: Participants will NOT reach an agreement on how to define equity.
Recommended time	1–2 hours
Materials	Tool 1.2 • Equity Stances Activity*
Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce equity stances with something like, “The equity issue can be confusing. Clarity is elusive. Exploration of the issue often feels risky. This activity is intended to provide a safe opportunity to explore and examine the issue in greater depth than often happens.” (2 minutes) 2. Ask participants to read Appendix A: 5 Stances, page 5, and decide which stance most closely matches their own. Acknowledge this is intended to represent a first impression, and that views may change during the exercise. (5 minutes) 3. Distribute Appendix B: Full Stances, pages 6–7, which includes examples of stances in practice and guiding questions. Ask participants to read it and respond to questions individually. (10 minutes) 4. Divide participants into groups of no more than 12. Identify a facilitator for each group. Provide the following focus question: What do you believe schools should do regarding equity in student learning? Begin discussion with each person having 1–2 minutes to offer a response to the question. Following the initial round continue the discussion looking for areas of agreement and areas where further conversation would be helpful. (20–40 minutes) 5. Ask facilitators to share 1–2 agreements and 1–2 further questions that surfaced during the discussion. (5 minutes) 6. Distribute Appendix C Feedback Form, page 8, and ask everyone to complete before leaving the session. Indicate the Leadership Team will be reviewing the feedback and group discussion notes to determine appropriate next steps. Thank everyone for the serious attention they gave to the topic. 5. In subsequent meeting with Leadership Team share Appendix D Facilitators Notes, pages 9–10, to inform next action planning.

* Source: Adapted with permission from the National School Reform Faculty (<https://nsrfharmony.org/protocols/>). Copyright 2020 National School Reform Faculty.

Forming an equity mindset for learning, continued

Appendix A

Equity Stances Activity: Five Different Stances on Equity in Student Learning

Essential Question for the Equity Stances Activity: *What do you believe schools should do regarding equity in student learning? (This is not asking what you believe about goals; this is asking what you believe about actions.)*

Stance A: Equity as Initial Equal Opportunity — Schools should guarantee each student will receive the same initial educational opportunity, and that each student’s response to this initial opportunity will be used to determine the kind of academic program he/she receives going forward.

Stance B: Equity as Ongoing Equal Opportunity — Schools should guarantee that each student will have easy access to all academic programs every year, regardless of past performance levels or other factors.

Stance C: Equity as Personalized Opportunity — Schools should guarantee each student will receive an academic program that is well-designed to meet the student’s unique needs.

Stance D: Equity as Equalization of Opportunity — Schools should guarantee that each student will receive an academic program that is well-designed to enable him/her to demonstrate performance that meets or exceeds a common high level within a reasonable length of time.

Stance E: Equity as Equal Results — Schools should guarantee that each student will demonstrate performance that meets or exceeds a common high level.

Forming an equity mindset for learning, continued

Appendix B

Equity Stances Activity: Examples in Practice and Tough Questions

Essential Question for the Equity Stances Activity: *What do you believe schools should do regarding equity in student learning? (This is not asking what you believe about goals; this is asking what you believe about actions.)*

Stance A: Equity as Initial Equal Opportunity — Schools should guarantee each student will receive the same initial educational opportunity, and that each student’s response to this initial opportunity will be used to determine the kind of academic program he/she receives going forward.

- Example in Practice: Student grades or assessment scores are used as gatekeepers for access to certain academic programs or courses.
- Tough questions for those who take this stance:
 - Doesn’t this approach to equity help preserve the status quo, with some students being denied access to academic programs or courses in which they might perform well, based on their past performance and/or someone else’s estimation of their future performance?
 - Shouldn’t access to public school academic programs and courses be open to all students who have a genuine interest in them, regardless of past performance (as in stance B)?

Stance B: Equity as Ongoing Equal Opportunity — Schools should guarantee that each student will have easy access to all academic programs every year, regardless of past performance levels or other factors.

- Example in Practice: Every student is allowed to participate in any academic program or course, regardless of past performance.
- Tough questions for those who take this stance:
 - Doesn’t allowing some students to participate in certain programs or courses set them up for a diminished likelihood of success, in the short term or long term?
 - Shouldn’t public schools do more to promote the aspirations and performance of students who have a background of lower performance than simply making all programs “open (as in stances C, D and E)?”

Stance C: Equity as Personalized Opportunity — Schools should guarantee each student will receive an academic program that is well-designed to meet the student’s unique needs.

- Example in Practice: School practices and resources are distributed according to the school’s judgment of what each student needs, which is informed by educators, the student, and the student’s caretakers.
- Tough questions for those who take this stance:
 - Given limited school resources and the greater power held by parents of privilege, won’t any attempt to “meet every student’s unique needs” result in public schools always doing more to meet the unique needs of the children of privileged parents than they do to meet the unique needs of other students?
 - Isn’t a focus only on what each student “needs” likely to result in an underestimation of what some students need and an academic program that doesn’t offer these students a promising future?

Forming an equity mindset for learning, continued

Stance D: Equity as Equalization of Opportunity — Schools should guarantee that each student will receive an academic program that is well-designed to enable him/her to demonstrate performance that meets or exceeds a common high level within a reasonable length of time.

- Example in Practice: School practices and resources (in addition to special education resources) are heavily weighted in favor of providing different and more programs and support for lower performing students.
- Tough questions for those who take this stance:
 - Doesn't heavily weighting school practices and resources in favor of lower performing students create an attitude of dependency within those students?
 - Shouldn't school practices and resource allocations be evenly weighted on what each and every student needs rather than just on what each lower performing student needs (as in stance C)?
 - Shouldn't students have access to these academic programs for an unlimited length of time (as in stance E)?

Stance E: Equity as Equal Results - Schools should guarantee that each student will demonstrate performance that meets or exceeds a common high level.

- Example in Practice: School practices and resources (in addition to special education resources) are heavily weighted in favor of providing different and more programs and support for lower performing students, including students who have become adults.
- Tough questions for those who take this stance:
 - Won't providing these programs for an unlimited length of time be either too expensive or result in schools certifying that some students have demonstrated something that they actually have not demonstrated?
 - Wouldn't a school be better off not making guarantees for results that it doesn't have sufficient resources or power to fully honor, and instead guarantee what actions it will take (as in stances A, B, C and D)?

Forming an equity mindset for learning, continued

Appendix C: Feedback Form - Please circle one response; comments are encouraged but optional.

1. Overall, I think this activity was worthwhile.

strongly disagree disagree somewhat disagree somewhat agree agree strongly agree

Comments:

2. The activity met the goal of helping participants deepen their understanding of several meanings of the word “equity” in regards to student learning.

strongly disagree disagree somewhat disagree somewhat agree agree strongly agree n/a

Comments:

3. The activity met the goal of helping participants learn an activity that can be used to effectively engage members of their school community in the issue of equity in student learning.

strongly disagree disagree somewhat disagree somewhat agree agree strongly agree n/a

Comments:

4. The workshop met the goal of helping participants engage in activities that invite them to examine potential inconsistencies between and among their beliefs, language, and actions regarding equity in student learning.

strongly disagree disagree somewhat disagree somewhat agree agree strongly agree n/a

Comments:

5. The larger group discussion portion of the activity was worthwhile.

strongly disagree disagree somewhat disagree somewhat agree agree strongly agree n/a

Comments:

6. The smaller group discussion portion of the activity was worthwhile.

strongly disagree disagree somewhat disagree somewhat agree agree strongly agree n/a

Comments:

7. The handouts from the activity will be useful to me again.

strongly disagree disagree somewhat disagree somewhat agree agree strongly agree n/a

Comments:

8. The activity was well-organized and well-facilitated.

strongly disagree disagree somewhat disagree somewhat agree agree strongly agree

Comments:

Source: Reprinted with permission from the National School Reform Faculty (<https://nsrfharmony.org/protocols/>).
Copyright 2020 National School Reform Faculty.

Forming an equity mindset for learning, continued

Appendix D

Facilitator's Notes for Equity Stances Activity: Five Different Stances on Equity in Student Learning

1. This activity has been refined over the past two years thanks to the contributions of more than 200 educators affiliated with the National School Reform Faculty, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and/or the Southern Maine Partnership at the University of Southern Maine.
2. The attached activity is based, in part, on the following beliefs/theory of action:
 - A belief that expressing a wide range of beliefs on an issue in clear and evenly-biased language can clarify the true strengths and weaknesses of each belief and can facilitate a deeper understanding of the issue and the values embedded in it.
 - A belief that using provocative questions to probe values can help an individual come to a deeper understanding of the values basis of his/her beliefs and the potential dissonance between beliefs and actions.
 - A belief that helping people identify dissonances between their beliefs and actions can be a powerful force for positive change.
3. There are situations in which the use of this exercise may be counterproductive. Care should be taken to make sure participants have a sufficient degree of mutual trust and respect to engage in an exercise that attempts to directly highlight potential differences between beliefs and actions.
4. Group size for the dialogue may vary from 2 to 12.
5. A text-based or other protocol may or may not be used. Although it is common to give participants a chance to discuss a text in small groups before engaging in whole group dialogue, this activity has worked well when the text is first discussed in a larger group and then in smaller groups, in rounds. The whole group dialogue increases the chances of hearing multiple perspectives, and the smaller groups give more chances to go deeper into ideas of particular interest.
6. If a participant proposes language for their own stance on equity, ask them to connect it to the five stances: Which of the five is it most akin to? How is it similar and how is it different?
7. The five stances use the generic term “academic program” rather than specific practices in order to help keep the focus on intended results and the values embedded in those intentions. Some participants may want to quickly reject all five of the stances and instead create their own stance that mentions specific practices. While this can be a valuable follow-up activity, doing this before engaging in a thorough exploration of the five stances can preempt any deep discussion about intended results and values.
8. Work to make sure all five stances get discussed at least briefly,

Forming an equity mindset for learning, continued

Possible Follow-up Activities (in no particular order):

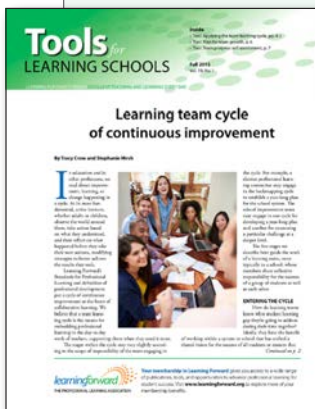
- Discuss the stances through some of the follow-up questions (below).
- Do some observations in your school over a period of time (perhaps a month) using the five stances as lenses and categories for collecting evidence.
- Do the activity with a group of students.
- Use the stances in conjunction with a vignette of school experiences or a case study of schooling.
- Use the stances in conjunction with the Profiles of a Student activity.
- Use the essential question of the stances activity within a Futures Protocol.

Possible Follow-up Questions (in no particular order):

- If no students in a school are experiencing high quality instruction, does equity really matter?
- Should the idea of a “culturally relevant education” be viewed as one of the “needs” mentioned in Stance C and/or part of the “well-designed” academic program mentioned in Stance D, or should it be specifically mentioned?
- What aspects of your school operate from which of the five stances? Are one or more of the five stances dominant in your school?
- What would need to change in your school for it to reflect the stance(s) that you believe are best?
- What terms in the stances, examples and questions are most likely to be interpreted differently by different people?
- What assumptions are embedded in each of the stances, examples and questions.
- What might you do to adhere to the stance(s) you believe are best?
- Which stances are most likely to give students experiences that will help them compete for opportunities in the broader society?
- Which stances are most likely to improve social justice in the broader society?
- Could you (or a school) be adhering to C, D, or E and still not be serving kids well?

Supporting learning teams

<p>Purpose</p>	<p>High-functioning learning teams are the key to building and sustaining learning schools. Learning Forward advances a cycle of improvement grounded in learning. The intention of this exercise is to identify opportunities for strengthening the current teaching and learning approach of the school.</p>
<p>Recommended time</p>	<p>1–2 hours with required preparation before the session</p>
<p>Materials</p>	<p>Tool 1.3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tools for Learning Schools</i>, Fall 2015, pages 5–9 • Plan for Team Growth, page 10 • Team Progress Self-Assessment, page 11
<p>Process</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invite leadership team members to read <i>Tools for Learning Schools</i>, Fall 2015, pages 12–16. Introduce the issue of <i>Tools</i> as a means for reviewing current learning processes and potentially finding ways to strengthen them. 2. In discussion with the leadership team, select one of the tools, Plan for Team Growth, page 17, or Team Progress Self-Assessment, page 18, which you think will provide the most aligned and valuable insights into your current learning cycle. 3. Ask all school staff members to complete the selected tool. Afterward, organize results for sharing with school leadership team. 4. Create a t-chart. Depending on size of the leadership team, facilitate small- or large-group conversations. For example, if the leadership team, has 10 or more members, first, divide into small groups then convene as a large group. If the team includes fewer than 10 people, you would facilitate a single large-group conversation. 5. Facilitate a large-group discussions to reach consensus on recommendations for the next steps.



Adapted from Tool 2.3: Collaborative learning: Fears and hopes in *Becoming a Learning School*, by J. Killion and P. Roy. Copyright 2009 National Staff Development Council.

Supporting learning teams, continued

Learning team cycle of continuous improvement

By Tracy Crow and Stephanie Hirsh

In education and in other professions, we read about improvement, learning, or change happening in a cycle. At its most fundamental, active learners, whether adults or children, observe the world around them, take action based on what they understand, and then reflect on what happened before they take their next actions, modifying strategies to better achieve the results they seek.

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning and definition of professional development put a cycle of continuous improvement at the heart of collaborative learning. We believe that a team learning cycle is the means for embedding professional learning in the day-to-day work of teachers, supporting them when they need it most.

The stages within the cycle may vary slightly according to the scope of responsibility of the team engaging in



the cycle. For example, a district professional learning committee may engage in the backmapping cycle to establish a year-long plan for the school system. The school improvement team may engage in one cycle for developing a year-long plan and another for examining a particular challenge at a deeper level.

The five stages we describe here guide the work of a learning team, most typically in a school, whose members share collective responsibility for the success of a group of students as well as each other.

ENTERING THE CYCLE

How do learning teams know what student learning gap they're going to address during their time together?

Ideally, they have the benefit

of working within a system or school that has crafted a shared vision for the success of all students or ensures that

Continued on p. 2

Supporting learning teams, continued

Learning Team Cycle of Continuous Improvement, continued

Continued from p. 1

educators' work at all levels is aligned to an overall improvement plan. Alternatively, teams may craft their own vision for improvement and use it as a driver for their ongoing work and persistence. Depending on the context, educators may then dig into high-level data to determine broad areas requiring their attention.

Because the real world throws challenges at teachers from all directions, they'll likely be working on multiple improvement goals at once. The learning team has the important responsibility to identify which learning challenge, if addressed, will most benefit the students they serve collectively.

STAGE BY STAGE

Examine data: Understand student and educator learning challenges.

In this stage, educators are focused on the critical questions: What do students need to know and be able to do, and what do the data indicate about our success in meeting these outcomes to date?

During this phase, team members study data to identify precisely what problem deserves their attention most. For example, while a team may be working in a context where their schoolwide goal is to increase reading comprehension, only through looking at student data will they know exactly which elements of reading comprehension are problematic, who is struggling, and who is succeeding.

Central to this work is establishing a culture where educators embrace the use of data. Educators also need knowledge and skills to use data effectively.

Set goals: Identify shared goals for student and educator learning.

During this stage, team members are focused on the question: What do students and educators need to learn in order for students to achieve desired outcomes? During the previous stage, teams were aware of the broad end goals. In this stage, their attention shifts to addressing the gaps that were identified as a result of their data analysis work. Team members are now ready to set specific student and educator learning goals. Many teams have found the SMART goal format (specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, timebound) to be extremely helpful in creating goals whose outcomes can be easily monitored and reported.

After the team determines their student SMART goals, they are ready to determine what they need to know as educators to help their students be successful in achieving

the SMART goal. Educators consider the content expertise attached to the goal, the pedagogical competencies required by the goal, and any special needs of their particular group of students. The list of adult learning needs can be long. It will be up to the team to identify the most relevant needs to address to achieve their desired outcomes.

This stage ensures that educator learning is intentional and tied directly to what students need to learn.

Learn individually and collaboratively: Extend educators' knowledge of content, content-specific pedagogy, how students learn, and management of classroom environments.

In this stage of the process, learning teams are addressing the question: How will we engage in learning to achieve desired outcomes for both ourselves and our students? As they choose among many collaborative and individual learning possibilities, they will consider first and foremost what outcome they seek. They expect to have new knowledge and skills, and they expect to have an actionable plan for using it in the classroom with students and must seek learning that fits their expectations.

Team members also need to consider how to best differentiate their learning. While the team may have set collective goals to achieve, each team member has his or her own learning preferences, works in a particular career stage, and already has a unique level of content and pedagogical expertise tied to the goal.

With clarity around the specific learning needs and inclinations of each team member, the team can identify expertise and options for learning. There are many resources available to assist them in selecting the appropriate learning strategy. Among their options, they may seek information resources for study. They might turn not only to one another but to other colleagues in their district for expertise. They may ask an instructional coach in their building or district, perhaps even a coach on their team, for mini lessons on using particular strategies.

Teachers may need to turn elsewhere for expertise if they don't have the knowledge in the building or district, whether to an online network or a technical assistance provider with a specialty focus. Their learning may take many forms at this stage, and they engage as active participants throughout the process.

Apply new learning: Implement new lessons and strategies with local support at the work site.

At this stage, team members address the question: What will now change based on our learning? They take their learning into their classrooms. While they've had opportunities to practice with peers, teachers aren't apply-

Continued on p. 3

Learning Forward BELIEF

More students achieve when educators assume collective responsibility for student learning.

Supporting learning teams, continued

Learning Team Cycle of Continuous Improvement, continued

Continued from p. 2

ing their learning until they change what they do in the classroom in the presence of students.

Teachers will apply their new learning more than once — as they become more familiar with new strategies, they become smarter not only in implementing strategies and knowledge with fidelity but also through the feedback their coaches and peers offer. The first steps in the use of new strategies don't always immediately lead to the intended outcome. Even at the classroom level, teachers can experience the implementation dip, where new practices at first show a decline in results. Change, after all, takes time, and moving a body of learners forward isn't an instant outcome.

Teachers have support in taking their learning to this stage from coaches or peers. Perhaps they co-teach a lesson with a peer; perhaps a coach observes and supports the teacher before, during, and after with questions and suggestions. Perhaps they use video of their own teaching as a tool throughout the learning and application of new knowledge.

Refine practice: Use evidence to monitor and adjust implementation.

In this stage, teams ask the question: What is the impact of our learning? Once teachers take new practices into classrooms, they start to watch how their new knowledge and instructional strategies impact what happens in the classroom. They gather evidence of the implementation of their learning, and this evidence may take many forms.

Not only can they watch how students respond during class time, they also gather information from classroom assessments and student work. Based on the student learning goals they've set, teams develop formative and summative assessments that measure precisely what they hoped to achieve. They use the results to inform the learning steps they will take next.

Teams examine this evidence and consider whether new classroom strategies are helping them achieve their goals. With this information, they may realize they are on the right track and can refine what they do with students. They may also realize that their changes in practice aren't contributing to student learning, in which case they will adjust their plans. They'll need to consider several questions as they refine. Did they make the right assumptions when they set their own learning goals? Did they engage in appropriate learning that really helped them achieve their learning goals? Did they implement new strategies with fidelity and get sufficient support in applying their learning in the classroom?

When successful in achieving its initial goals, the team is ready to take on its next challenge. When results fall short, the team may return to a previous stage to dig deeper into the actions it must take to produce better outcomes for students.

A word about learning teams

Learning teams function at many levels within schools, across a school system, in state or regional clusters, and virtually across time and space. Teams may form through the actions of their members, or they may form through mandate. Members may come together because of the grade level or the subject area they cover, or based on particular projects or job roles or titles. They may seek teammates to address common challenges or create innovative solutions. Team members may not have colleagues in their buildings or even districts who can collaborate around their specific needs and thus may need to find peers in other ways, perhaps virtually or through periodic face-to-face gatherings.

Thus, we recognize that not every learning team has a scheduled time and place to meet together each week and may need to adapt the suggestions and actions we offer.

WHY IT MATTERS

Many schools and systems understand that learning teams or professional learning communities are a valuable structure for ensuring that educators have time to learn in collaboration with colleagues. Some districts establish team time with a clear vision for exactly what the learning teams will do, including how they will use their time together and what results they are expected to achieve. Other districts have been convinced that PLCs would be great, so they create schedules that allow teams to meet, yet they don't have a plan or vision for what those teams will do during that time. They trust that the professionals will know what to do with the time.

Setting aside team time without a plan is a professional hazard. Districts can go to a lot of trouble to rearrange schedules, at the risk of upsetting parents and expending considerable energy with teachers and unions. If that time isn't well spent, everyone involved will label team learning a waste and professional development gets another black mark. The cycle of continuous improvement is the plan for using that time in ways that lead to changes in practice and student results.

•
Tracy Crow (tracy.crow@learningforward.org) is director of communications and **Stephanie Hirsh** (stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org) is executive director of Learning Forward. ●

Supporting learning teams, continued

Learning Team Cycle of Continuous Improvement, continued

Applying the team learning cycle

A big question for learning teams is how they will schedule their meeting time specifically to work through these five stages. As one option, we offer a six-week cycle, a typical grading period for many school systems, that takes teams through the five stages, and we understand that teams may need to adjust based on the team time they have, the course content they need to cover, and myriad other factors that contribute to the pacing of both adult and student learning.

Our six-week schedule works most ideally with the following supporting conditions and elements:

- Teachers have three or more hours per week to learning collaboratively with their teams.
- Teachers have access to the data they need to understand student learning gaps and set meaningful goals.
- Teachers are motivated to change short- and long-term lessons based on what they learn together.
- Teachers can set their learning schedule so that the application stage has them teaching a new and improved lesson during week five of the cycle.
- Teachers work both individually and collectively on the problems they identify together – the learning doesn't happen solely during team time.
- Teachers have ready access to learning support within the school or district.
- Teachers work in a culture that prioritizes continuous learning for adults with a climate where trust pervades all interactions.
- Teachers know generally where their greatest student learning gaps lie, informed by school and system improvement goals.
- Teachers have the expertise and/or support to collaborate efficiently during their limited collaboration time.

WEEK 1: EXAMINE DATA.

Teachers arrive with data in hand, ready to pinpoint student learning challenges and differences among classrooms and various groups of students. During their meeting, team members highlight key data points and analyze various sources of data to identify trends. The team's goal is to come to consensus about the student learning gaps that stand out as their next most important challenges.

During this stage, individuals may:

- Examine portions of the data on their own and prepare to bring key points to the team.
- Examine their own performance related to the student data.
- Reflect on what they believe the data tell them.

During this stage, the team may:

- Ask individual members to share essential data points or trends for discussion.
- Examine data collaboratively, perhaps using a protocol to move efficiently through the information.
- Ensure that all team members speak up with important understandings from the data.
- Reach consensus on the most urgent data to address.

WEEK 2: SET GOALS.

The learning team has decided on the most urgent data to address, so they use this stage to determine learning outcomes for both students and themselves.

During this stage, individuals may:

- Reflect on their individual assumptions about what led to their data findings.
- Consider past and current individual goals for performance, perhaps informed by the educator evaluation process they experience.

Supporting learning teams, continued

Learning Team Cycle of Continuous Improvement, continued

During this stage, the team may:

- Surface assumptions and beliefs about what contributes to the key data findings they will address.
- Review important connections between teacher learning, teacher practices, and student outcomes.
- Discuss student learning goals that will lead to better outcomes in the data.
- Discuss what adult learning outcomes will lead to better student outcomes.
- Reach consensus on most important goals to set for this period.

WEEKS 3 AND 4: LEARN INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLABORATIVELY.

With goals in hand, team members need to engage in professional learning intended to help them achieve outcomes.

During this stage, teams learn both individually and collectively. As a team, they may:

- Use expertise and research to identify learning options will most effectively lead to the outcomes they seek.
- Pause frequently for reflection, allowing time for journaling or discussion to make meaning as they progress.
- Learn collaboratively using any of a range of learning strategies if their individual needs and preferences indicate.

WEEK 5: APPLY LEARNING.

In this stage, teachers are taking their learning to the classrooms. In most cases, this will mean teaching new lesson(s) that they've prepared for throughout the earlier stages.

During this stage, individuals may:

- Implement learning in classrooms.
- Seek support from peers and coach.
- Gather feedback from students.

During this stage, teams may:

- Discuss how learning is going.
- Share successes and challenges.
- Observe colleagues and discuss observations.
- Engage in team conversations with a coach.
- Use innovation configuration maps to assess implementation.

WEEK 6: MONITOR AND ADJUST PROGRESS.

With the new professional learning applied, team members gather data in their classroom about what is working and what isn't.

During this stage, individuals may:

- Use formative or summative classroom assessments tied to new practices.
- Reflect on their individual learning and application and steps for moving forward with improvement goals.

During this stage, teams may:

- Examine student work and other assessment data to determine how new practices worked.
- Discuss successes and challenges.
- Consider modifications to the strategies as well as lessons they created.
- Discuss fidelity of implementation of learning.
- Discuss earlier assumptions about which practices lead to which outcomes.
- Determine next stages.

Supporting learning teams, continued

Plan for Team Growth

Directions: Begin now to plan for success as a productive team. Use this tool to track how well your team is modeling these 10 important characteristics. Discuss each characteristic together and fill in the column at right. Complete a chart at regular intervals — monthly or quarterly.

Date _____

TEAM GROWTH INDICATORS	What might someone observing us see or hear that would indicate we're growing in this direction?
Maintain a focus on teacher professional growth.	
Abide by norms that guide team interactions and behaviors.	
Learn new and relevant information about teaching.	
Share leadership and responsibility.	
Communicate to others what we are learning and doing.	
Meet regularly and on schedule.	
Practice trusting behaviors.	
Work productively as a team.	
Apply new knowledge and skills in the classroom.	
Monitor student learning and success.	

Source: Adapted with permission. *Team to teach: A facilitator's guide to professional learning teams* by A. Jolly. Copyright 2008 National Staff Development Council.

Supporting learning teams, continued

Team Progress Self-assessment

Directions: Circle the word that indicates how you think your team is doing for each of the following descriptors. Cold indicates you do not think the phrase describes your team at all. Hot means you think the team is doing great. Then discuss responses and fill out a chart as a team.

As I think about our learning team:						
1.	We have a sense of accomplishment.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
2.	Our team is supportive and collegial.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
3.	We trust one another.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
4.	We enjoy working together.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
5.	Everyone feels accepted.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
6.	Diverse ideas are respected.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
7.	We are solving some problems.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
8.	We actively listen to each other.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
9.	We stick with our team norms.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
10.	We have a high energy level.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
11.	We are curious and inquisitive.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
12.	We know where we are going.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
13.	We are organized.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
14.	We are learning more about teaching.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
15.	Our meetings are productive.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
16.	We spend more time than before talking about instruction.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
17.	We share what we are learning with other teachers and teams.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
18.	We hold ourselves more accountable for student learning.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
19.	We have a feeling of shared responsibility for student learning.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot
20.	We are becoming stronger teachers.	Cold	Cool	Lukewarm	Warm	Hot

Adapted with permission from *Team to Teach: A Facilitators Guide to Professional Learning Teams* by A. Jolly. Copyright 2008 National Staff Development Council.

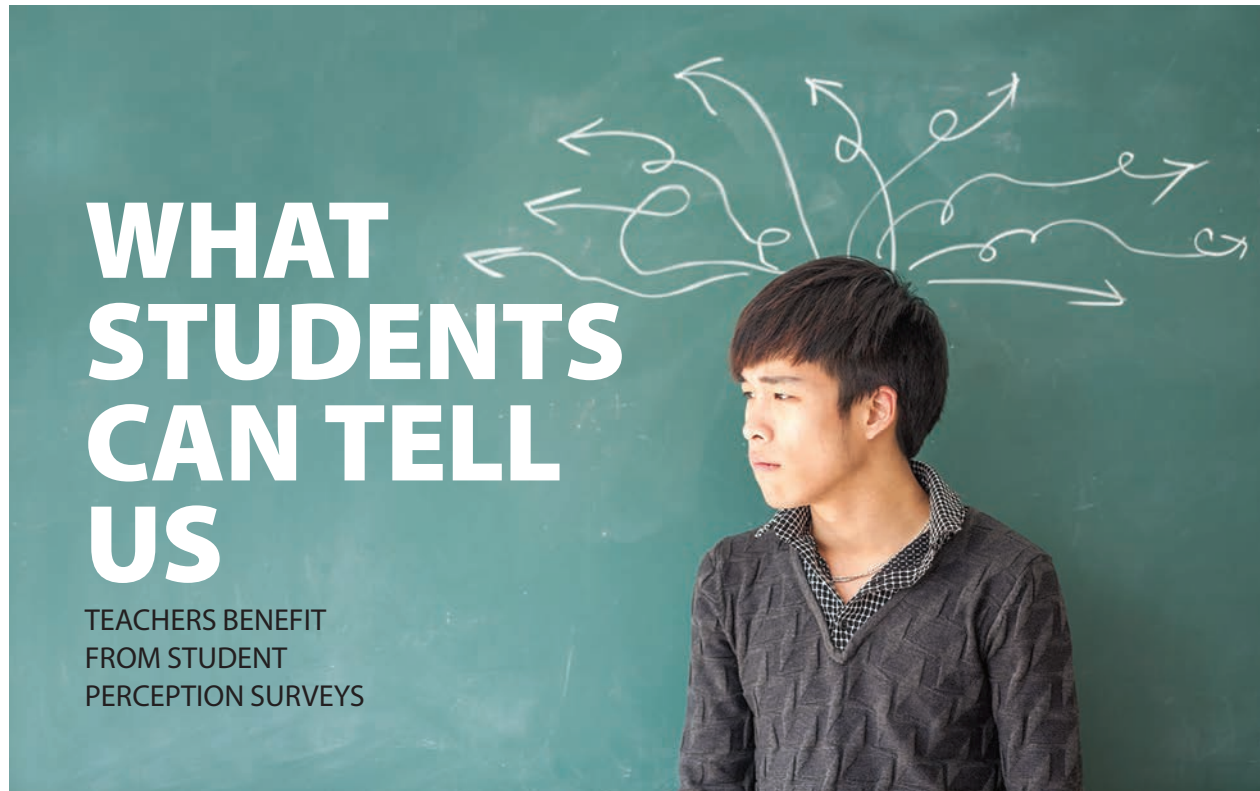
Listening to students

Purpose	For students to feel that their voices matter and they have ownership of their own learning and that of their peers, they need to sense that their ideas carry weight and that they are an integral part of the school community. A principal plays a major role in creating meaningful relationships with students so that everyone is engaged in building a vibrant school culture and learning system.
Recommended time	One hour per month (minimum) The amount of time needed will be determined by the student plan addressing a genuine problem of practice. Many problems may be embedded into classroom plans; others may require student time before and after school.
Materials	Tool 1.4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Forward <i>The Learning Professional</i>, February 2020, Vol. 41 no. 1: “What Students Can Tell Us,” pages 21–24 • Student Voice Team Planning Template, page 25
Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage the school leadership team in reading/discussing research/articles on means and benefits for activating student voice. (See <i>The Learning Professional</i>, February 2020; <i>Educational Leadership</i>, March 2020; and others). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Establish a goal and vision for activating and amplifying student voice in the school. b) Identify ways you expect student voice to make an impact on school culture and individual classrooms. 2. Identify potential challenges that may be undertaken as problems of practice by a Student Voice Team. Here are two examples for different grade levels: <p>Problem of Practice</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) High School: After leading a study to measure the extent of sexual harassment in high school, a member of the team formed a nonprofit dedicated to sexual harassment education. The results were picked up by the local and national press, and she is now developing materials to train students to address the problem in their schools and help educators understand it.

Listening to students, continued

	<p>Problem of Practice (continued)</p> <p>b) Elementary: After observing the waste of food in the cafeteria, the Student Voice Team determined that they would do research about the impact of wasted food. They shared the findings with all students including the number of items discarded (e.g. full milk cartons, apples). They requested that everyone take only the food they want and will eat, bring to school only food they will eat, and set a goal to cut waste by 10%. They discussed the harm of wasting food. They exceeded their goals and hosted a schoolwide celebration with all students.</p>
	3. Share information with all staff members and students. Invite nominations including self-nominations for participation on the Student Voice Team (or whatever name you give to this group). Consider nominations carefully so as not to omit any segment or voice of the student population.
	4. Select an initial team with the help of the school leadership team. The student team should be large enough to address the problem of practice in ways that involve all in the school. The team also may solicit additional help for each problem of practice.
	5. Choose or ask for volunteers on the staff to coach the student team. Coaches commit to working with the students through a cycle to resolve one problem of practice.
	6. Use the Student Voice Team Planning Template, page 25, to set plans, timelines, and begin implementation with the coach and Student Voice Team.
	7. Monitor progress. Use informal and formal processes, including student surveys, to ensure that students feel empowered.
	8. Share and celebrate progress regularly and widely.
	9. Evaluate the effectiveness of the effort with the school leadership team and make adjustments to the plan.

Listening to students, continued



WHAT STUDENTS CAN TELL US

TEACHERS BENEFIT FROM STUDENT PERCEPTION SURVEYS

BY NASUE NISHIDA AND HOLLI HANSON

Suzanne is a midcareer elementary teacher at what she feels is the height of her career. Her students do well on assessments and make progress on their school work. She receives proficient and distinguished ratings on her annual evaluations. Colleagues turn to her with questions, seeking her sage advice, and she often leads professional learning in her building and across her district. But Suzanne's world tilted when she surveyed her students on their perceptions of instruction and her classroom.

Suzanne was surprised to

discover that students perceived the classroom environment as somewhat chaotic because it was loud and full of distractions. While her students appreciated her one-on-one rounds with each individual student, they felt that the rest of the classroom wasn't well-managed or on-task during these times.

Suzanne realized this was something that she wouldn't have discovered through a student assessment or a periodic evaluation from her principal. Furthermore, she realized she would need to reconsider how to implement the rounds strategy, which was a core part of her teaching and deeply personal to her practice.

Suzanne was part of a district team that participated in the Student Perception Project, a two-year opportunity for educators in Washington state to explore student perception surveys and how data students provide can inform educator practice.

Through this project, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and led by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, district teams explored and piloted student perception survey instruments that gleaned data about students' take on their learning,

Listening to students, continued

What Students Can Tell Us, continued

their teachers' instruction, and the classroom environment.

The key lesson of this project was that student perception data give teachers valuable information they can use to make immediate changes to their practice, along with the added benefit of helping students become active collaborators in their own learning. Washington's experience was so powerful that the state invested funds to create a bank of student perception items that any teacher in the state can access to create an online survey for students.

This work has challenged us at the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession and the educators we have worked with to consider student feedback as a viable data point in providing meaningful and relevant information about teacher practice and student learning. We are revisiting assumptions and challenging adult mindsets about student engagement and ownership of their learning in pursuit of what we hope will be better classroom experiences for students.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AS DATA

Businesses ask consumers continually for feedback on their products and services and frequently make changes accordingly. Students are the consumers of the classroom. As such, they can provide teachers with invaluable data and feedback about the classroom experience in service of their learning.

Teachers often use exit slips, written reflection, and other teacher-developed ways of gathering feedback from students. However, these forms of

data collection are ad hoc and usually informal, and they may not yield information that is actually useful to refining teacher practice.

In contrast, when educators use student perception surveys about instruction and the classroom, they get specific and actionable data from students. Many schools use other types of student perception surveys — for example, focused on a school's culture and climate — which can be helpful but are often not directly relevant to specific teachers' instruction. This is why the Student Perception Project focused on asking students about highly specific teaching methods and classroom interactions.

In Washington, we culled student perception survey items from open source surveys across the country. With teachers, administrators, and survey experts, items were tested and piloted with thousands of students in Washington to meet validity and reliability sniff tests. Based on student and teacher feedback during the testing and piloting phases, the number of survey items was narrowed down and item language was adapted or revised.

The menu of survey items available to teachers is still relatively large — upwards of 70 — but it does allow teachers to be selective about the area(s) of their practices for which they seek feedback and information from students. As this resource is used more and more, we anticipate revisiting the item bank to find out which survey items teachers are selecting more frequently than others and/or items they aren't choosing at all.

WHAT EDUCATORS SAY

“Perception is reality, and my reality is now the perception of my students. ... What can I do to make a difference in my classroom so that I see growth there for me and my students feel like their voice has been heard?”

— *Christine Firth,*
teacher at *Salter's Point Elementary,*
Steilacoom (Washington) School
District

“We are asking people to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is a huge component of a growth mindset. You don't have it yet, but maybe you will get it. And you will get it if you work hard. I can't say enough about the positivity that I have seen in my teachers who have better job satisfaction because they feel they have better relationships with their students now.”

— *Marilyn Boerke,*
director of talent development,
Camas (Washington) School District

TEACHER REFLECTION AND GROWTH

In Washington, there isn't a state requirement or mandate to connect or collect student perception data related to a teacher's evaluation. Therefore, the exploratory project work focused on using student perception data for

Listening to students, continued

What Students Can Tell Us, continued

teacher reflection and growth. The power is using this as a tool for deeper reflection that pivots a teacher toward making changes in practice.

Through the Student Perception Project, we have learned that surveys are most useful in a cycle: From survey administration to data analysis to reflection to action and then back to survey administration, ultimately resulting in growth. For full impact, neither teachers nor students can see the survey as a one-time event. The steps of reflection and action are the most critical — and possibly the most difficult.

Collaborative conversations with colleagues, learning teams, professional learning communities, or instructional coaches can be helpful for facilitating reflection and action. Learning teams may decide to administer a survey on a specific aspect of professional growth on which the group is focusing or an individual might ask the team to support her or him in processing what emerged from the surveys. This kind of support can be helpful for engaging in a new and often difficult form of reflection.

In Washington, the results of surveys are not automatically shared with administrators or evaluators unless the teacher decides to share them. But the majority of teachers who do share some aspect of the results or reflection about the results with evaluators have said that it has helped develop relevant professional growth goals that lead to far more meaningful, growth-focused evaluation conversations.

ENGAGING STUDENTS

For this process to work, students need to be prepared to understand how to look at what is happening in the classroom with a critical eye and provide constructive feedback. The teacher must be prepared to explain the reason for the surveys and coach students through the art of providing constructive feedback for learning, a skill that is critical for a lifelong learner mindset. When teachers take these steps, students often feel honored to

LEARN MORE

- The Student Perception Survey Toolkit is available at cstp-wa.org/teacher-leadership/resources/student-perception-project.
- Teachers, administrators, and students share their perspectives about the impact of student feedback data in this video on the Student Perception Project: www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2sEjip41eU&feature=youtu.be.



be active participants in someone else's learning, especially that of their teacher.

Students also need to know their feedback is being taken seriously. After teachers review the results, they should discuss them with students. This can open meaningful two-way communication between teachers and students and may help teachers clarify students' points of view. In addition, this can demonstrate to students a teacher's growth mindset and create stronger partnerships with students as initiators of their own learning and growth.

As we involve students, we elevate student voice and ownership increases. Students begin to understand that they have agency and are valuable collaborators in the learning experience, which often results in increased connections and deeper relationships.

SUPPORTING TEACHERS

It's important to recognize that student perception data are often not easy for teachers to see and use. Listening to students situates teachers in a vulnerable space that most are not accustomed to. Often what is communicated in the results can be surprising, challenge assumptions, or lead to new ideas or more questions.

We have learned that translating student perception data into teacher

growth isn't necessarily a natural move, especially when the learning is deeply personal and teachers may not want to share their student perception data.

One way to shift teachers out of this discomfort and resistance is to focus on cultivating a mindset shift away from assessing whether teaching is "good" or "bad" to whether it is effective for these specific students.

With a microgrant from the Learn Next initiative, spearheaded by education design lab 2Revolutions, the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession convened a group of educators who had experience with the student perception surveys to develop a tool kit for their colleagues to support teachers before, during, and after the survey process.

The Student Perception Survey Toolkit includes tools and resources to create a climate of emotional safety and orientation to action for teachers as they seek and respond to student perception data and honor student voice. It focuses on reflection, offers advice about conversations, and provides resources on learner agency.

POWERFUL LEARNING

Authentic student perceptions provide educators with feedback to dig deeper into what is happening from the student experience and how they are learning, whether we agree or not. The critical next action step is for the teacher to decide how to use that data to impact the student experience.

There are several ways teachers are using the feedback from the surveys. One is to inform professional learning. We have seen teachers use the data to set more relevant professional goals for themselves. To maximize this potential, we have moved to regularly incorporating a collaborative processing of their results with colleagues and evaluators.

Teachers also use the data to modify daily classroom practices. For example, some teachers, realizing they need to do more to assess and summarize student learning each day to ensure all students

Listening to students, continued

What Students Can Tell Us, continued

understand, have posted clearer lesson objectives or developed exit tickets.

Other teachers have reported that their data have generated deeper class discussions about topics such as rigor, lack of challenging material, and how to address instructional issues with their teacher.

In one instance, the result was implementation of an inquiry-focused time giving students autonomy and creativity over their own learning and

space to explore new ideas, passions, and things that spark curiosity.

Overall, one of the most widespread impacts was how teachers and students approached goal setting in a more collaborative way. The survey opens the door for a different type of conversation, but achieving results takes time and investment. By demonstrating how to give and receive feedback, take action, and learn and grow, we are providing an invaluable learning moment for students.

Asking students for feedback shows them that teachers are learners, too, and it can become a way of being that is transformative for everyone.

•
Nasue Nishida (nasue@cstp-wa.org) is executive director and Holli Hanson (holli@cstp-wa.org) is director of teacher engagement and initiatives at the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession. ■

Source: Reprinted with permission. "What Students Can Tell Us," pp. 9–12. *The Learning Professional*, Vol. 41 no. 1. Copyright 2020 Learning Forward.

Listening to students, continued

Student Voice Team Planning Template

What is the problem we want to address?	
What evidence do we have to document this problem?	
What measures of success do we want to achieve?	
What solutions will we test? How will we run these tests?	
What are our next steps and timelines?	
How will we monitor what we are learning and our progress?	
What have we learned and what are we ready to celebrate?	