



# A 'ONE, SOME, ALL' approach wraps educators in layers of support

BY MAGDALENA GANIAS

**I**n the face of staff shortages and teacher turnover, Worcester (Massachusetts) Public Schools is supporting multiple avenues to recruit and retain quality educators in our district. High-quality professional learning is one of those avenues for ensuring we have a strong and stable workforce.

The district's Office of Curriculum and Professional Learning believes that systematic, purposeful, and structured high-quality professional learning is not only vital to teacher practice and student outcomes, but also a critical component of retaining staff. Put simply, we believe that if educators feel supported, they will stay committed to

students and the field.

The phrase "high-quality" is key because a one-time workshop or occasional feedback session will not lead to the kind of relationships, skills, and commitment that are essential for teachers to stay in the profession and thrive for the long term. Our professional learning is a multitiered,

sustained system that is grounded in best practices in and conditions for high-quality professional learning.

This structure ensures quality so that professional learning is a foundation of the safety net that helps staff persevere, experience daily wins, build confidence, feel successful, and see the results of their efforts. With this support, they can push past barriers we are all facing in schools today so high-quality teaching and learning can happen.

## MULTITIERED SUPPORT FOR ONE, SOME, ALL

Every day, our professional learning team, which includes specialists from each of the major curriculum content areas, offers professional learning at both the district and school levels, tailored to content areas and grade levels. The team recognizes that we are all learners, adults included, so we create multiple entry points to support all staff.

To do this, we use a “one, some, all” model in which we offer learning opportunities that are targeted and individualized for adult learners’ specific needs.

- **One** refers to individualized support, such as a coach helping a teacher with lesson planning or modeling a lesson.
- **Some** refers to focused support for small groups, such as professional learning communities (PLCs), grade-level team meetings, or learning walks.
- **All** refers to whole-school or districtwide support, such as support for introducing and implementing a new curriculum, routine, or initiative.

This support includes weekly content-based professional learning sessions, content-focused PLCs, classroom walk-throughs, learning

walks, and lesson modeling. Teachers in our district are often in a professional learning session on Monday, bringing content-specific practices back to their classrooms on Tuesday, and following up with our team on Wednesday to share and receive feedback that includes artifacts such as pictures of students implementing the classroom activities covered in professional learning.

One of the main ways we translate the “one, some, all” model to the school level is through coaching. Coaches identify the appropriate level of support and plan and facilitate accordingly. In Worcester Public Schools, coaches are widely considered the most effective building-based support available to teachers, and they have a profound impact on teachers’ growth and development.

A core value of our team is listening to learner voice. With the goal of connecting by listening, our team shares a midyear survey to collect feedback from all staff in the district. We review the data to plan and facilitate professional learning experiences that are responsive to the needs and the targeted goals of schools. Teacher voice and engagement in the learning process fosters connection and provides a sense of investment in planning learning opportunities. It also helps us provide the support they need to be successful and stay in the profession for the long term.

## MODEL CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

Across all of these levels, we apply and model the conditions for effective teaching and learning. Aware that the principles of effective teaching and learning are similar for students and adults, we intentionally model these conditions and highlight our

metacognitive planning process so that adult learners may recognize the practices and strategies and emulate them with their students. These conditions and practices are detailed in the table on p. 42.

We also know that professional learning must meet an additional set of criteria to be high-quality and lead to positive outcomes for teachers and students. Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning offer us a structure for designing and ensuring effective professional learning at all levels — for teachers, coaches, and professional learning staff. The standards frame the essentials of adult learning to impact student outcomes, and we use them to guide our work.

The following examples illustrate how specific standards shape our work and therefore coaches’ and teachers’ career development. It’s important to note, however, that the standards work together to provide a coherent vision of professional learning and these standards are implemented in connection with the others.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE

*Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators apply standards and research to their work, develop the expertise essential to their roles, and prioritize coherence and alignment in their learning.*

- We prioritize professional learning based on district and school-based goals and the specific areas of expertise that staff need to develop.
- We support coaches to develop their coaching lens, which is a distinct body of knowledge and skills for which coaches need support.

CONDITIONS AND PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING	
<b>Goal-driven</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarifies content and practice standards to drive learning.</li> <li>• Outlines targeted focus of the session(s).</li> <li>• Refines the focus of the workshop for the presenter.</li> <li>• Clarifies expectations for participants.</li> <li>• Determines level of session: awareness, skill building, design, leadership.</li> </ul>
<b>Learner-centered</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses and models effective facilitation methods and techniques for learner engagement.</li> <li>• Considers barriers of the learners in planning.</li> <li>• Values the input and experience of diverse learners.</li> </ul>
<b>Action-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively includes participants in their learning.</li> <li>• Uses I do, we do, you do.</li> <li>• Provides multiple ways to achieve and show mastery.</li> </ul>
<b>Product-creating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds participants' skills and knowledge for application.</li> <li>• Offers a variety of materials and resources for additional study.</li> <li>• Connects evidence back to the goal so participants can show their learning.</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation-focused</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets implementation goals: tomorrow, in seven days, in 30 days.</li> <li>• Encourages participants to share learning with a peer.</li> </ul>

**CULTURE OF COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY**

*Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators engage in continuous improvement, build collaboration skills and capacity, and share responsibility for improving learning for all students.*

- We work in professional learning communities because we know that ongoing collaboration and shared reflection build more capacity more effectively.
- We recognize we are all responsible for improving learning for all learners, including our district's multilingual learners and students with disabilities.
- We engage educators in cycles of continuous improvement that are embedded in collaborative structures and practices.

**LEADERSHIP**

*Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators establish a compelling and inclusive vision for*

*professional learning, sustain coherent support to build educator capacity, and advocate for professional learning by sharing the importance and evidence of impact of professional learning.*

- We shape and maintain a compelling and inclusive vision for professional learning at the district level.
- We structure authentic communities for staff, including leaders, to learn, share, and build educator capacity.
- We offer coherent and consistent district support to coaches and staff.

**CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT, AND INSTRUCTION**

*Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators prioritize high-quality curriculum and instructional materials for students, assess student learning, and understand curriculum and implement through instruction.*

- We employ transparent processes for choosing high-quality materials.

- We identify consistent and coherent practices for teaching and learning.
- We continuously communicate Multi-Tiered System of Supports structures and practices for all learners.

**LEARNING DESIGNS**

*Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators set relevant and contextualized learning goals, ground their work in research and theories about learning, and implement evidence-based learning designs.*

- We set relevant and contextualized learning goals based on context, including schools' goals and content and practice standards.
- We focus on valuing the lived experience of diverse learners and using culturally responsive and appropriate materials.
- We plan for and anticipate barriers to learning through our focus on Universal Design for Learning.

## SUPPORTING COACHES

Coaches are essential for implementing these high-quality professional learning practices. But we know that coaches are at risk of burnout and attrition, just like the teachers they are supporting. Transitioning from the role of teacher to coach comes with a unique set of challenges that new coaches are not always prepared for.

In addition, the current context of high teacher and student stress, as well as high levels of teacher turnover and absences, means that coaches are supporting instructional and emotional needs while balancing a sense of urgency to foster academic growth in the wake of pandemic disruptions. Supporting them is therefore an important part of the work of our department.

We offer coaches two authentic learning communities to build professional ties and collaborate with a community of colleagues. The relationships built in these professional learning communities reduce feelings of isolation and increase coaches' retention.

The PLCs for new coaches, which are facilitated by the consulting group Focused Schools, focus on coaching practices, models, and conversations. New coaches meet monthly to learn and practice coaching protocols and then build practices to ensure transfer of learning that impacts teacher instruction and student learning. For example, they learn about the teaching and learning cycle we use in the district, which includes:

- Planning (from standards or goals);
- Teaching with consideration of all learners and barriers;
- Assessing (assessments vary by context);
- Analyzing learner evidence;
- Adapting as needed; and
- Reflecting on the process.

The Office of Curriculum and Professional Learning also guides coaches to use scripting to guide

reflection. Scripting, a very simple way to document a lesson, calls for noting three types of information in every observation: time, what the teacher is doing, and what the students are doing. Documenting this information allows coaches to jot down what they have observed without any judgment or opinion.

Following the observation, the coach and teacher can review the script and discuss what the coach observed. The coach's role is to ask probing questions. The questions allow the teacher to lead the learning process rather than the coach dictating what comes next. The lens of the school growth plan and district goals are a factor, but teachers are driving the shifts and leaning on the coach for support. A shift that is teacher-led has more meaning and impact than a shift that is imposed, and a shift that is teacher-led will be implemented over time.

The other PLC focuses on Universal Design for Learning. Universal Design for Learning is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people and is based on the recognition that there is variability in the way people learn and demonstrate their learning (CAST, 2018).

The PLC works to deepen coaches' understanding of the Universal Design for Learning guidelines from CAST, the organization that developed the framework. The guidelines provide concrete suggestions and practices to help educators ensure that all learners have flexible ways to access and engage in learning opportunities.

Over the course of a year, the Universal Design for Learning PLC builds a support team of colleagues who learn and apply the guidelines to their coaching practice. This inquiry-based community shifts thinking and practice in a safe space while gaining confidence to apply learning through a coaching lens. Topics include the why of Universal Design for Learning, learning barriers, expert learning,

and variability. Participants meet monthly to connect and have pre- and post- tasks to deepen their learning. A library of resources and materials is available for coaches to incorporate as needed.

Through these collaborative experiences, coaches feel connected and gain a sense of belonging. Staff who feel connected to their professional and academic communities overwhelmingly remain in the profession. They can then, in turn, support teachers to feel connected, supported, and engaged so that they, too, stay in the profession.

## CONFIDENT AND INVESTED

We believe that educators are more likely to develop confidence and feel invested in and committed to their profession, their colleagues, their students, and their schools when they feel a sense of belonging and care and when their feedback is used to craft needs-specific support to address their current challenges. In this way, our office's investment in all educators' learning, development, and growth can improve retention at all levels of the system.

As our team strives to meet our mission of supporting all learners — adults and students — and looks for avenues to continue our learning, we are eager to connect with other learning professionals about how they design and implement professional learning and navigate current challenges. We encourage you to reach out to us and share your professional learning practices and supports for retaining staff.

## REFERENCES

CAST. (2018). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2*. [udlguidelines.cast.org](http://udlguidelines.cast.org)

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