ACCELERATION KEEPS STUDENTS MOVING FORWARD. HOW DO WE DO IT?

When our team began planning this issue of *The Learning Professional*, we asked ourselves: What do we not yet know about unfinished learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and what do we need to know to move forward?

We wanted to go deeper than the well-documented fact that many students are behind where we would expect them to be, academically and socially, if the pandemic had not happened.

We wanted to tackle, not simply lament, the trend that the pandemic's impacts have been felt disproportionately by historically marginalized students, including students of color, students experiencing poverty, and students with special needs.

Like you, we wanted to know what to do now.

For several years now, education leaders have been proposing the concept of acceleration as a path forward. Unlike remediation, which research shows often results in vulnerable students falling even farther behind, acceleration approaches keep students moving forward while supporting them to fill in the gaps in knowledge and skills that are necessary for grade-level work.
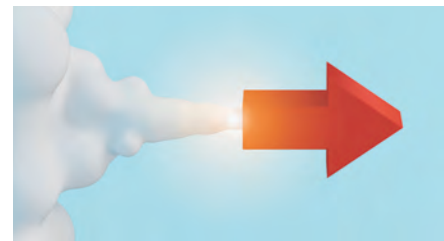
It's an intuitively appealing concept, and one that many educators are getting behind. But as we dug into the details of acceleration, we found that far fewer people have a clear understanding of how to do it.

We made it the goal of this issue to find out not just what acceleration is in concept, but what it is in practice, and what adults need to learn and do to make it work for students. We were fortunate to work with a stellar group of educators and authors who are at the leading edge of this work. In varied contexts and settings, they are demonstrating the possibility and benefits of acceleration, documenting their strategies, and reflecting on next steps.

There are many open questions about acceleration. But some things are clear. First, acceleration takes significant shifts in understanding and practice, shifts that can only occur with high-quality professional learning. This issue's authors explain why and how they are investing in capacity building for educators, including coaching on providing just-in-time support to students, tools and structures to build knowledge about formative assessment, and instructional leadership team planning around acceleration.

Second, acceleration requires partnership and collaboration. Articles in this issue address the importance of vertical alignment of teaching practices across grade levels, intentional collaboration between school year and summer staff, and the nesting of state, district, and school support. This issue's At a Glance graphic pulls it all together and depicts how the levels, people, and strategies need to connect.

We hope you will see this issue, as we do, as a valuable and unique resource for building educators' capacity to implement acceleration approaches so that all students can do grade-level work and beyond. We hope you will also see it as an invitation — an invitation not only to deepen your own practice but to share your learning with us and the other members of the Learning Forward community. We all have a lot to learn about navigating the challenges students face today, and we're just beginning to understand how professional learning can support the shifts we will need to continue making as we move forward. Reach out to us by email or social media to share your insights, questions, and stories so we can all share the challenges of learning and the pride of success. ■

Acceleration takes significant shifts in understanding and practice, shifts that can only occur with high-quality professional learning.

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PROFESSIONAL LEARNING HELPS EDUCATORS ADDRESS STUDENT LEARNING GAPS

Research points to better ways of supporting students to do grade-level work even when they have knowledge gaps.

Most of us accept that scientific knowledge evolves over time, so best practices in medicine and other science fields change. Knowledge about the learning sciences evolves, too, so we should constantly revisit and adjust education practices. To paraphrase the great Maya Angelou, when we know better, we should do better.

For example, as a new teacher, I was taught that differentiating based on student need meant that I should place students into reading and math ability groups. Since then, we've learned that this structure doesn't allow for students in lower-ability groups to catch up to those in higher-ability groups. I would approach this situation differently if I were in a classroom today because our field has learned so much about how to better support students' diverse learning needs.

A clear example of that evolution is the growing knowledge base on accelerated learning approaches, which are the focus of this issue of *The Learning Professional.*

Students' needs have changed and multiplied in recent years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice, and many other issues. This has created an urgent need for educators to understand how students learn best amid these challenges and implement instructional practices that ensure students with very different skills and needs can all engage in grade-level work.

Professional learning is the vehicle for making that happen. It has always been one of Learning Forward's core beliefs that all educators have an obligation to improve their practice, and in the most recent iteration of Standards for Professional Learning, we stated this unequivocally in the Professional Expertise standard. This standard reads: "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" (Learning Forward, 2022). Like all of the standards, Professional Expertise has three key constructs, each of which is important to the discussion about accelerating learning.

First, educators are responsible for understanding and applying relevant standards, such as content-area standards and social and emotional standards, and research. As articles in this issue show, the research on remediation raises serious concerns that traditional methods actually cause struggling students to fall farther behind. Fortunately, research also points to better ways of supporting students to do grade-level work even when they have knowledge gaps. As educators, it's critical that we continue to stay abreast of this important research.

The second construct in the Professional Expertise standard reminds us how important it is that educators strengthen their discipline-specific expertise. Learning Forward defines discipline-specific as the knowledge, skills, and practices essential for professional educators to succeed in their roles. Within the context of accelerated learning, that discipline-specific expertise varies by role. For

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teachers, it means understanding the key strategies needed for just-in-time learning support, including knowing the domain-specific skills students should know from previous grades and how to scaffold them when students haven't yet mastered them. For professional learning leaders, it means having the ability to apply relevant adult learning strategies and other key constructs found throughout Standards for Professional Learning to support teachers who are developing their own understanding of accelerated learning. For principals and district leaders, it means understanding how leaders create the conditions for teachers and others to engage in learning and strengthen their skills — for example, how to adjust the professional learning schedule so that educators' learning about accelerated learning and other important topics can happen as part of the school day.

The final construct in the Professional Expertise standard reminds us that educators who develop professional expertise attend to coherence and alignment in their learning over time. That includes aligning their practice to district goals and expectations and connecting with colleagues at the same grade level or subject area to use consistently evidence-based strategies for all students.

As you learn about acceleration, I encourage you to use Standards for Professional Learning to shape your and your colleagues' professional learning because the standards will help deepen your knowledge and understanding of teaching and leadership strategies and help you scale and sustain the kind of educator practices that make a difference for students. It's my hope that we can all evolve to meet the needs of this critical moment and that, when we look back on our early practices, we're proud to say that we know more and we're doing better.

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7
Ways to celebrate teacher growth

According to Kent Peterson, co-author of *Shaping School Culture* (2009), celebrations are an important component for high-quality learning communities. Here are simple ways for educators to celebrate the growth of their teammates, shared by Learning Forward's community of professional learning leaders.

① Acknowledge with an email.

"When a teacher is name-dropped as doing something well, I will follow up with an email. I let them know that their hard work does not go unnoticed."

② Give away prizes.

"For professional learning, we have contests where we give away prizes such as coffee, lunch, gift cards, or coverage."

"To celebrate my own growth, I share new information learned with my colleagues."

③ Post compliments on the bulletin board.

"In our staff lounge sits prominently a large bulletin board, where teachers and staff post compliments about each other. The compliments are on things we see in improving instruction. They are not the usual 'I saw someone doing something nice' type of compliments. Instead, they have a more instructional focus."

④ Share words of affirmation.

"We celebrate academic growth with words of affirmation."

⑤ Organize luncheons or breakfast gatherings.

"For social/team building, we have lunches or breakfast each month to celebrate with and for each other."

⑥ Give certificates.

"We might observe a teacher using academic vocabulary and give him or her a certificate acknowledging that change in practice."

⑦ Allocate time in team meetings for quick celebrations.

"When planning our learning community work, we make sure to include time where they can share and see others' successes. Little things like snapping fingers or high-fives are quick and easy ways to celebrate the little steps we make forward."

Infographic by Ariel Durham

DISTRICT-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS TACKLE WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

The iLEAD network uses improvement science principles and practices so that districts and their university-based partners can address local problems of practice, enhance school and district leadership, and improve learning environments and outcomes for K-12 students.

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When Betsy Hargrove, superintendent of Avondale Elementary School District in Arizona, bumped into one of her district's teacher candidates in the local Home Depot checkout line, she realized she had a bigger problem than home repairs. The teacher candidate wasn't buying material for a DIY project — he was working the cash register. "I realized then that we needed a better way to support teacher candidates," she said. "They shouldn't have to juggle a part-time job to make ends meet while they finish their degree program and complete their student teaching in our classrooms."

Fortunately, Hargrove had forged a close partnership with Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton College of Education and volunteered the district to be a pilot site for the university's Next Education Workforce project, an effort to redesign career pathways and structures. The project focuses on developing better ways for teachers to enter and advance in the profession and replacing the old model of one teacher isolated in a classroom with a team approach.

To support this fledgling effort, the district and university joined the Carnegie Foundation's iLEAD network of district-university partnerships. The iLEAD network uses improvement science principles and practices so that districts and their university-based partners can address local problems of practice, enhance school and district leadership, and improve learning environments and outcomes for K-12 students. The Carnegie Foundation, where I lead strategic initiatives and support implementation of improvement approaches, launched iLEAD in 2017 to build closer and more productive, practice-centric relationships between school districts and schools of education.

The network is an opportunity to build improvement infrastructure that can align the two types of institutions around big issues that both care about but rarely collaborate on. That infrastructure includes routines, processes, and protocols to enable enduring and relational partnerships that would be adaptive to the needs of local communities, rather than opportunistic and transactional connections that would likely fade over time and achieve little impact.

Avondale's sustained work with Arizona State over the last five years illustrates the power and potential of this approach. Avondale embraced two key elements of the Next Education Workforce model: forming teacher teams that are responsible for cohorts of students and hiring teacher candidates as full-time teachers even as they finish their degree programs. By hiring teacher candidates to be full-time district employees, the district not only reduced student teachers' reliance on external employment but also provided them with immersive, on-the-job training. And by ensuring that skillful teacher leaders led the teacher teams, the district provided growth opportunities for veteran staff to mentor candidates and share building-level responsibilities for students' growth and development.

To support building- and district-level implementation of these elements, the district and university applied improvement practices developed through the iLEAD network. In particular, Avondale used consultancy protocols, which provide a structured process for thinking about a problem of practice, and improvement reviews, sessions during which teams ask for and receive feedback on specific aspects of their work. These practices enabled open communication, fostered a collaborative culture within schools and across the district, and strengthened implementation of the teacher workforce innovation.

As a result, the district saw meaningful changes for teachers and students. For example, the district's teacher vacancy rate decreased from 22% to 13%, and, at the same time, the quality of instruction improved because long-term substitutes were replaced by teacher candidates. Teacher candidates benefit, too, in a long-term way. In Arizona, the teacher candidate who had been working at the Home Depot became a district employee while finishing his degree program and later served as a full-time teacher at the same school where he had been a student teacher.

In addition, teacher survey data revealed improvements in self-efficacy and satisfaction with the teacher teaming model, which also provided additional career paths for teacher leaders. Furthermore, 75% of students taught by teacher teams outperformed students taught in traditional classrooms, as assessed by value-added models.

These improvement strategies and approaches can also be used to address other problems of practice as they arise. For example, the Avondale-Arizona State partnership that began with workforce development reforms remained a vital resource to addressing emergent (and unexpected) problems such as the COVID-19 crisis. Their sustainability is a key part of their power.

And the iLEAD infrastructure is itself enduring. The edited volume *Improving America's Schools Together* provides early lessons from the network (Gomez et al., 2023). In 2023, iLEAD will continue to create improvement-based partnerships at its new home at the University of Mississippi's National Center for School-University Partnerships. I'm confident that with this new center — and other state, local, and national improvement-based partnerships — we can continue to build educational infrastructure that improves learning opportunities, experiences, and outcomes for teachers and students.

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EQUITY & IMPROVEMENT
Val Brown

ARE WE REALLY CENTERING STUDENTS IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING?

Maybe we're all going about COVID-19 recovery and acceleration wrong because we're not asking students — the very people we're trying to help — to co-construct it with us.

I n the past three years, young people have done what no other generation of students has been asked to do. They have navigated change admirably by trying to move at the "normal" pace of schooling at the peak of a global pandemic, when everything was far from normal.

Even as I'm impressed by their resilience, I still feel uneasy. As an educator and a parent, I recognize the things that many of our children and communities have lost. For many, that includes a sense of connection with school. As a parent, I'm keenly aware that I haven't gotten any classwork or textbooks sent home in years, and while learning management systems have provided immediate access to grades, what I have lost is a deeper understanding of my children's assignments and their progress. It's hard for me to determine if they are on track or behind because, most times, I am not sure what they are learning.

Even though I know deep down that my family will be OK, I can't help but worry that my two Black children will be caught underprepared and left behind, causing irreparable harm to their futures. Believing that our children are achieving less or have access to less can activate feelings of fear and panic, especially for historically marginalized families, for whom such fears have been justified. When my oldest went to high school this year, deficits in core knowledge that I had previously overlooked now became glaring. Panicking, I decided I was going to use the summer to accelerate him. I got him a math tutor. I bought several books in his favorite genre, SAT vocabulary word cards, and an ACT practice test book. But these have sat on a bookshelf, barely touched since he unwrapped them.

When I started writing this piece, I wondered what his perspective is on all of this. Is he as concerned about falling behind as I am? I asked him if he was worried at all about becoming an adult. He replied, "No, I just want to enjoy being a kid as long as I can." I suddenly thought: Maybe I was going about this all wrong. In fact, maybe we're all going about COVID-19 recovery and acceleration wrong because we're not asking students — the very people we're trying to help — to co-construct it with us.

I can only recall a handful of professional learning experiences where a young person's voice was centered, but those have been powerful. Most recently, at the 2022 Learning Forward Annual Conference, we got to hear from student keynote speaker Margarida Celestino, an immigrant student leader and aspiring teacher. Each time I hear from young people like her, I am deeply moved by their clarity and passion about their own learning needs. And I wonder why we don't create more opportunities to learn from them.

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USE SUMMERTIME REFLECTION TO RECHARGE YOUR PRACTICE

By delving deep into our experiences, successes, challenges, and methods, coaches can identify areas for growth and set meaningful goals.

Instructional coaches and school leaders dedicate significant time to encouraging teachers' reflection, as it can be the cornerstone of improving teacher practice and student learning. But are you allocating sufficient time for your own reflective practices?

Now that it's June, you've likely completed another school year. In education, most of us have the privilege of concluding a school year and rejuvenating ourselves for the next one. Reflection is crucial to the recharging process. As authors Pete Hall and Alisa Simeral (2017) write, "The more reflective we are, the more effective we are" (p. 21).

This summer, I urge you to make time for reflection. Settle down in a cozy spot with a notebook or digital device. Clear your mind of distractions and think back on your work, goals, and learning over the past year.

I've created some questions to get you started. For each question, jot down your thoughts and expand on them. Use the AWE (And What Else?) question technique (Stanier, 2016) to seek further insights. Allow ample time to go through the process. Write down your thoughts, take breaks, and return to add more. Include your own categories and questions to make the process your own.

R - Relationships: Reflect on the relationships you built with the teachers you coached, as well as challenges or successes you experienced in building trust and rapport.

E - Effectiveness: Reflect on the effectiveness of your coaching strategies and approaches, and consider changes or improvements you can make.

F - Focus: Reflect on your coaching goals and the extent to which you were able to focus on them, and consider strategies to help you maintain focus and prioritize your coaching.

L - Learning: Reflect on your own learning as a coach, including professional learning you pursued, coaching techniques you tried, and successes or challenges you experienced.

E - Equity: Reflect on your coaching practices through an equity lens, and consider how you can continue to support all teachers and students, regardless of their backgrounds.

C - Culture: Reflect on the school culture and the ways in which your coaching impacted it, and consider ways to foster a positive and inclusive school culture.

T - Targets: Reflect on the targets you want to set for yourself, and consider strategies or action steps you can take to achieve those targets.

In addition, analyze your thoughts, identify patterns, and set goals for the next school year. Consider breaking larger goals into actionable steps with the help of a colleague, mentor, or coach.

One useful tool for continuous reflection is the ACT method that Kenny McKee and I

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FOCUS ON WELLNESS
Victoria E. Romero

TO COMBAT STRESS, CREATE A RESILIENT SCHOOL COMMUNITY

For additional resources about building educators' resilience, see the online version of this article at bit.ly/3WMCFDT.

T he COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted some lessons about the social and emotional needs of people working in habitually stressful environments. To learn how teachers were coping during the early stage of the pandemic, the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence surveyed educators about their most frequent daily emotions. Within three days, 5,000 respondents said they were feeling anxious, fearful, worried, overwhelmed, and sad (Brackett & Cipriano, 2020). This was not a new trend. In 2017, when asked the same questions, 7,000 teachers responded and said their most frequently felt daily emotions were frustrated, overwhelmed, and stressed (Brackett & Baron, 2018). The pandemic only made a stressful job more stressful.

Educators begin their careers with compassionate ideals. We are caring people who see ourselves wanting to make a difference in students' lives. But if teachers go to work each day feeling any of the emotions from the two surveys, they and our students suffer. Working under duress adversely impacts cognition, decision-making, and ability to maintain relationships, physical health, and emotional well-being, all of which are essential to be effective practitioners.

It also makes us prime candidates for burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma. Burnout has a slow progression; it happens over time. It can manifest as fatigue, frustration, anger, negativity, or withdrawal. In contrast, compassion fatigue is spontaneous. A co-worker or a student pushes our buttons, and suddenly we're incapable of feeling empathetic. Signs include, but are not limited to, sadness and grief, nightmares, reduced empathy toward others, detachment, and avoidance of work or personal relationships.

Vicarious or secondary trauma occurs when we develop beliefs and feelings as though we experienced a negative event that happened to someone else. Listening to a student's or colleague's retelling of a traumatic event can trigger this reaction, especially if trauma is widespread in our environment. This can cause anxiety, sadness, intrusive thoughts, physical symptoms, trouble with relationships, and other difficulties. It's important to understand how these related concepts are distinct, how they impact our work, and how we can recognize their signs and symptoms.

Even more importantly, we must be intentional about creating and sustaining resilient school cultures so that everyone can cope with stress and trauma, bounce back from adversity, and move forward toward success. In many high-performing, high-poverty schools, faculty have figured this out. Understanding that they have no control over their students' home lives, economic security, or the communities where they live, educators are intentional about building a culture that fosters resilience and social and emotional competencies for themselves and their students.

The entire faculty — including administrators, teachers, cafeteria workers, and custodial

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personnel — works together to create a culture based on mutual trust, a shared vision, and collegiality. Recognizing the high risk of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma, they know and value how to care for each other. But it's not just high-poverty schools that should commit to creating such environments. In the face of a global pandemic, a drug epidemic, and school shootings, educators in all communities should be intentional about building school cultures that promote wellness.

Fostering a resilient school community begins with helping the adults put on their own oxygen masks first. These steps can help.

Create short surveys to gather information on the well-being of your staff and colleagues. Questions might include:

- On a daily basis while at work, what are your three most frequent emotions?
- What are your social and emotional needs at work?
- How well do you know the symptoms of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma?
- How well do you understand the various realms of trauma (household, environment, and community) and their impact on behavior (Quinn, 2020)?
- Are you able to recognize when you or a colleague might be struggling emotionally?
- In terms of building a culture that promotes wellness at work, what suggestions do you have for professional learning?

After gathering data, determine possible next steps to incorporate self-care into your district, school, grade-level, or department improvement plans. Watch and discuss videos of schools and districts that focus on developing strong environmental cultures and positive relationships. Note that all roles should be included because creating a supportive environment is a whole-staff approach. See a list of example videos

We must be intentional about creating and sustaining resilient school cultures so that everyone can cope with stress and trauma, bounce back from adversity, and move forward toward success.

in the online version of this article at bit.ly/3WMCFDT.

Research specific strategies educators can use to support wellness at work. Draw on organizations and publications such as *The Learning Professional*, Edutopia, Mindful Schools, and Greater Good in Education. Strategies might include:

- Tap in/tap out: When teachers need to step out of their classrooms to recharge and refocus, they text a colleague to cover their class.
- Healing circles for teachers: Staff members sit in a circle to reflect and problem-solve together, support each other, and share small victories.
- Wellness check-ins: Leaders check in with staff during meetings and events to assess how they are feeling physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially, allowing leaders to make adjustments to agendas or even postpone when appropriate. Simple hand signals like thumbs up/down help with check-ins.
- Create a wellness at work column: Leaders share links to short articles, wellness tips, and videos in a regular electronic bulletin or other form of communication, sending the message that the commitment to wellness is ongoing and sustainable.
- Mindfulness for teachers: Teachers focus on the present moment and notice feelings and thoughts without judgment or interpretation. Research shows that it helps minimize negative biases (Torres, 2014). It is a practice

that faculty can do for less than five minutes during their planning times.

Encourage faculty, team, or department members to assess how well they are balancing work and life and engaging in self-care. This can be accomplished using an online self-care self-assessment. In addition, suggest staff add a wellness or self-care goal to their annual professional objectives and identify a colleague as a support person.

As you take these steps, don't forget about the power of humor. Laughter relieves physical tension, improves heart health, lowers blood pressure, and floods the body with hormones connected to well-being (Field, 2021).

You are an essential worker. Remember to put on your oxygen mask first, and that will allow you to help your colleagues and students.

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Continued from p. 12

Traditionally, school has been designed and driven in a way that privileges the adult perspective. Adults have determined the length of the school day and school year, what classes count as credit, and what young people should — and now, more prevalently and troublingly, should not read. Often, even large-scale youth activism efforts such as the 1964 protest of 464,000 students against school segregation in New York City or the hundreds of thousands of students who participated in the 2018 March for Our Lives movement hasn't led to the immediate changes young people demand for themselves, other young people, and their futures.

From an equity standpoint, I can't help but wonder about the role ageism — discrimination on the grounds of a person's age — plays in our unwillingness to value the voices and desires of young people for their own learning. Adultcentrism bias — the tendency to view children and their realities from an adult perspective — can unintentionally lead to inaccurate judgments, misuse of power, and undermining the strengths and abilities of our young people (Petr, 1992). We convince ourselves we are making the right decisions for young people without asking them what they think.

I even found myself engaging in this behavior with my son last summer. I did what I thought was best for him by finding opportunities for acceleration, and it wasn't until my son resisted that I bothered to even ask him how he wanted to engage in formal and informal learning experiences over the summer. As a parent, I believe I have the responsibility to guide him, but I can also honor his personhood and engage him in dialogue about how best to prepare him and support him in the future that he wants for himself. I believe the same is true of educators.

Collectively, educators need to start thinking about school as an intergenerational endeavor, a place where there is meaningful interaction between members of different generations. This would require we learn to share power with students and invite them to the table when making decisions that impact them.

This practice can easily start in professional learning. For example, when engaging in a lesson study, in addition to reviewing student work, we can ask a few students to share their perspectives on the content or the teaching strategies, and we can use their voices in our analysis of a lesson. Another example can be to administer a student survey at the end of each semester and use the data to inform professional learning for the next semester. Finally, we can always invite a panel of students — especially those traditionally marginalized — at any point in the year to learn about their experiences in our schools. This will take a mental shift, and I include myself in that. I would call myself a student-centered educator; however, as a facilitator, I have often fallen short on identifying opportunities to include youth voice in professional learning. I'm working to change that, and I invite others to join me.

What we lost in the past few years is incalculable, and we can't address it by simply throwing more at our students in our current systems and paradigms. What we can and should do is make the time we have now count and work with students to figure out how. Students are the ones who have to live in the systems that adults create. Therefore, they can offer an honest perspective and keen insight about how adults can transform educational systems for their benefit. When we co-design with students or follow their lead, it becomes more than advocating for them. The act of working together with students democratizes our institutions.

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Continued from p. 13

described in our book, *Compassionate Coaching*. We suggest using it at the end of each week during the school year.

A = What **actions** have I completed toward my goals?

C = What **changes** have I noticed?

T = What **things** do I need to do to get closer to my desired results?

By delving deep into our experiences, successes, challenges, and methods, coaches can identify areas for growth and set meaningful goals. Through this process, we can continue to make a positive impact on the students and teachers we serve.

As you prepare for the school year, continue reflecting and growing. And never forget the impact you have on those around you.

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Realizing the promise of the evidence-based concepts and strategies outlined in the standards starts with assessing how well the professional learning educators experience is aligned to those standards.

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SURVEY GIVES SYSTEMS A CLEAR PICTURE OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Professional learning research is essential for helping education leaders make informed, strategic decisions about how to build staff members' knowledge and skills. That's why applying data and evidence is a theme throughout Standards for Professional Learning and an operating principle for all of Learning Forward's work.

One of the first steps in this process of data-informed decision-making is knowing the current state of a system's professional learning. Understanding the way teachers experience professional learning and what impact professional learning is having (or not having) can shape the approaches that systems start, stop, and continue and can increase the likelihood that future strategies and programs achieve their intended outcomes.

Learning Forward has developed a tool to provide this relevant, educator-level data. The Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) is designed to help systems of all kinds — states, districts, schools, provinces,


and organizations — gather and track data about the professional learning their educators experience. The framework for the inventory, which is administered in survey format, is the evidence-based set of 11 Standards for Professional Learning, which describe the conditions, processes, and content of high-quality, systemic professional learning that are theorized to lead to improvements for educators and students.

Realizing the promise of the evidence-based concepts and strategies outlined in the standards starts with assessing how well the professional learning educators experience is aligned to those standards. Then, bringing the school or system's professional learning closer to the full realization of the standards will improve educators' knowledge, skills, and capacity, ultimately resulting in better outcomes for students (Garrett et al., 2021).

HOW THE SAI MEASURES PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The SAI is a confidential, 30-minute, web-based instrument for teachers, coaches, and other professional learning stakeholders that helps systems assess the quality of the professional learning their teachers experience. Familiarity with the standards isn't required or assumed.

The first iteration of the SAI was created in 2003. Learning Forward recently created a new and significantly improved version to align with the latest version of the standards, which were released in 2022. The new version also includes more detailed data and an easier-to-navigate platform for reviewing the results.

Overall Standard Score Averages

Experience level

Years at current school

Equity Practices
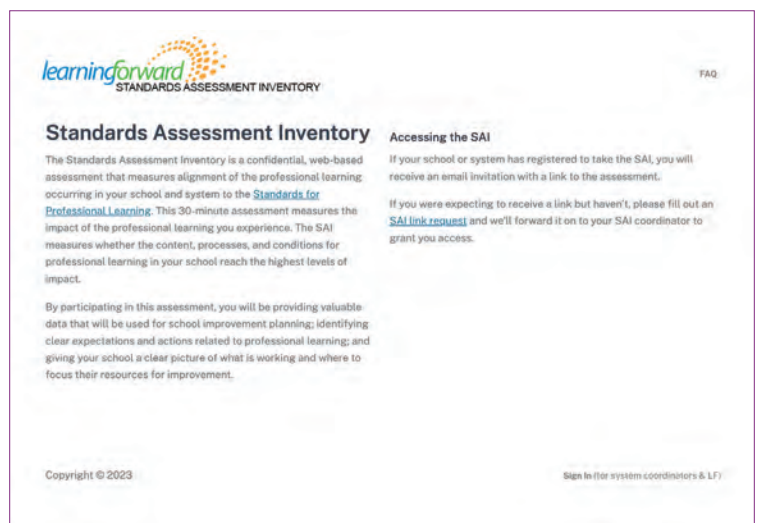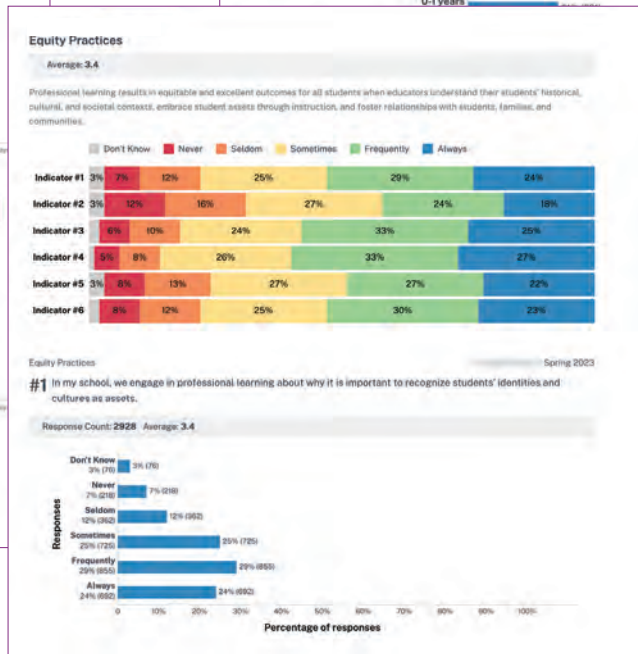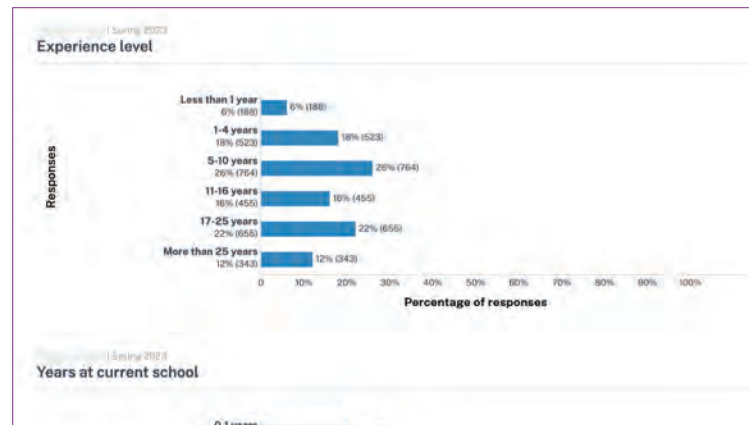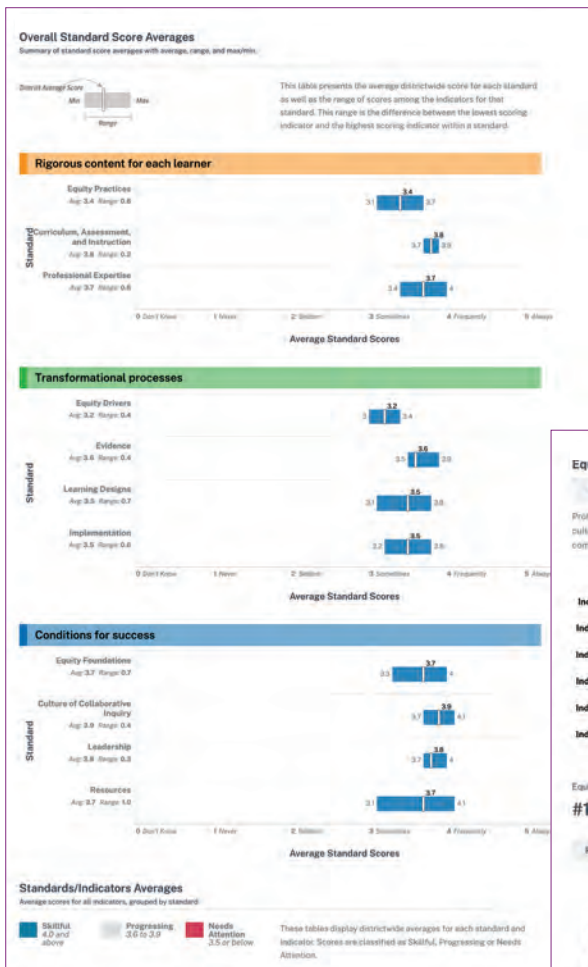
In the new SAI, educators respond to 74 items, choosing from five rating categories that range from "never" to "always." Respondents also can answer "don't know." Following are some selected illustrative items:

- Professional learning in my school builds my capacity to implement my curriculum with integrity.
- I have the opportunity to build discipline-specific content knowledge and expertise through professional learning at my school.

- The professional learning I experience at my school is relevant to my work.
- Professional learning at my school includes conversations about how cultural and historical barriers can impact student learning.
- Teachers in my school receive ongoing support (e.g., coaching, co-teaching, peer feedback) in various ways to improve teaching.
- My school system has structures and procedures that support collaborative educator learning.

Respondents' privacy is protected, as SAI data is anonymized and aggregated in all reports to the system or school administrator. School and system leaders use the SAI data to better understand their educators' collective experiences and whether there is a gap between their vision and strategies for professional learning and what educators experience. If the SAI is administered pre- and post-initiative or at the beginning and end of an academic year, administrators can look across data to see if any changes have taken place.

HOW THE NEW SAI WAS DEVELOPED AND TESTED

The SAI itself embodies several important themes that run throughout the standards because it supports a culture of continuous improvement and elevates the voices and true experiences of educators. The items underwent extensive internal and external reviews and a rigorous external study to ensure that the SAI yields data that accurately shows how well teachers' professional learning is aligned with the evidence-based content in the 2022 standards.

The updating process began with a close review of the previous version of the SAI. Learning Forward interviewed professional learning experts who have administered the SAI and analyzed data over many years with multiple systems to get their feedback about items, reflections on how well the data represents systems' professional learning, and insights on how they use the results. Learning Forward revised the SAI items, in collaboration with professional learning content experts, during 2021-22 to align with the revised Standards for Professional Learning released in April 2022.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) then partnered with Learning Forward to conduct a validity and reliability study to ensure the items measure the standards as intended. Learning Forward administered the revised SAI to a sample of volunteer participants, consisting of 259 teachers and instructional coaches in 166 schools from 148 districts, and AIR analyzed the data.

Learning Forward recruited the participants from their professional networks. The participants came from diverse professional backgrounds with varying roles, years of experience, years at their current school, and school settings. Most of the respondents had never completed the SAI previously (71%) or were unsure about whether they had (23%). The majority were female (86%) and non-Hispanic

(95%). Sixty-four percent were white, 26% were Black or African American, 3% were Asian, and 7% identified as other races. Participants had high levels of education experience, with 86% having five or more years of experience, but nearly half (47%) had spent four or fewer years at their current school. Most respondents were either content-area teachers (45%) or instructional coaches (35%), and they worked in elementary school (56%), middle school (28%), or high school (29%).

Based on the data collected by Learning Forward, AIR conducted psychometric analyses to determine whether the revised SAI items map onto the standards as intended, examine measurement quality of the revised SAI, and examine item consistency. In addition, AIR performed multiple group analyses and differential item functioning analyses to examine whether the SAI, overall and by each item, may have potential measurement bias for certain teacher groups. AIR also examined item nonresponse to determine if any items had a nonresponse rate of 25% or greater. For items with nonresponse rates of 25% or greater, AIR assessed potential bias by comparing the characteristics of respondents, nonrespondents, and the entire sample.

These analyses found that the revised SAI is a valid measure of all of the 2022 Standards for Professional Learning. The items that were designed to measure each standard produced consistent information and align to those standards as intended. In addition, AIR's analyses showed that educators at different schools and of different racial backgrounds scored similarly (although scores were higher among teachers than instructional coaches for some standards), indicating that the SAI does not have issues with measurement bias.

To complement the qualitative analysis, AIR analyzed qualitative data from cognitive interviews and focus groups with teachers, instructional

coaches, and school and district leaders about their experiences taking or using the SAI in their settings. These qualitative data provided insight into the experience of completing the survey and considerations for continued revisions to ensure that the revised SAI is relevant to districts and schools as they assess their professional learning systems. Overall, teachers, instructional coaches, and district leaders shared positive feedback on the SAI and believed that the revised SAI captures key professional learning experiences and will yield valuable information about professional learning systems.

NEXT STEPS

Learning Forward is exploring the feasibility of conducting a predictive validity study to determine the extent to which the SAI predicts future outcomes for teachers and students. However, establishing such correlations in a way that is rigorous and does not fall prey to the limitation of self-report surveys requires a very large sample and considerable expense.

A future article in *The Learning Professional* will share details about how SAI data can be used and applied to improving professional learning in systemic ways. We'll illustrate the tool's useable format and delve into how it can lead the way toward systemic improvement of educators' learning and practice.

For more information on the SAI, visit **standards.learning.org** or contact **tom.manning@learningforward.org.**

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DATA POINTS

84% OF TEACHERS REPORT MENTAL OR PHYSICAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

51% of current and former teachers said a lack of respect for "professionalism, knowledge, and investment in teaching" was the main factor influencing their desire to leave the classroom. Nearly 1,000 U.S. educators responded to researcher Betina Hseih's 75-question survey asking about their mental and physical health. She shared the survey results on Twitter, noting that 84% of respondents "reported personally experiencing mental/physical health challenges because of their work in teaching." Hseih, a teacher education professor at California State University at Long Beach, studies how identities shape teaching and learning, what draws people to the profession, and what influences their career trajectories. In the Twitter thread, Hseih says education is experiencing a crisis of humanization and we have to stop blaming teachers for their humanity: "A broken system breaks people."
bit.ly/3KpmczR

1,140 HOURS MORE LEARNING TIME IN NEW MEXICO

New Mexico has added 1,140 hours of learning time to the state's public schools, plus an additional 60 hours of professional learning time for elementary school teachers and 30 hours for middle and high school teachers. Gov. Michelle Lujan signed HB 130 into law in March to help address pandemic learning loss. The bill gives districts flexibility in how and when to use the extra hours. Rep. G. Andrés Romeo, D-Albuquerque, a high school history teacher, said the added hours are "not just about opening up seat time

but creating enrichment time for students to reinforce lessons they need to learn in class and providing more time within the school day for mental and social health." The law goes into effect next school year.
bit.ly/3Gt2WQM

1 IN 4 SUPERINTENDENTS LEFT IN THE PAST YEAR

One in four superintendents left their jobs in the past year, and 95% of them said the job has become more difficult in the last decade, Hanover Research reported in its *2023 Trends in K-12 Education* report. The report notes that leaders can feel pressured to take quick action when their communities are eager for progress after the past few tumultuous years, but districts need a clearly defined strategic plan. As new people fill the vacated leadership positions, there is "a unique opportunity for incoming leaders to work with their school boards and community members to reimagine districtwide plans in ways that not only align with the current landscape but are also better suited for navigating the road ahead," the authors write.

The study also reported that 93% of educators experience burnout. Despite this fact, many teachers say they would like to continue teaching, especially those from marginalized groups. School districts that support positive school climates and provide quality professional learning "can

help improve the likelihood of hiring and retaining high-quality, diverse teachers while easing the stress of these ongoing problems." The report names social and emotional professional learning as one specific example that can deliver long-term benefits.
**bit.ly/3KLaPnk**

55% OF SUPERINTENDENTS LACK EVALUATION SPECIFICS

55% of superintendents reported that their employment contracts don't specify a process, indicators, or measure for their evaluations and performance reviews, according to a survey of over 2,400 superintendents by AASA, The School Superintendents Association. Also noteworthy is the number of responding superintendents who are fairly new to their jobs — 61% indicated they have been in their current positions for five or fewer years. The superintendent evaluation process differs from that of teachers, which are required annually in at least 22 states and are often articulated in detail. This lack of specificity can leave district leaders with less direction and blurry expectations. Having clear goals can align a superintendent's focus with that of the district, including the school board and the wider community.
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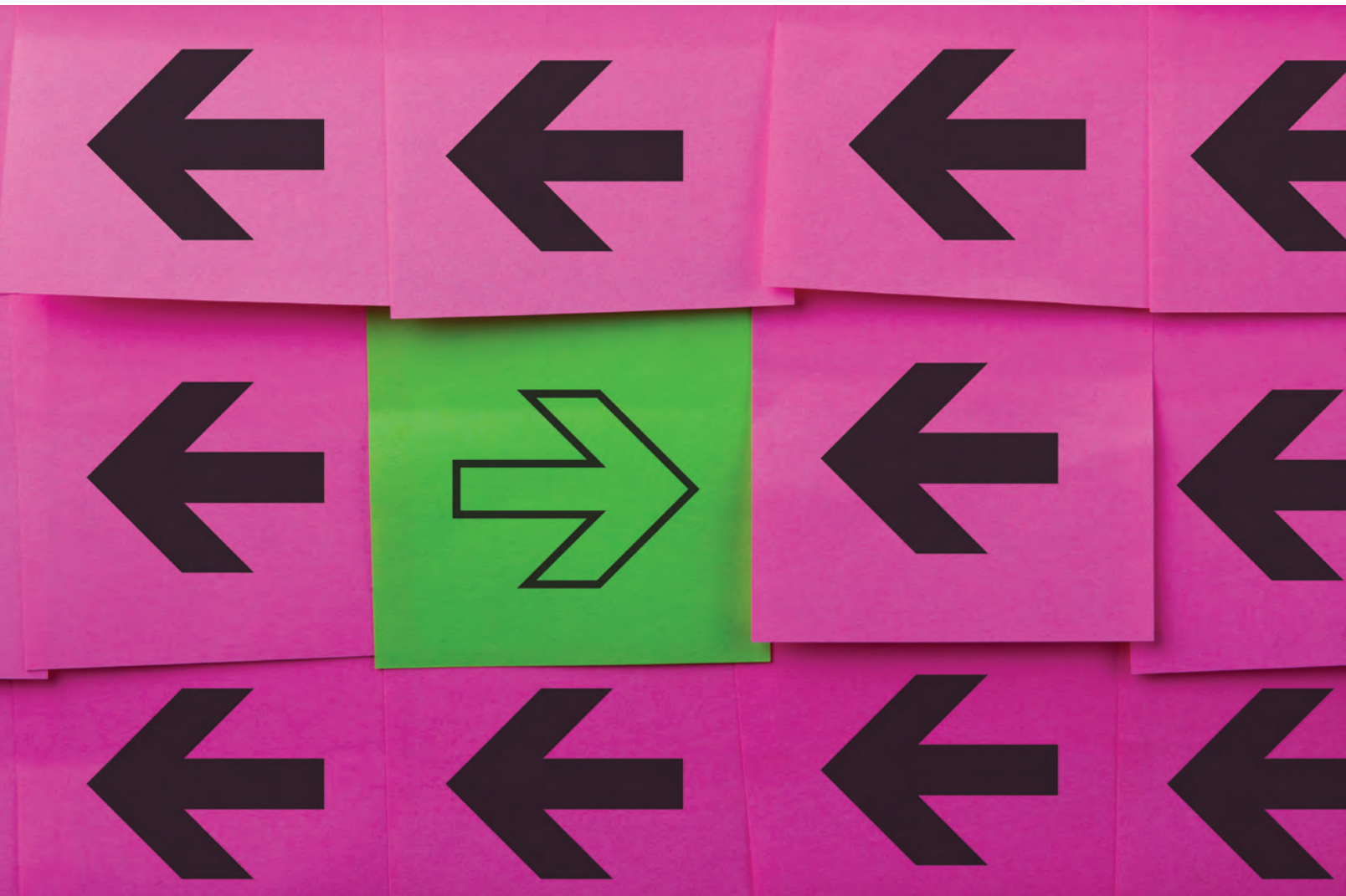
Accelerate or remediate?
KEY FACTORS FOR EDUCATORS TO CONSIDER

BY TANJI REED MARSHALL

Last month, the U.S. government lifted the emergency designation put in place three years ago to address the COVID-19 pandemic. But the impacts of the pandemic live on, especially in schools, where there is a dire need to address the interrupted learning students experienced and continue to wrestle with now that they are back in classrooms.

The critical question is: How do we do this? What are the promising practices leaders and classroom-level educators should consider as they work to support *all* students? And how should the billions of dollars in education stabilization funding be allocated to best meet students' needs, especially students who are struggling and those who have been historically marginalized and frequently left behind?

After the murder of George Floyd, the country seemed prepared to address the racial inequities grounded in our unaddressed historical systemic issues. Now, there seems to be an abatement of efforts to provide redress for centuries-long policies and practices that have yielded ongoing racially and economically predictive outcome imbalances.

Efforts to create educational equity through cultural relevance and responsiveness, curriculum inclusivity, attention to teacher diversity, and funding have recently been challenged. Across the nation, states have rolled back efforts to ensure that every student has an authentic place and knows their identity is valued.

Instead of working toward more inclusion and equity, efforts from many states are moving backwards. They are banning books from classrooms and libraries, narrowing curricula, and putting leaders and classroom educators in jeopardy.

In this context, what does it mean to approach acceleration with an equity lens?

MOVING BEYOND THE INEQUITY IN REMEDIATION

Historically, traditional means of addressing learning gaps have a poor track record when it comes to equity. Remediation has long been a popular choice, and continues to be, in response to the pandemic, based on the assumption that, because students were not in school buildings for months or even years, they were going to be behind on whole grade levels' worth of material. Unfortunately, research shows remediation is not always the best route (Asio & Jimenez, 2020), and the impact is felt most acutely by historically marginalized students, most especially Black boys.

A report from TNTP (2021) examined patterns and impacts of remediation, which TNTP defined as:

- Spending significant time in content below grade level before moving into new learning;
- Covering many objectives or standards from prior grades or units (usually extending to a month or more of instruction);
- Isolated from grade-appropriate learning; and
- Usually with greater than 50% of time on procedural fluency (ability to select and use strategies and procedures) rather than a balance of fluency, conceptual understanding, and application.

TNTP found that remediation in the wake of school closures left many students further behind, in part because students were assigned to remedial work even when there was sufficient data to suggest they were already on grade level.

This occurred more often for students of color and those designated as in economic need than for their white and wealthier counterparts. In fact, one in six students in higher-poverty schools were in remediation, regardless of what the data showed about their ability to achieve mastery on grade-level content.

According to TNTP, acceleration is a better way forward. TNTP defines acceleration as:

- Connecting unfinished learning into the context of new learning;
- Integrating a few lessons from prior grades or units;
- Just-in-time to grade-appropriate learning (whether in core or extended time); and
- Always with an appropriate balance of fluency, conceptual understanding, and application of work.

Another study compared the two kinds of instruction when students struggled in math (Zearn, 2022). The study showed that 44% of students with remediated instruction faced academic struggles when attempting to do subsequent grade-level work, compared to 36% of students in an acceleration model. Furthermore, students consistently engaged in acceleration completed an average of twice as many grade-level lessons as those with consistent remediation.

These patterns were even more pronounced for historically marginalized students. Those in majority Black and Latino schools had a 50% probability of struggle after remediation compared to a 41% struggle after acceleration, and the numbers for students in schools designated as low-income were 51% and 41%.

BUILDING EQUITY INTO ACCELERATION

Conceptually, acceleration appears to provide the best way forward to close interrupted learning gaps. But doing so with equity takes intentionality. In particular, it requires educators — building leaders included — to examine their mindsets about students, address structural barriers and external pressures, and ensure all teachers have high-quality professional learning and materials. The following questions and points for consideration can help educators approach their thinking and design of classes and systems to address each of these factors.

Examine mindsets about students

One of the most significant areas that we must address is teacher and leader mindset — how teachers see the students in front of them. While the TNTP report is now two years old, there are students — especially students of color and those from low-income families — still being remediated even when the data is clear that they have mastered the content.

Given the unabating test score outcome differences between students of color and less wealthy students as compared to their white and wealthier counterparts, many educators make assumptions about their students based on demographics. While this sometimes comes from a place of care and sensitivity, such care should not slip into misplaced compassion. We must also be willing to admit that, many times, this comes from a place of deficit thinking that links intellect to economic status and other demographics.

There is another false assumption many in education must be willing to face: While many children faced traumatic experiences during the pandemic resulting in family loss and increased economic distress and instability, not every child had those experiences, and not every child of color or economically disadvantaged child had those experiences. There were students from many communities — even from those we tend to believe would not have thrived — who did, in fact, thrive when their school building moved to remote learning. Yet there remains a pervasive belief that students of color need remediation more simply because their schools moved to remote learning, even when there is evidence to the contrary.

Beliefs are essential because what we believe to be true becomes true. Our actions will always align to our core beliefs and assumptions. Beliefs

impact instructional decision-making: If an educator believes the students of color in their class experienced heightened levels of pandemic trauma, their instructional decisions will be shaped by their belief and their students of color will fall into the category of being remediated despite the possibility that data suggests otherwise.

While data suggests that acceleration is the way to go for all students, nuance is necessary to ensure every student receives the support they need. Remediation — targeted and sustained reteaching of a concept or skill — is part of the story. There are times when a student might require remediation due to severe unteaching, disrupted learning, and many other factors. Educators need data analysis, a check on their personal belief systems, and effective professional learning to recognize when and to what extent students need remediation and when it has achieved the desired outcomes.

Far too often, students, especially Black and Brown students, those experiencing elements of poverty, and those learning English, get dropped into remedial learning programs with no hope for a way out. In these cases, remediation relegates students to never-ending cycles of under- and miseducation. It has also resulted in students' misrepresentation (over and missed identification) in special education classes, exclusion from advanced courses, and risk for more restrictive learning environments and higher discipline targeting (Morgan, 2020; The Education Trust, 2020; American Psychological Association, 2021).

Questions to consider:
How is your system addressing teacher beliefs?
- Teachers must face the realization that how they see their students is how they will teach them.
- Leading with the heart has its place until doing so leads to low expectations fostered through misplaced compassion.

- Building leaders must be willing to name and address educator low expectations to ensure every student has the best opportunity for academic success.
- Teachers and leaders must recognize the importance of knowing how who they are and how they experienced school are driving factors in the instructional decision-making process.

Are teachers aware of the power they have to direct student access to learning?
- Teachers make thousands of instructional decisions every day, each endowed with the power to advance or constrain student access to an excellent education.
- Teachers must understand that their decisions hold power and weight in ways that often reinforce negative stereotypes about certain groups of students while maintaining overly positive stereotypes about other groups of students.
- Learning about the ways instructional decision-making can create empowered or disenfranchising learning environments could help educators become more mindful of the decisions that often leave students behind.

Address structural barriers and external pressures

External pressures, especially accountability processes, can be barriers to teachers' willingness to try acceleration. Classroom teachers, who are governed by curricular mandates not of their own making, will feel the stress of potentially leaving something out if they do not cover every unit in a curriculum. Such a sentiment may lead them to go further backwards to address what they believe has been missed rather than moving forward and including in-time learning support.

Concerns about high-stakes assessment may also be a driver in decision-making about acceleration. If teachers believe students will be ill-prepared for upcoming tests, they may be more likely to lean into remediation as opposed to acceleration. This will be especially true for students who are consistently performing below grade level and teachers in schools under intense state scrutiny.

Addressing these mindsets and teacher fears requires a willingness to move past the conventional and dare to create more empowering learning environments. Leaders should start by recognizing the impact of their own and teachers' instructional power and decision making (Reed Marshall, 2023). They should also develop deep-level knowledge of the root causes of persistently low student outcomes, including the historical context behind and underneath the disparities.

Data analysis, using culturally sensitive and relevant data and applying a justice-focused lens, is necessary, and leaders must be willing to use that data to develop short- and long-range plans to address the disparities. Short-range plans must address leadership development, educator learning to support instructional development, and curricular enhancements. Long-range plans must focus on understanding the historical context behind and underneath the disparities, using culturally sensitive and relevant data and applying a justice-focused lens to address the issues, disrupt the systemic inequities, and foster lasting change. Such plans should include a range of stakeholders to gain historical and contextual insight into the underlying issues related.

Bringing students, especially older students, into the data analysis process is one way to help students better understand their data and foster a transparent learning environment. Students need deep knowledge about how to analyze their data so they can take authentic ownership of their learning and progress.

Analyzing curriculum through a more comprehensive lens where students gain much-needed critical analysis skills will also position them for higher motivation, engagement, and success.

Questions to consider:
What data has been collected and how is it used in the decision-making process?
- Formative and summative data both have value in this process.
- Students should be made aware of their data and considered critical stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Is disaggregated data available to determine which students have fully mastered concepts, standards, and skills?
- Educators must have accurate disaggregated data to avoid leaning into their deficit beliefs and assumptions about which students really need remediation and which must be accelerated.
- Instructional decision-making is complex. Building and classroom leaders must take a nuanced approach to deciding when and how to accelerate learning.

Does the data give clear, unequivocal support that students assigned to remediation need it?
- Leaders must resist the urge to lean into clarion calls to simply accelerate and give clear-eyed attention to the most recent empirical data with an understanding of their context to apply data effectively.
- Data should evidence which students are closest to achieving skill, concept, and standards mastery; these are students who most likely can benefit from acceleration.
- Data should also indicate a pathway for students who might need additional targeted support so they can get to grade level and beyond as quickly as possible.

Ensure all teachers have high-quality professional learning

Acceleration may be a new concept for many educators, and it may feel counterintuitive to some. Teachers will need strong guidance from their leaders at the building and district level. They will also need professional learning with specific modeling that demonstrates how to incorporate a needed skill from a prior unit while teaching new skills in a current unit.

Many educators need permission to go beyond the structures of purchased or mandated curriculum. Leaders must develop their own understanding of acceleration to be better able to afford their educators the space they need to make the right kinds of instructional decisions that may involve going beyond what a purchased or mandated curriculum requires.

Such knowledge necessitates professional learning. District leaders must be willing to invest in the type of learning that helps building and classroom leaders build the knowledge needed to make critical decisions about how to use data effectively as a tool to better understand when best to accelerate content. They also need skill development on how to judiciously and effectively condense curricula to accelerate learning without exacerbating learning and skill gaps incurred due to interrupted and disrupted schooling.

Questions to consider:
Do educators have the necessary skills to make the determination of when to accelerate and when to remediate?
- Building leaders must have a full understanding of their teachers' instructional capabilities to determine where best to invest in professional learning on data use and analysis and effective instructional practices for remediation and acceleration.
- Building leaders must ensure teachers have permission to make

on-the-ground instructional decisions in the best interests of students that may mean going outside purchased and mandated curriculum.

Do teachers possess the necessary pedagogical knowledge and skills to accelerate effectively?

- Building leaders need to know what pedagogical skills teachers possess and how best to develop them so they can provide the instruction needed for effective acceleration.
- Leaders may need to increase access to professional learning on standards, the curriculum, concepts, and more.

Do teachers have the resources necessary to accelerate student learning?

- Acceleration is more than going fast. It involves teaching differently and with materials that may not be part of the curriculum.
- Building leaders should have a working knowledge of the curriculum to provide teachers with the additional resources they may need to accelerate effectively.

TO ACCELERATE OR NOT?

Deciding when and how best to address the gaps created by interrupted and disrupted learning requires care and intentionality so that students who should be accelerated are and those who may need more targeted support get what they need.

Judicious understanding about data is crucial in making sure student needs are met and done in a way that is devoid of assumptions and underlying deficit

beliefs that deny students' potential. Leaders and teachers should also consider how they are implementing plans for remediation and acceleration and monitoring progress.

Additional questions to consider:
Are there clear structures for how acceleration fits into current schedules?

- Building leaders should provide support through tutoring, core schedule adjustments, or teacher rotations to ensure there is a clear structure for how best to implement acceleration strategies.
- Discussions with building-level stakeholders (e.g., teachers, coaches, etc.) should be involved in the decision-making process for effective acceleration implementation strategies.

Is there a system for strategic progress monitoring of acceleration?

- There must be a process through which educators will be able to monitor the effectiveness of acceleration to ensure student success.
- There must also be a process through which students are able to analyze their own data and partner with educators on the acceleration process.

These are just some of the questions leaders should have in their minds as they and their teachers determine how best to address the interrupted and disrupted learning from the pandemic. The pandemic's effects are still creating learning challenges for students, and it will take critical reflection and thoughtful approaches to make sure that all students get what they need.

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A districtwide path to acceleration starts with teacher teams

BY ISOBEL STEVENSON

Friday, March 13, 2020, was a professional learning day for many school districts in Connecticut. The timing was fortuitous because it gave educators a chance to make plans for the coming weeks. In the previous few days, we had learned that schools were going to be closed for a couple of weeks due to the rising threat from the pandemic that would come to be named COVID-19.

When it became clear that, in fact, schools were going to be closed for a lot longer, my colleagues and I at Partners for Educational Leadership went into overdrive figuring out how to support districts in their planning for online learning, and later, for the return in the fall.

When we realized remote learning was going to be with us for quite some time, we began researching and creating a framework and resources for districts to guide them in making decisions about instruction in an extremely challenging educational context — one

that no one in our professional network had ever encountered before.

This article is the story of what we created and how Wilton Public Schools, a district in Connecticut, designed and facilitated professional learning for its teachers and leaders so that they might leverage academic acceleration in service of student learning. Wilton was recently ranked No. 1 on Connecticut's Accountability Index, which is a combination of several metrics and prioritizes student growth over time. District leaders credit the implementation of their approach to accelerating learning with contributing greatly to their success.

ACCELERATION IN THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

In summer 2020, amid confusion and lack of models to draw from, we began to come to grips with what to do in the new reality. After a good deal of research, we settled on acceleration as the foundational concept. We drew on the work of educators who made

the case that remediation is ineffective (Rollins, 2014) and that students already spend too much of their school life doing work that is below grade level (Santelises & Dabrowski, 2015).

This statement, from TNTP (2020), sums it up best: "We found this approach of 'meeting students where they are,' though well-intentioned, practically guarantees they'll lose more academic ground and reinforces misguided beliefs that some students can't do grade-level work. The students stuck in this vicious cycle are disproportionately the most vulnerable: students of color, from low-income families, with special needs, or learning English."

The work of acceleration is to stop worrying about what students have missed and focus instead on what they should be working on according to grade-level standards. With that as our organizing principle, and recognizing that there was little specific guidance available for educators, we set about creating a framework for districts to use

in their planning that was both detailed and practical. The resulting model, the Accelerating Learning Framework, comprised our best thinking for organizing the collective efforts of educators to meet the needs of students in this highly unprecedented time.

During the design process, it came to light that this framework actually served several purposes. While it was first construed as a structure for planning instruction as a bridge *between* remote learning and a return to regular instruction, it became a guide for instructional practice *during and after* remote learning.

COMPONENTS OF THE ACCELERATING LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Prioritize essential concepts and skills. Students should be working on grade-level standards, no matter how much school they miss (Bakshi & Steiner, 2020; Resmovits, 2021). And while trying to teach everything in the curriculum for each grade level was not

feasible given the real constraints of remote learning, districts could leverage the fact that curriculum in America is generally overstuffed and thoughtfully pare it down (Mehta & Peeples, 2020). This should be a district responsibility, not a task for individual teachers (Stevenson & Weiner, 2020).

Design academic tasks as deep learning experiences. During remote learning, educators struggled with radical shifts away from normal instructional routines and practices. We wanted to give them an uncomplicated way of sorting through all the activities they *could* be doing, and we settled on a single design question: What is the *thinking* that students are being asked to do? This encourages engagement in deep learning, with a focus on cognitive engagement, rather than on wide subject coverage.

Practice responsive teaching based on formative real-time assessment. This component is really about what Dylan Wiliam (2018) calls embedded formative assessment, but we have found that the term formative assessment can cause confusion, as many educators associate the term with testing and data teams. We define this as the teacher employing techniques to know where all students are in the learning process. Real-time assessment is not about grading or determining the need for intervention. It means adjusting in the moment with the present students. We use the phrase "even an exit slip is too late" to make that point.

Scaffold learning and prerequisite skills. Given that the lynchpin of acceleration is ensuring all students have access to grade-level content, we did not use the term differentiation. Differentiation has the connotation of "meeting students where they are," which we explicitly seek to discourage. Instead, we encourage teachers to use scaffolding as a metaphorical platform under students, allowing them to access grade-level work.

This could be a concrete scaffold

> **We settled on a single design question: What is the thinking that students are being asked to do? This encourages engagement in deep learning, with a focus on cognitive engagement, rather than on wide subject coverage.**

like a multiplication table or a word list, or just-in-time instruction of a concept students need to do a task. For example, if students have missed the instruction they need to work on a math problem involving division of multidigit numbers, the teacher can use what they know about multiplication and place value to create a ratio table they can use to solve the problem.

Center student self-efficacy. The impact on students during and after the pandemic lockdown is more than academic. At the very least, that disruption in daily life and instruction has affected their academic confidence. We know that we cannot take on the entire spectrum of social and emotional learning, but we do think it important to pay attention to building students' belief that they can be successful if they put in effort.

We asked educators to be creative in helping students draw on their experiences of previous success to approach obstacles and frame goals so that the only way to fail was not to try. It might sound like this: "Mr. Malik told me you had a hard time in PE getting the beanbag through the hoop. He was very proud of you for persisting. Do you remember how you kept trying until you could do it, and how it felt when you realized that you could do it every time? This is the same thing! Keep trying, because that's what's most important. No one is expected to do it right away, so don't worry. It may take you a long time, but persistence is a skill you already have, so use it."

WILTON'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

Wilton, Connecticut, is where we have seen the clearest implementation of and success with the framework. Wilton senior leaders made an early decision to adopt the Accelerating Learning Framework as the district strategy for managing and addressing unfinished learning.

They communicated to the entire community, starting with the school board and district administrators, that district resources would be aligned with acceleration as a strategy, including devoting time and resources toward professional learning for teachers.

Acceleration provided Wilton educators with a mindset for approaching unfinished learning. Wilton's spring 2020 Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment scores were much lower than in previous administrations, which was not surprising given the circumstances, but concerning nonetheless.
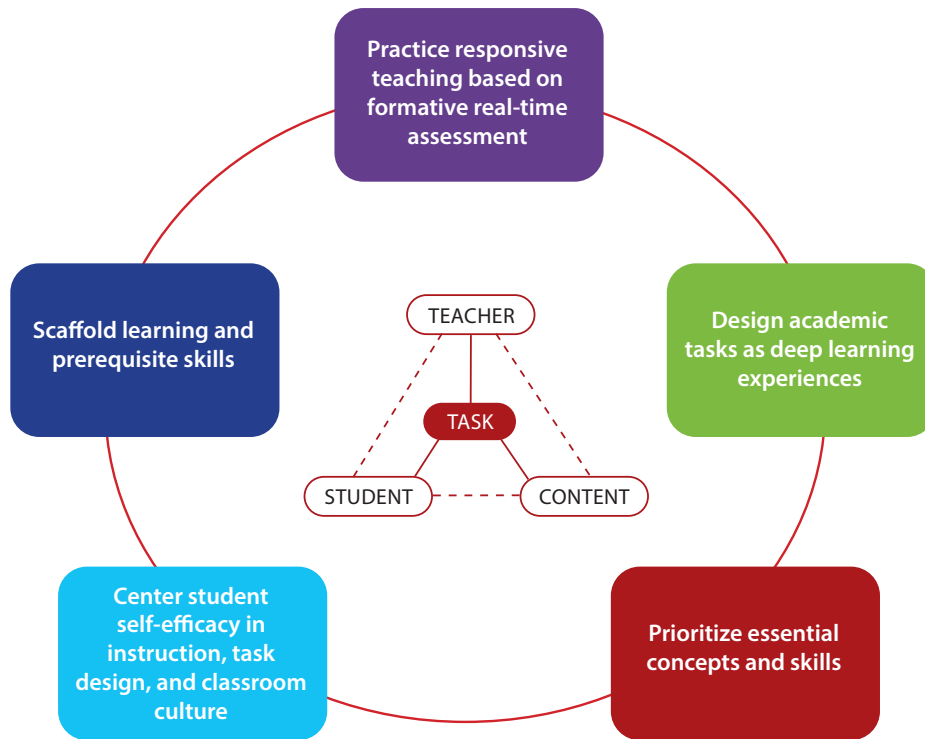
District leaders realized it was probable low scores could influence educators' expectations of future student performance, so the district worked hard to replace the assumption that students were somehow "broken" or required remediation. Instead, they guided educators toward the concept of acceleration.

We and Wilton leaders recognized that professional learning would be key. In presenting the Accelerating Learning Framework to districts, my colleagues and I provided the best high-level, research-based, and engaging workshops we could create. However fabulous, it was still the opposite of job-embedded, ongoing, and experiential.

While the Wilton leaders used the materials we developed (such as slide decks, tools, recordings of our workshops, lists of books, articles, and resources), they were also aware that a turnkey approach has hard limits and that educators need opportunities to make meaning of the big ideas, time to plan, and support in working through questions and challenges.

In practice, this meant that

ACCELERATING LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Practice responsive teaching based on formative real-time assessment

Scaffold learning and prerequisite skills

Design academic tasks as deep learning experiences

TEACHER

TASK

STUDENT — CONTENT

Center student self-efficacy in instruction, task design, and classroom culture

Prioritize essential concepts and skills

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district instructional leaders taught the framework, used it to structure agendas for and facilitation of meetings, and were relentless in making all gatherings, whether labeled professional learning or something else, as vehicles to teach about the framework. Perhaps not surprisingly, much of what the Wilton leaders spoke about could have been drawn straight from Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022).

A large part of the professional learning and planning took place via an existing structure in the school district: instructional effectiveness team meetings. These weekly meetings for teacher teams are attended by teachers, coaches, and building leaders and are the major vehicle for professional learning, continuous improvement, and

joint planning for instruction.

District-level curriculum coordinators capitalized on this structure to support teachers by providing them with plans and timelines that removed some of the uncertainty in a very uncertain time; ways of strategizing around lost instructional time drawn from the Accelerating Learning Framework (prioritizing foundational skills, staying on grade level, scaffolding as the district's approach to differentiation, and so on); and support for how to enact these principles by having coaches and coordinators work hand in hand with teachers to enact these principles through the lesson planning process.

In addition, Wilton's central office staff set the direction and made teachers' lives easier by shouldering the

work of prioritizing the curriculum based on student-level data. They created a spreadsheet to track student data at a granular level. The spreadsheet identifies foundational skills in literacy and mathematics; tracks them across overlapping grade bands (K-1, 1-2, 2-3, etc.) so that teachers can see learning progression; identifies the instructional units where the skills appear; and captures where students are with mastering the skill.

With teachers not having to spend time prioritizing curriculum, they were able to design instruction collaboratively — an example of job-embedded professional learning. Wilton central office leaders are clear that the best professional learning isn't always labeled as such. It happens when curriculum experts, instructional

coaches, and teachers work together to meet actual challenges in engaging students in learning, even when the conditions are far from ideal.

Wilton adopted the Accelerating Learning Framework at several levels: as a set of guidelines for instructional practice, a framework for building capacity in teachers, a focus for instructional leadership in coaches, principals, and central office leaders, and the district's overall strategy for improvement. It became a vehicle for coherence across the district, and none of that would have been possible without a comprehensive approach to collaborative planning.

As a result, the district is not focused on remediation but on ensuring that students have access to grade-level content. Teachers have permission and support to prioritize those parts of the curriculum that are foundational to success in higher grade levels. And there is increased priority on student agency

— through goal setting, for example — and self-efficacy because when students believe that they can be successful, they experience more success.

ACCELERATION MOVING FORWARD

Wilton and the other successful districts we have worked with not only leveraged the Accelerating Learning Framework to cope with the acute phase of the pandemic, but are planning to use it as a blueprint moving forward. For Wilton, the backbone of the district's strategy from now on is a focus on engaging teachers in ongoing professional learning so they have the capacity to support students' success in doing grade-level work.

As before the pandemic, the instructional effectiveness teams continue to meet, and each school is engaged in continuous improvement around an instructional focus. Wilton started with a blueprint for unfinished

learning that identified where the unfinished learning "lived" in each grade level.

From there, the district emphasized the key understandings from the Accelerating Learning Framework: scaffold grade-level learning over remediation and develop responsive lesson planning to grow learners who could achieve grade-level expectations. Later, it deepened the learning with task design and scaffolding, and it continues to deepen and refine these two practices.

Sometimes it takes a crisis to help us distill what really matters. In my organization, we learned that, while we have always advocated for the individual pieces of the Accelerating Learning Framework, we had not pushed hard enough for the integrated whole. Once they were treated as such, it became both easier and more potent to engage teachers in professional learning that paid off in service of students.

As with so many practices, what makes the difference is vision, clarity, and consistency in implementation. That is never easy to accomplish, especially in a time of enormous uncertainty and unpredictability. But it could not be realized without a coordinated effort among central office, building leaders, and coaches to provide teachers with everything from high-level concepts, frameworks, and timelines to partnership in planning for unprecedented instructional conditions.

The work of Wilton during the pandemic gave new meaning to the phrase job-embedded professional learning, as all the educators in the district worked to learn what they needed to know to engage students that day. Wilton, of course, is not unique in this. What teachers across the country accomplished in service of their students during the pandemic has been a credit to the profession.

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CONNECTING ACROSS GRADES HELPS TEACHERS CLOSE STUDENT LEARNING GAPS

BY SUZANNE BOUFFARD

To accelerate learning with just-in-time support, educators need a set of skills and knowledge about the continuum of student learning and development over time. Vertical alignment of concepts and skills across grade levels is one way to develop that knowledge base and determine what students know, what they have already learned, and what they need to know.

The Learning Professional recently spoke with two mathematics professional learning experts about the role of vertical alignment and how to support teachers to facilitate it. Nicole Marshall is an education associate in secondary mathematics at the Delaware Department of Education, where she oversees professional learning and support for the state's mathematics coaches. Andrea Gautney is a math instructional coach for Clear Springs High School in Clear Creek Independent School District in Texas, where she partners with teachers and

Andrea Gautney

Nicole Marshall

teams to provide support and build capacity in all facets of the classroom. She also serves as a Learning Forward consultant, working with school districts on instructional coaching.

Why is acceleration a valuable approach to close students' learning gaps?

Nicole Marshall: First, we need to understand and wrap our minds around why remediation doesn't work and will never work if we want to close the gap in opportunities for learning grade-level content. If we discuss that piece, the need for changing our actions will be far more understood and have more buy-in.

If we're always remediating certain students, those students won't ever have the opportunity to get past the gaps. There are many analogies to explain this. One I read recently was a sports analogy: If you take the kids who are struggling with game play and always pull them out and they never have time with the coach, they'll never improve. We need that understanding in order to create the need to change and do something else.

We know that there are some students who may struggle with specific topics within the content. This does not mean they struggle with all of mathematics. A student in 8th grade, for example, may struggle with a mathematics topic relating to congruence and similarity. We (the educators) need to dig into the mathematics and determine the learning and understanding that lead in to this topic in order to assess where the student is struggling and determine the support to be provided for this student to ultimately engage with the grade-level mathematics.

How is vertical alignment across grades important for acceleration?

Marshall: Vertical alignment and understanding the vertical articulation (of content across grade levels) is a necessary component to address acceleration. The classroom teacher as a content expert needs to rely on not only their knowledge of the content *they're* teaching but also those foundational elements (from prior grades) that a student might be struggling with.

And not only is *what* students

learned historically important for building grade-level knowledge, but *how* they learned it. (For example,) in elementary school, students are learning and demonstrating math through modeling with manipulatives and diagrams. When these students move into middle school, rather than jumping straight into algorithms, we should be providing opportunities to connect those models and diagrams, to connect not only the content of their previous learning, but also the pedagogical content knowledge. It might not be that students don't know the information or have the knowledge, but rather they articulate it differently.

How do you help teachers understand the importance of vertical alignment?

Andrea Gautney: I've been working with content-area teams as well as individual teachers, starting with understanding what students do and don't already know. We've had a lot of conversations about preassessment as formative assessment.

In PLC (professional learning

community) meetings (when we are planning instruction for the beginning of the school year), I ask, "Why are we placing two days in the calendar to reteach and then retest (concepts from previous grades)?" The teachers say, "They're not going to be able to do it. I already know." They're planning for remediation instead of responding to student needs.

So we talk about the value of preassessment and about shifting forward one of those days we've allocated to reteaching to come *after* the formative assessment, when we know what students need. (Historically) we've been resisting this idea of preassessing the prior knowledge skills because we think it will take too long. But the active engagement in this preassessment might reignite students' understanding or give them some idea of what they do remember or know how to do so we can see a starting point.

We also do this at the start of a new unit or at the start of a new topic. We go back and quickly look at what prior skills it connects to, we give students a preassessment, and we shift right then and there in our lesson (based on what they know). We're triaging those skills the moment they need them. We're not saving it all for after they take the high-stakes unit assessment. To me, that embodies the idea of just-in-time instruction that's necessary for grade-level learning.

How do you build on that information to facilitate alignment of content across grades?

Gautney: We have conversations about how (math) skills build on each other across grades. Let's use solving equations, which runs through all of the core of high school math. Let's think about all the things a student has to be able to do to solve an equation: They need to rely on integers, multiplication skills, the understanding of abstract manipulation of a formula, the understanding of equivalency.

As we start to step out those

skills, the teachers say, "Wow, this is a humongous collection of skills from prior grade levels that I don't think twice about." And once they start thinking about that, they start saying, "OK, where did this happen in their curriculum? What grade level should they have learned this in?"

From there, we build in a scaffolded manner. So, on our preassessment of equations, we put one or two questions where they have to multiply, add, and subtract with positive and negative integers. And then we include a one-step equation, and then a two-step equation, and then an equation with distribution. And (with that information), we start to understand where the student's ceiling is and where their floor is.

As a result, we have a better understanding of where we need to start in our instruction. And the teachers are coming around to the idea that their entry point might need to be somewhere around 7th grade before I can get to the 9th-grade skill.

I've got a teacher teaching BC calculus (an Advanced Placement course that covers two semesters of college-level algebra) for the first time, and she was terrified, but her students think she is the best teacher. She goes into the AB curriculum (an Advanced Placement course in the fundamentals of calculus), and she looks for those components that they should already know how to do. And she starts her next lesson that way. So they think she's this amazing teacher, which she is, but she says, "I'm just putting the things in front of them in the right order and helping them gain entry into that lesson."

We also teach this to the students. We've started explaining the steps of the problem like this: We say, "OK, I'm going to label this step with PK, for 'prior knowledge.' That's how I'm reteaching you or reminding you of something that you need to know from a prior grade level to be successful here. Then I'm going to show you how those skills layer and stack together to build you up to be successful in the grade-level thing we're working on." And

then the kids can turn around and tell us, "OK, so I know this PK and this PK, but I don't know this one," and we can support them with the one they're missing or struggling with.

What resources do you draw on to support vertical alignment?

Marshall: In Delaware, we use Common Core, and we take advantage of coherence resources as well. With access to high-quality curricular resources, teachers are able to see the coherence within one grade or course, and they can also go back to previous grades or courses and recognize how to help their students make connections.

Gautney: When I worked in a Common Core state, we had a document that talked about coherence that says that a teacher should be spending 20% to 25% of their time with coherence. When I presented that coherence as a teaching practice, it made the teachers think differently. They had never thought of it as a strategy or a way of accelerating learning. They thought of it as a box to check. But this changed their thinking.

In Texas, we have guides to our state standards that outline each standard, and it shows you a graphic of what standards it fed from and what standards it points to. And I started making it someone's job in PLC time to have the guides out, look at the standards, and tease out the list of skills. That has really helped with strategies for acceleration.

One thing that seems like a small thing but has really opened teachers' minds is pointing to specific words in the standards. (Before doing that), teachers will say things like, "Oh, they solved systems in 8th grade." And I say, "Let's look at the verb in the standard." They look and see that in 8th grade they have to *identify* the solution from a graph. That's it. In 9th grade, they have to *solve*, and they can use different methods. And the teachers realize, "They *didn't* do this in 8th grade; they only did this one conceptual part of it." It has changed the way that they view even preparing and

scaffolding kids to grade-level learning.

How can districts and states support this alignment work?

Marshall: This takes time. As a state system, we consider the structures we need to ask districts to put in place so that we are providing the time and the setting for this work to happen. Do we have collaborative planning opportunities for teachers to talk with different grade-level teachers? Do we have structures in place for content teachers to talk and plan with special ed teachers and multilanguage learner teachers? We need to provide those times for teachers to meet and be able to talk about mathematics. You also need to be able to create processes and protocols for that.

Gautney: Our campus deliberately groups all teachers together who teach the same subject area and gives them the same conference period. That has been a massive effort on the part of our campus administration because we have 3,000 students and 200 teachers. And what has happened as a result of that is they work together more. They're in each other's rooms, they're in the hallway, they're having lunch together. It has been immensely helpful for these conversations to take place.

I've been working with our PLC leads in Algebra One, Algebra Two, Geometry, and Precalculus. We've started talking about the wants and the needs of the next grade level. We designed a form where the precalculus teachers answer questions like, "What are the skills and concepts that you would want students coming from Algebra Two to be able to do almost cold or with very little reminders?" and "What are the things that you really wish they could do, but you don't mind reteaching and doing a minilesson or doing some accelerated learning over?" And then, "What are the things that you could let go, they might never see again?" They fill that out, and we give it to the Algebra Two teachers, and then they fill it out and they give it to

Geometry and Algebra One, and so on. It's really increasing the conversations and starting that vertical alignment work in a very concrete way. And it's been a time-saver. I don't have to bring them all together for a whole day. The PLC gets together, they do the form, and then we talk about it in the next PLC.

I also started organizing PLC-wide learning walks where I will take an entire PLC to visit another PLC. That has supported that whole process of getting people more open to seeing what their colleagues are doing and how kids are responding.

What advice do you have for getting started with this kind of professional learning?

Gautney: Start big, ask for a day. If (the district or school) can't give you a day, ask for a half-day. If they can't give you a half-day, ask for an hour in the afternoon and for teachers to be paid. Get creative and think about little places you can fit it in.

I would also say find a coach or someone who has content knowledge and spend a little time chatting with them to try to get the door open and see where that can take you. If you have access to a coach, even if it's not your content area, recognize that they have the skills that you might need.

Marshall: Professional learning for coaches is important. Coaches can and should be working in consultation with building administrators. And make sure the professional learning is high quality. In Delaware, we use Standards for Professional Learning. There are valuable resources that accompany the standards that support the role of the professional learning providers.

How do you know if this work is making a difference?

Marshall: At the seemingly simple level, there is an opportunity to gather impact data based on evidence in walk-throughs and through teacher feedback. In the conversations that I have with

coaches, I ask, "What did the teacher say after this lesson or week or unit?" And then we ask the teacher to provide the evidence on how the students experienced mathematics. That framing — "How are students experiencing mathematics?" — is a shift in language we've made over this past year or two, instead of the framing of "student outcomes." It is a little less evaluative.

Gautney: You can look at subpopulations, like special ed students or English learners. Maybe we're seeing gains in those places more readily. We have some subpopulations that have grown in the past two years of state testing. That calculus teacher I mentioned also took over Algebra One sections that include our English learner students. She was appealing to their mathematical sensibilities and not as much their formal math education, because some of them didn't have one, and she was attaching to what they know. The prior year's class got about a 54% pass rate on the state test. The year she took over, they got up to about 78%. She's a really gifted teacher, but she also really adheres to this idea of accelerated learning.

Marshall: At a basic level, have a teacher identify a few students who are struggling with this specific content and then look at the impact and feel the change with those students. Listen to the difference in the conversation or look at the difference in the writing. Those are leading indicators.

Once we recognize that the students are experiencing mathematics differently, let's document and gather evidence with student work within the classroom. It could be with one teacher, it could be with a team, in order to build up the momentum. We need the momentum and the drive to be able to move forward.

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Reimagine summer to accelerate learning

BY RISA SACKMAN AND NANCY GANNON

Most people associate summer with activities that have nothing to do with school, or, if they do, summer school comes to mind — the remediation variety. Historically, summer school is for struggling students who need to relearn and firm up skills from prior years or for those required to retake a class. With this type of remediation, teachers review content a student may not have mastered from the previous year before moving on to grade-level work.

But what if we could reimagine how to use the summer months to provide effective, engaging learning opportunities for students, especially those who were hit hardest by the pandemic? Some districts are shifting to evidence-based summer programs that move from remediation to acceleration in a climate that prioritizes equity and
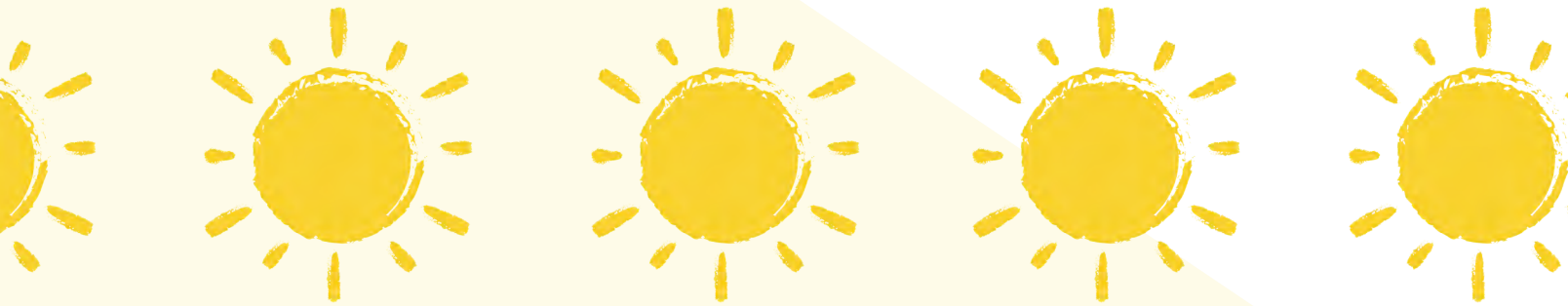
supports well-being so that all students can thrive.

This article offers a framework for the components of effective acceleration, explains the role of high-quality professional learning, and provides examples of school systems that are making it happen through a summer learning network led by FHI 360, an organization whose education initiatives aim to dismantle obstacles and give students the tools they need to succeed in school. These summer learning approaches are connected with school-year learning, and the lessons we are learning from them have implications for professional learning with and for school-year teaching staff.

ACCELERATION VS. REMEDIATION

Despite the widespread use of remediation, evidence shows that it's not an effective way to improve students' performance or get them to grade level. The primary failure of remediation is that it limits the time students spend doing grade-level learning; additionally, remediation is often boring and stigmatizing, which further impedes students' progress.

In fact, remediation can have detrimental outcomes, including exacerbating inequities (Hill, 2020; North, 2021; TNTP, 2021), because students of color and those from low-income backgrounds are more likely than their white and wealthier peers to experience remediation — even when they have already demonstrated success

on grade-level content (TNTP, 2018, 2021).

Learning acceleration is proving to be far more successful than remediation in helping students perform well socially, emotionally, and academically. At the heart of this shift is grade-level learning. Teachers provide scaffolded foundational concepts and skills to students as they need them. This includes exposing students to essential vocabulary and background knowledge on the topics so students can form a deeper understanding of the new information, see its relevance, and take ownership of learning.

Through ongoing formative assessments, the teacher knows exactly what knowledge and skills students have and where there are gaps. This way, there is no need to spend time on content students already know. This type of just-in-time learning is key to students being more engaged and experiencing greater success. Not only does it boost students' academic progress, but it also improves their confidence, attendance, sense of connection and belonging, as well as college and career readiness.

HOW THE NETWORK PROMOTES ACCELERATION

Adding in well-designed and thoughtfully planned accelerated learning between traditional academic school years is no small feat. To do this at scale, FHI 360 partnered with The Wallace Foundation to launch the

District Summer Learning Network in January 2022. Through the network, FHI 360 is assisting 100 geographically diverse school districts across the country in their redesign of summer learning programs.

Focused on equity, the network asks districts to rethink which students are invited to summer learning offerings, prioritizing participation based on a needs assessment that integrates test scores, grades, opportunity gaps, and other criteria.

Achieving a radical change in mindset and programming requires a substantial commitment to professional learning for teachers and leaders. We designed our professional learning to be timely and relevant, with the key outcome being the development of a three-year road map that can serve as a guide for districts to implement transformed summer learning programs to improve results for young people.

The network facilitates professional learning with district leaders so they may gain competency and understand systems and strategies to support accelerated learning. Our learning network also supports districts to facilitate professional learning for teachers and staff, who may be required to unlearn things they have done in the past.

Through the network, FHI 360 offers districts three integrated professional learning strands for just-in-time supports and strategies: job-embedded coaching, whole-

group sessions, and small learning communities. While there is no one perfect design for professional learning, our team has identified key strategies that can create powerful outcomes: Establish a clear, districtwide vision; consider summer an extension of the school year; prioritize student learning essentials; and develop district leadership for summer programs and beyond.

By incorporating these strategies in ways that fit staff needs, district leaders build educators' capacity to provide acceleration for students who need it most. In this article, we provide several examples of these components and the professional learning school districts are implementing to accomplish this.

ESTABLISH A DISTRICTWIDE VISION

If districts want a new paradigm for summer classrooms, they must create opportunities for educators to learn and practice those new moves. For that to happen, leaders need to address the policy and the politics that built the old model.

For Newark Public Schools in New Jersey, that meant that clear expectations and messaging had to come from leadership. The superintendent articulated the importance of challenging all students with grade-level materials. By specifically stating that there would be no remediation or credit recovery, the superintendent provided a strong vision of summer learning as an extension of the larger district commitment to accelerated learning.

With such defined guidelines for everyone — from school principals, to teachers, to learning specialists — there is no room for misinterpretation or error. The clear messaging of learning acceleration vision and priorities communicates to the community that district resources will be allocated toward working on strategies and materials to accelerate student learning and that educators will be expected and supported to learn how to implement it.

CONSIDER SUMMER AN EXTENSION OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

District leaders can work across departments to ensure that summer learning and the professional learning for summer instructors that supports it are seen as integral parts of the school's work, not a separate project or special initiative. This creates coherence and consistency.

For example, network member Dougherty County School District in Georgia explained to staff the connection between professional learning for school-year and summer instruction, noting that summer instruction is aligned with the rest of the district's work and that investing in summer professional learning is another way to invest in the overall development of teachers and staff. The superintendent provided a vision of systems and structures to promote a seamless cycle of professional learning.

For instance, the team that plans and develops summer acceleration professional learning is the same team that is thinking about what teachers need in the fall. This team starts planning for summer in January, implements three professional learning sessions in the spring for summer instructors, and then integrates what they've learned during summer instruction into the fall professional learning for all teachers.

Dougherty's summer professional learning includes a strand of learning for leaders and aspiring leaders, knowing that their work will be key to consistent school-year implementation across the district. The cycle is continuous, building on itself by all who are engaged in the work.

Professional learning sessions include paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, and other staff so that everyone in the district understands the mission and the implementation strategy around shifting from remediation to acceleration. That shift requires ongoing learning and practice from everyone.

There's a continuing conversation

about what acceleration can look like so that students are engaged and excited about their summer learning. The network provided districts with examples to make this concrete and attainable. In Battle Creek, Michigan, student engagement increased when students were given more voice and choice by creating idea boards to brainstorm what they wanted to study during summer learning. In this way, the students took ownership over their learning.

PRIORITIZE STUDENT LEARNING ESSENTIALS

What is most critical to address in limited professional learning time? As Rochester City School District in New York makes a major shift from a remedial approach in summer, it has started to draw a picture of what accelerated classrooms would look like. The district is identifying the key strengths required for a class to meet the definition of acceleration.

For example, the district is prioritizing writing skills and will use those as a thread throughout the summer. It is looking at student competencies, such as the ability to read grade-level texts, exposure to academic vocabulary, or showing evidence of one's work. As a first step, some teachers shifted from using worksheets and resources that were below grade level to ones that were on grade, with some strategic supports to enable students to understand and complete the work. As a next step, many staff are planning ways to provide a range of scaffolds for project-based and inquiry-centered activities that are on grade level and serve to ignite students' interests and help them make real world connections.

These acceleration competencies will drive pedagogical and curriculum priorities, leading the district to prioritize professional learning. If the district wants teachers to shift to require all students to read grade-level texts, professional learning must focus on the skills and strategies educators

need to make those classrooms successful.

For summer 2022, Florence School District 3 in South Carolina started summer professional learning in March with a districtwide session that helped staff understand and accept summer programming and created a strong shared set of goals. The first session built buy-in, and the next two sessions targeted teachers who were going to instruct that summer.

Last year's professional learning focused on whole-child development needs for elementary students, recognizing that students could not thrive academically if their developmental needs were not met. In 2023, the district will expand programming for middle and high school students and design professional learning around those competencies.

DEVELOP DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Newark Public Schools created its 2022 summer professional learning plan with an eye toward using summers to build capacity for acceleration across the district. Knowing the district would lose leaders to retirement, it recruited innovative, aspiring vice principals and teachers to lead summer learning sites.

Both groups participated in months of professional learning focused on the shift from remediation to acceleration. By investing in this group of future leaders, who in turn manage the professional learning for teachers, Newark knew it could strengthen the quality of summer programming while also building capacity and preparing for the decade ahead.

Last year, the entire group

collaborated to create a summer learning orientation framework for consistent implementation across the district, with a shared understanding of the purpose and goals for the summer program. Then, individual leads customized that framework in ways that were relevant to their specific sites.

Notably, intensive professional learning happened daily across the sites. Each leadership team (vice principal and teacher to assist) used a walk-through protocol to give ongoing actionable feedback to teachers. This job-embedded professional learning met teachers where they were in their own practice and helped create district coherence.

In its first year in the network, the Newark team focused professional learning primarily on climate and

DISTRICT SUMMER LEARNING NETWORK FRAMEWORK

Three pillars are embedded in the District Summer Learning Network framework: partnership, equity, and whole-child development.

PILLAR	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Partnership	Broaden district capacity to meet a wide array of students' needs. Connect more closely to students' and families' cultures. Offer opportunities for teachers to work more strategically with students.	Uniondale Union Free School District in New York recruits local organizations to bring in mentors, entrepreneurs, scientists, and other professionals to offer inspiration, near-peer connections, and an exploration of career paths that are substantially different from students' academic classes.
Equity	Ensure that students, especially those impacted hardest by historical inequities, get what they need.	Tuscaloosa City Schools in Alabama uses data to prioritize students with high needs. While summer learning is open to all, those students get front-of-the-line access to summer education.
Whole-child development	Affirm that classrooms, schools, and districts are attending to a range of students' needs so that students are more ready and able to digest learning.	Rochester Public Schools in Minnesota uses a whole-child development approach to shift its summer learning to incorporate significantly more voice and choice so that students feel connected and engaged in their learning.

culture. As it moves into its second year, the team's focus is wholly on academic acceleration. Professional learning will focus on what leaders need to know to pivot from remediation thinking. Those leaders, in turn, will craft professional learning that offers that same path for teachers.

THE BENEFITS OF SUMMER LEARNING

Professional learning for summer instruction should feel like a benefit to teachers, an investment in their learning, and a strengthening of their craft. It should create the kind of conditions we are asking teachers to nurture in their classrooms: places where learners feel valued, supported, inspired, and set up for success.

Now in our second year, the network's districts are determined to create accelerated learning opportunities for summer 2023 that will engage more than 2 million students, many of whom are from historically marginalized communities. To do that successfully, network members are building timely, relevant professional learning before and during the summer that supports educators in creating a different and exciting summer learning program for its young people.

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How do we prepare teachers for accelerated learning? Experts weigh in

BY JEFNA M. COHEN

When I was a primary classroom teacher, it was my goal for each student to make one year's worth of growth in reading over the school year. My same-grade teachers stuck to that goal, too. It made sense because not only did it feel attainable, it also felt like a reasonable amount of progress to ask students to make in a single school year.

I was so invested in my students' reading that often I tacked my success as a teacher directly to their progress on whatever measurements I was tasked with using, such as DIBELS, Fountas and Pinnell's assessments, an Orton-Gillingham-based assessment, and others. Never far from reach, my reading clipboard was piled with pages

of class scores, conference comments, and reading group notes so I could track students' progress toward the growth goal.

But over time, I realized that not all students make that kind of growth each year, and I worried: What about students who start out behind their peers? All growth is a celebration, but when students begin lagging, where does that leave those kids over time? If a low-scoring student achieves that hard-won year's worth of reading growth, they're still low-scoring entering the following grade, too. And if I couldn't catch those kids up to their peers, and their subsequent teachers couldn't either, what would become of them?

Most educators already know the answer: Underperforming students are remediated into low-ability groups out of the best intentions, but they usually get stuck there. Year after year, they meet in the low-scoring groups, their teachers and interventionists working mightily to give them the skills they need to move forward. And they do move forward, but usually not enough to ever reach their grade-level peers.

I can clearly picture my students who received reading intervention services lining up at the door and leaving with the reading assistant who accompanied them to another classroom down the hall. I felt a mixed sense of relief at my temporarily shrunken class size, but also some concern. Those students were missing out on what the rest of the kids were doing.

While working on this issue of *The Learning Professional* and digging into academic acceleration approaches, I've wondered: What if I had known about acceleration as a way to give all students access to grade-level content? Do my former students' current teachers know about it? And what would we all need to learn to make it successful?

Acceleration is complex. It involves a mindset of seeing the strengths in all kids and forming relationships with them so they can learn in a supportive community, techniques for planning scope and sequence in a way that streamlines standards, and frequent student assessments so teachers can adjust instruction in real time.

And while some of those things already come naturally to many teachers, other aspects are counterintuitive, especially for educators who have been teaching differently for many years. This kind of reflective, data-driven teaching that provides many pathways for students to master content is unlikely to happen without strong professional learning.

What should that professional learning look like? What would have made a difference for me and my students, and what would make a difference for those grappling with learning gaps now? I asked a group of experts in the field to weigh in on what educators need to know about acceleration and how professional learning can help them build that knowledge and accompanying skills.

By sharing highlights of their recommendations, I hope to give educators at varied levels some ideas of where to start with this promising and relatively new approach. After all, as one of those experts, assistant superintendent Renee McCall, put it, "Educators should know that the challenges they face as a result of unfinished learning is a universal concern. School communities must collectively embrace a shared responsibility for meeting the needs of all learners."

What follows are excerpts from my conversations with these experts, condensed and edited for clarity.

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Jefna M. Cohen (jefna.cohen@ learningforward.org) is associate editor of *The Learning Professional.*

Renee McCall

Assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, Newton Public Schools, Newton, Massachusetts

Educators must be provided with opportunities to grapple with content standards to deepen their understanding of the grade-level demands and expectations and identify potential areas of growth. With an understanding of current grade-level expectations and knowledge of subsequent grade-level standards, educators are better equipped to make more informed instructional decisions, such as providing targeted instruction on prerequisite skills. Also, by focusing on fewer concepts and deepening conceptual understandings of the content, students will have a strong foundation to build on in subsequent years.

Professional learning should be designed to provide educators with an understanding of the impact of unfinished learning, balanced by highly effective, practical strategies and examples that help to concretize skills and knowledge. Ongoing, frequent data collection and analysis will inform educator practice and provide key information related to student progress toward mastery of content standards. Additionally, it is integral that educators engage in frequent discourse with their colleagues in a professional learning community about student progress to continuously sharpen their practice to effectively meet the needs of all learners.

S. Ayesha Farag

Assistant superintendent for elementary education, Newton Public Schools, Newton, Massachusetts

Many educators have not had adequate professional learning specifically focused on meaningfully and effectively instructing students with gaps in foundational learning to access grade-level work. It is essential to understand that shifting from remediation practices to an acceleration approach is likely a significant shift, requiring ongoing and tailored support for educators of varied roles, such as teachers, coaches, and administrators.

Such substantive pedagogical changes necessitate a long-term commitment to professional learning that is practical, job-embedded, and sustained over time, with frequent opportunities for modeling, practice, and feedback.

One strategy is to start small. Compelling research and the urgency to serve all students can lead us to set ambitious goals that are greater than we can realistically support. We launch with the best of intentions but are unable to sustain momentum or focus in the face of the demands of new learning, coupled with the complexities of everyday work in schools.

One example of starting small is focusing on practicing instructional changes in one content area. Another idea is to conduct a case study by focusing on the needs of one or two students, centering their needs in instructional planning, monitoring the impact, and creating time to reflect and learn.

The insights gained from small, highly focused practice and reflection enable educators to build their understanding and skills for learning acceleration and gradually broaden the application of their repertoire of strategies to plan, implement, analyze, and adjust instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

Verónica Madrigal
Principal, Grant Elementary, Long Beach, California

Learning acceleration requires a shift in how we provide Tier 1 instruction. Through a coordinated and collective process, educators in Long Beach Unified School District, including the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development and school site leadership, learned that one of the most important aspects of learning acceleration is providing all students with quality core instruction. To do this, we leveraged our instructional leadership teams to provide professional development to support this priority.

My school, Grant Elementary, made this shift by using research from Student Achievement Partners on critical literacy accelerators implemented through Tier 1 instruction. A pivotal moment was the restructuring of interventions. Our support team had to rethink when and how we pulled students for intervention. Interventions were moved into classrooms, allowing specialized staff to work in tandem with teachers. This "push-in" model removed a learning barrier that had existed previously. Students were not missing critical instruction as a result of being pulled out and falling further behind.

Now we continuously evaluate our instructional practices, conduct data dives, adapt our professional development plan, and implement tier levels of support to ensure that we keep students moving forward in their intended grade-level pathways.

Additionally, educators in our diverse learning community hold the belief that all students enter the school site with cultural and linguistic assets. We build on students' assets while ensuring they have access to grade-level tasks with the appropriate scaffolds. Teachers provide strong instruction using formative practices to determine what students know as well as to determine the needed scaffolds required by students to make grade-level work accessible.

In partnership with students and caregivers, high expectations are set for all students regardless of their learning abilities. These partnerships, grounded and cultivated by mutual trust, allow for deep engagement in the classroom.

Wanda Mangum
Learning Forward senior consultant

One important skill for acceleration is applying gradual release of responsibility concepts in the classroom consistently to assure that all students are given the opportunity to experience success as an individual learner. The teacher guides the students and has a conference with each individual to customize the support based on the learner's needs.

Once receiving customized support based on the keen observation of the teacher, the student can practice concepts and skills at an independent level. This practice often leads to the student successfully deepening their knowledge as they apply the skills on a regular basis with ongoing teacher feedback.

Professional learning is important for building this kind of knowledge and skill. Collaboration with a mentor, instructional coach, or instructional leader can help teachers refine and apply best practices. Research is clear about the impact that coaching support can have on the application of the knowledge and skills acquired across all content areas and concepts (e.g., Joyce & Showers, 2002), and acceleration should be no different. In fact, Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey (2013) have emphasized how mastery of the gradual release concept is related to teacher modeling, often linked to the support obtained during their professional learning experiences.

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Noline Martin is assistant principal at Thurgood Marshall Elementary in Richardson, Texas. Photo by Joel Reynolds

Educator's professional learning transforms Texas school:
Revamped instruction puts school in 99th percentile for growth

BY JEFNA M. COHEN

When Noline Martin became assistant principal at Thurgood Marshall Elementary, a pre-K-6 school in Richardson, Texas, in 2017, the school was working its way up from being declared a failing campus two years earlier. It had recently improved to a "met standard" rating, but Martin knew the school could do more to help its students. Her experience with the Learning Forward Academy led her to revamp the school's approach to literacy, and now the school's rank has risen to a B, according to the newer letter-based ranking system that began in 2019.

Thurgood Marshall is a diverse, Title I school with 514 students from 21 countries speaking 18 different languages. The campus is 98% economically disadvantaged, with 33% of students being English learners,

mainly from the Middle East and Africa. About a third of the students moves schools each year, making it a challenge to support student growth over the long term.

Martin was troubled by the fact that only 19% of the school's 3rd graders were reading on grade level. A statistic she had read had stuck with her: Kids who can't read in 3rd grade are much less likely to graduate from high school. She knew what that would mean for students like hers. "As an immigrant, I know what it is to have the American dream, and with those numbers, I knew a lot of these immigrant families weren't going to achieve it," she says. "I'm from a third-world country, and I've always been told education is the way out. I couldn't believe I was in America and kids couldn't read."

In 2018, Martin started looking for professional growth opportunities to enhance her ability to help her students, especially in literacy. "I knew there was a problem that I wanted to do something about, and I didn't have all the tools," she says.

When a colleague told her about the Learning Forward Academy, an intensive learning experience for midcareer professionals, she was immediately interested. It was not a small commitment, however. It required participation in a 2½-year program and

came with costs for tuition and travel.

Martin asked her principal for the time and coverage to take part in the Academy. The principal agreed but lacked the funding to support her financially. "I knew there was no money at the school to pay for it," she says, "but I was willing to do whatever I had to do to be part of it."

When Martin learned that the Learning Forward Foundation offers scholarships to the Academy, she applied. The foundation awarded her the Patsy Hochman Grant, which provided full tuition, "because of her innovative ideas, unstoppable attitude, and valuable contributions to the profession."

Soon after, an article in *The Learning Professional* noted her award, and this caught the attention of her district's office of professional learning. That led the district to pick up her airfare for the in-person convenings that are essential to the Academy experience. It also helped set the district on a path to improving student achievement through high-quality professional learning.

A CLEAR FOCUS ON LITERACY

At the core of Learning Forward's Academy is an individualized problem of practice. Each participant identifies and works through a problem of

practice they're encountering in their school, develops professional learning solutions to address it, and learns to assess the impact of those solutions. Martin immediately identified literacy as her area of focus.

She decided to tackle literacy by building the capacity of teachers in grades K-2. She had noticed more attention being paid to grades 3-6, and she believed that the problems in the upper grades stem from the foundational years of early elementary school. "Whatever happens in kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade … we see the fruits in 3rd grade. And if there are things that should happen that didn't happen, then we're playing a lot of catch-up in 3rd grade. [So] my problem of practice was to increase the percentage of students who are proficient readers by the time they end 3rd grade."

Martin's work to improve her school's literacy approaches began with using Learning Forward's Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI). The SAI is an anonymous, web-based assessment that measures whether a school or district is implementing the content, processes, and conditions for professional learning in ways that lead to high impact. (To learn more about the SAI, see pp. 18-20.)

She administered the assessment

Noline Martin reads to 3rd graders at Thurgood Marshall Elementary in Richardson, Texas. Martin made literacy her area of focus at the Learning Forward Academy. Photo by Joel Reynolds

tool to 26 classroom teachers in kindergarten to 6th grade and analyzed the results, using Learning Forward's online platform. Martin considers the opportunity to learn about and use the SAI one of the most beneficial things about the Academy. "I was able to get a real feel for what teachers knew about professional learning and what they thought about it," she says.

She and her principal examined the SAI results, which included teacher and student data as well as teacher interest. The learning designs section of the SAI revealed that teachers wanted to learn more from each other, and they also wanted to be able to choose some of their professional learning sessions based on personal growth goals. The two then formulated a professional learning plan.

CONFERENCE-STYLE LEARNING

The redesigned professional learning plan started with a conference-style model with a mix of choice and required breakout sessions to kick off the 2021-22 school year.

During the conference, Martin and her principal ran concurrent sessions that teachers selected based on their interests and needs. The sessions included content across the curriculum, as well as technology options and even a session on oral language for English learners.

Some sessions were required for teachers, tailored to teachers' experience levels, or based on teacher observation data. For example, new teachers attended sessions on model lessons and time management, while sessions for experienced teachers focused on honing their craft, such as writing across the curriculum or higher-order thinking skills.

Professional learning is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor, and Martin understands that teachers in different career stages are working on different aspects of their practice. The conference format is one way to meet this variety of needs, and it's now how they implement professional learning at least twice annually on that campus.

Based on her learning in the Academy, Martin and her principal built on the conference with professional learning throughout the school year. For example, inspired by her own experience discussing professional learning readings and resources with other Academy members, Martin started a book study with the K-3 teachers to develop professional learning communities (PLCs) in her school. After that, she set up a literacy PLC on a nine-week cycle.

With this format, teachers can test strategies and materials right away to see if something works. "I just love the fact that people's doors aren't closed and they're talking," she says of the PLCs. Next, Martin will work with grade 4-6 teachers to develop their own book study.

Martin also organized a vertical PLC, creating time for teachers across the grades to look at reading data together, analyze it, discuss patterns, look for problem spots, and identify changes in practice to try.

Throughout, Martin has led data collection and analysis efforts, both to assess impact and determine next steps. "Going through the [Academy] process at Learning Forward taught me a lot about data," she says. "I don't just look at quantitative data. I also look at qualitative data. I look at teacher data,

ABOUT THE LEARNING FORWARD FOUNDATION

The Learning Forward Foundation raises funds for awarding grants and scholarships for educators who desire to gain knowledge and skills in professional learning to lead change actions that result in equity and excellence in teaching and learning. Learn more about the Foundation at **foundation.learningforward.org/**

I look at student data, I look at feelings and aspirations. I look at all of those things." And she's teaching her teachers to do the same.

After examining the data, Martin asks her teachers, "So what can we do collectively as readers, reading teachers, and lead learners to attack this particular problem?" She says this has led to important shifts in practice. "There's so much power when a 1st-grade teacher can talk to a 5th-grade teacher," she says.

SCHOOL RATING IMPROVES

Less than three years later, Martin is already seeing the results of her work, not just in her day-to-day interactions, but in the data. Last year, Thurgood Marshall earned a B rating, up from a C rating in 2019. "When I say a B, I mean a high B. We got an 87," Martin says. This kind of progress is possible only with staff-wide buy-in, and the victory belongs to everyone. "That score made the kids so excited. We had a big celebration when we came back to school. The kids were saying, 'Ms. Martin, we just need three more points (to get to an A rating)!' "

Additionally, once the school returned to in-person learning after the pandemic necessitated a shift to remote learning, it began a new practice of student goal-setting. For the last two years in a row, over 83% of Thurgood Marshall's 3rd graders met or exceeded the school's growth goals in reading, which puts the school in the 99th percentile ranking for growth

by Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) grade-level norms.

This means students know where they are, estimate their progress, and set their own goals they know will require work but are also attainable. Thurgood Marshall uses NWEA's Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) Reading to measure a student's academic growth and proficiency three times each year. They gather the baseline in September, monitor progress in January, and do the final assessment in May of each year.

School culture has changed, too. One day, two 2nd-graders ran up to Martin in the hallway, proudly boasting about their reading level progress. They told her she *had* to come listen to them read. "Those are the kind of things that never used to happen that are happening now," Martin says, adding, "My No. 1 goal is to get kids into reading, and I'm starting to see the fruits of it."

In the past, Martin wanted to do a schoolwide reading challenge but didn't feel there were enough kids who were excited about reading to make it successful. Now, she says, she feels confident the school can do the challenge next year.

The school's turnaround has earned some local notice, and other teachers and administrators have come to tour the building to see what's going on.

'I'M STILL LEARNING'

Martin says she is grateful for her work with Learning Forward. "All the different protocols and systems I am

learning, I am able to use. That's really good professional development. I use them every day. I'm applying the tools to my problem of practice, and I'm sharing that with my staff. These are invaluable experiences that I'm having."

Martin says one of the most important things she has learned in the Academy is the real meaning of effective professional learning. It "has to be continuous, it has to be measured, and it has to be evaluated to make sure you're getting the result you are looking for," she says. "It should take place *during* the school day. Just because someone went to a professional learning session doesn't mean they know it or how to implement it. At 4 o'clock, when you're tired and you've had a rough day, you're just sitting there to comply."

Martin and her Academy cohort will graduate this December at Learning Forward's Annual Conference near Washington, D.C. They will be the 30th class to graduate and spread their knowledge to schools, districts, states, and provinces in the U.S., Canada, and beyond. While Martin is sad about the experience ending, she knows her learning will be ongoing. "As long as I'm around, I'm going to be a member of Learning Forward because this is the best PD I've *ever* gotten. And I'm still learning."

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Professional learning vs. PD:
THE DISTINCTION MATTERS

BY JANICE BRADLEY, CORI GROTH, ANDREA RORRER, AND LESLIE EVANS

For most professional learning facilitators, this is a familiar scenario: A district invites us to present during a back-to-school professional development day, assigning us to a breakout session slot following a general session keynote address. We work with the educators for a short time — maybe 45 minutes, maybe three hours — and then we never see them again. We hope we've made a difference, but we have no way to know for sure.

When this scenario occurs, we recognize that the district's request is well-intentioned and that educators value the support. But research and experience tell us that these kinds of professional development activities rarely result in desired shifts in educational practice and increases in student achievement because they are disconnected from educators' day-to-day work and do not provide ways for participants to integrate what they learn into ongoing practice.

Part of the reason many districts fail

to achieve the promise of high-quality professional learning is that they operate with what we call a "PD mindset." This mindset manifests in sporadic, one-time events, inservice sessions, guest speakers, webinars, and workshops that are not part of a larger plan or vision.

Typically, even when they are grounded in research, these activities do not align with school goals, promote educator voice and agency, encourage learning in community, or respond effectively to students' and teachers' needs. Ultimately, a PD mindset attempts a quick fix or offers a small dose of content that is not sufficient to stimulate a change in thinking or practice or address systemic issues.

As university partners who collaborate with school districts, we believe that education leaders and learning designers need to shift from this *PD mindset* to a *professional learning mindset*, in which professional learning and growth are centered around accelerating personal and collective learning and closing the knowing-doing gap for leaders and teachers. We draw on the work of scholars, researchers, and practitioners who promote evidence-based professional learning practices as described in Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022).

Shifting mindsets requires reframing the purpose for professional learning and educator support. In part, this shift will include moving from *delivering information* to intentionally *co-designing, with educators, learning and growth opportunities* that are grounded in the evidence about what is most needed and most effective.

HOW ONE SCHOOL SHIFTED TO A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MINDSET

Student achievement at Riverglen Elementary (a pseudonym) was in the bottom 10% of the state. When none of the 5th-grade students achieved proficiency in writing on the state assessment, school leaders knew they needed to do something differently.

They recognized that improving student writing proficiency meant setting shared goals and building teachers' instructional capacity vertically in grades K-5. In August, the literacy coach, with principal support, introduced the faculty to several research-based writing strategies.

However, in January, students' writing scores hadn't increased. School leaders realized that teachers were not consistently implementing the new strategies, so they reached out to our university-based center for help with implementation.

We worked with Riverglen leaders to use a professional learning approach grounded in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. In this process, teachers and school leaders developed a shared vision for how they would collaborate in professional learning communities, planned collaboratively for implementation of the writing strategies supported by coaching, engaged in ongoing feedback cycles, participated in lab class learning designs, and used student learning data to ensure effective implementation and continuous improvement of instructional practices.

Three years later, teachers were implementing the strategies more effectively, and an impressive 83% of 5th graders were proficient in writing. The principal attributed students' success to leaders and teachers developing a professional learning mindset and understanding how the standards could be enacted to result in student learning gains.

To make the shift in mindsets, school and district leaders must reconsider how their school vision aligns professional learning with student achievement goals, be clear about their "why," and engage in critical self-reflection about how their own experiences with professional learning influence current practices.

They must commit to building their own skills, knowledge, and awareness of the components and qualities of effective professional learning so they can foster this growth in others. And finally, they must consider how evidence is used to track implementation and outcomes.

In our work with districts, we have seen that when school and district leaders make the shift in mindset from

PD to professional learning, they create and facilitate more effective learning designs, and professional learning becomes more aligned and coherent. The content becomes more relevant, job-embedded, and responsive to students' and schools' immediate needs.

Teachers have more regular opportunities to diagnose and respond to student learning needs through approaches like lab classrooms and coaching. Educators begin collaborating to create a shared vision, construct detailed implementation maps, and co-design professional learning plans and feedback systems to monitor their progress.

Ultimately, they make changes to their instructional practices that improve

COMPARISON OF A PD MINDSET TO A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MINDSET	
Ineffective approach designed with a PD mindset	**Effective approach designed with a professional learning mindset**
Leaders attend a workshop for one full day, listen to a presenter tell them about the standards, read the standards in groups, identify and connect the key ideas, then consider how the standards can be applied in their context. Leaders are encouraged to continue reading the standards and related resources on their own after the workshop.	Leaders attend four two-hour sessions with a team of colleagues and a facilitator focused on engaging in the foundation for standards as a pathway to student improvement, deepening knowledge about each standard and how the standards are interconnected, applying the standards to each context, and reflecting on enactment of the standards in context. Facilitators use interactive study with expectations for including each person, foster collaborative inquiry, facilitate creation of journey maps for implementation, and lead group reflection. They also collect data on leaders' engagement and understanding and later reflect on the facilitation moves they used. Leaders' learning is sustained through follow-up sessions for cohorts of learners, check-ins, and repeat series for new cohorts with facilitators from previous sessions.

and accelerate student learning. (See sidebar on p. 57 for an example of how one school we worked with made the shift from PD to professional learning.)

HOW TO MAKE THE SHIFT

Shifting from a PD mindset to a professional learning mindset takes an intentional systems approach, where those designing professional learning must consider that the "whole is more than just the sum of its parts" (Koffka, 1963).

Such an approach should draw on the well-established characteristics of effective professional learning, such as having sustained, ongoing structures for collaboration, coaching, and feedback with opportunities for active engagement to learn about specific instructional strategies or curriculum (e.g., Archibald et al., 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Garet et al., 2001).

Recent research shows that professional learning aligned with these characteristics and other elements of Standards for Professional Learning is associated with improved teacher instruction, leading to increased student

achievement (Foster, 2022; Learning Forward, 2022, Garrett et al., 2021; Labone & Long, 2016; LeFevre et al., 2019).

Standards for Professional Learning provide a framework for shifting from a PD mindset to a professional learning mindset by emphasizing interrelationships among the conditions, processes, and content rather than seeing professional learning as a series of stand-alone, isolated activities.

To understand and apply the standards, leaders at the state, district, and school levels must *experience them*, not just intellectualize or listen to others talk about them. They must have opportunities to engage in meaningful professional learning that embodies and models the standards. To illustrate what this does and doesn't look like, the table above compares two professional learning designs for examining the standards — one effective and one ineffective.

Shifting from a PD mindset to a professional learning mindset takes time, intentionality, and an investment

in learning. We recommend that leaders aiming to facilitate this shift focus on the following components:

- Establish a shared vision of professional learning;
- Review evidence of current professional learning approaches;
- Identify a compelling "why" for professional learning;
- Develop self-awareness about professional learning experiences and perceptions;
- Examine knowledge about high-quality professional learning, including Standards for Professional Learning;
- Cultivate skills in facilitating standards-aligned professional learning;
- Identify active learning processes to engage adult learners; and
- Encourage language that focuses on learning and improvement and discourage language about training and workshops.

The table on p. 59 explores each of these components, including questions to pose and actions to take.

HOW TO SHIFT FROM A PD MINDSET TO A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MINDSET		
Ideas to consider	**Questions to ask**	**Actions to take**
Vision	• What is our current vision for ongoing teacher learning to support and accelerate student improvement goals?	Examine the district's or school's vision for student achievement and the degree to which it is aligned with the professional learning plan.
Evidence	• Is the current professional learning plan resulting in changes in leadership and teaching practices and ultimately increased student achievement?	Collect and analyze current evidence about implementation of the professional learning plan (e.g., student achievement data, exit tickets, surveys, observations).
Compelling why	• Why shift to a professional learning mindset?	Begin conversations about the potential benefits of shifting to a professional learning mindset (e.g., use a sentence starter, "We need to shift to a professional learning mindset because …").
Self-awareness	• Have I ever experienced meaningful professional learning?	Take time to reflect using a five-minute write. List the positive experiences you've had with professional learning and how it changed your practice. Write a sentence or two about your current understanding about the difference between PD and professional learning.
Knowledge	• Do I know the difference between professional development and professional learning? • Do I understand Standards for Professional Learning? • Do I know how adults learn?	Study Standards for Professional Learning, using an approach similar to the one described in the table on p. 58. Engage in conversations about adult learning theories and what you know about them (e.g., andragogy, self-direction, experiential learning, reflection).
Skill	• Do I know how Standards for Professional Learning are operationalized? • Do I know the difference between facilitating and presenting?	Identify and reflect on how you enact the standards (e.g., by using the Learning Forward Standards Action Guides with Innovation Configuration maps). Compare how you present and how you facilitate. Explore how you know when to do one or the other to support adult learning.
Congruency	• Do I recognize when professional learning experiences are designed and facilitated using active learning processes for adults and not just using a presenter "transmission" model?	At your next professional learning session, notice trends in adult engagement, such as how much time the participants talk compared with the facilitator.
Language use	• Do I use vocabulary associated with professional development or professional learning?	Listen for words that indicate a PD or professional learning mindset. • PD: training, workshop, guest speaker, famous name without a link to what will be learned. • Professional learning: outcomes, implementation, data, support for follow-up, experience, facilitation, equity, and standards.

'ARE WE DOING IT RIGHT?'
Tool guides curriculum implementation

BY KIRAN PUROHIT, JENNIFER KIM, LIZ RAMIREZ, JENNIFER WILSON, AND MAX RAY-RIEK

In New York City, as in many education systems, Algebra 1 is a gatekeeper course: Success in Algebra 1 helps students place out of remedial co-requisite courses if they enroll in the City University system, which includes almost half of students who attend high school in New York City. In spite of its importance, college readiness rates in math hover around 50% in New York City schools, effectively blocking students from higher-level math courses and college math.

Recognizing this pattern, New Visions for Public Schools is in the third year of supporting a network of 18 New York City public schools to address uneven student success in Algebra 1. One of the ways New Visions is helping schools achieve greater equity in algebra is by supporting them to use a shared curriculum. Implementing a high-quality curriculum is a key tenet of frameworks for curriculum-based professional learning that aim to improve all students' access to rigorous and meaningful learning (Chu et al., 2022; Hirsh & Short, 2022).

All schools in our network have opportunities to learn about and engage in coaching on the Illustrative

USE OF MATH LANGUAGE ROUTINES			
Awareness	**Experimenting**	**Implementing**	**Integrating**
The teacher attempts the math language routine, but deviates from the intended structure or focus on language.	The teacher uses the math language routine to advance language development, but makes modifications that impact access, reduce rigor, or are inconsistent with the goal and design.	The teacher facilitates a math language routine to advance language development consistent with the goal and design. The teacher may adapt the math language routine in response to students' evolving competencies and stage of language development while maintaining access to grade-level mathematics.	The teacher facilitates a math language routine to advance language development consistent with the goal and design. The teacher adapts the math language routine in response to students' evolving competencies and stage of language development while maintaining access to grade-level mathematics. The teacher creatively and strategically embeds relevant math language routines into the lesson at the right time.

Source: Danks et al., 2021.

Mathematics Algebra 1 curriculum — a course that is available for free online, with resources for K-12 instruction. We find that a shared curriculum facilitates conversations among teachers about lessons, math problems, and instructional routines.

But how do we know the shared curriculum is making a change and leading to improvement? In the early months and years of enacting a new curriculum, teacher practice will be uneven, and school leaders may be uncertain if instruction is improving. In fact, school leaders who don't have experience teaching similar curricula might not recognize that poorly paced or otherwise messy implementation could be a sign that a teacher is right where they need to be in the early years of using a new curriculum.

To help leaders understand how the stages of implementation typically look and where their teachers are on that continuum, our network uses the Illustrative Mathematics Implementation

Reflection Tool (Danks et al., 2021), a nonevaluative resource to guide classroom observations, reflection, and feedback about implementation. The tool supports educators across roles — including teachers, coaches, school leaders, and district staff — in navigating the predictable twists and turns of curriculum adoption and early implementation.

LEARNING WALK OBSERVATIONS

Imagine a learning walk in a small high school in New York City. Learning walks are a regular component of many professional learning communities, a structured way for a school's staff and sometimes external partners to visit classrooms and get a sense of how instruction looks and feels. Rarely evaluative in nature, learning walks are intended to surface shared understandings of the nature of instructional practice.

The learning walk we are imagining involves visits to the classrooms of teachers in a 9th-grade team that has

been working to adopt Illustrative Mathematics as its Algebra 1 curriculum. The team participated in professional learning during the summer, and it meets on a weekly basis to plan lessons and sometimes look at student work together.

As the learning walk team visits classrooms, focusing on Algebra 1 instruction, team members observe some notable differences from classroom to classroom:

- In the first classroom, the Algebra 1 teacher is familiar with the usefulness of math language routines to support multilingual learners. She enacts one such routine thoughtfully, but the pacing is quite different from the lesson plan: Rather than the 10 minutes recommended in the curriculum materials, the routine takes 45 minutes, and the teacher omits other components of the lesson.
- In the second classroom, the teacher uses all of the activities

USE OF DESIGN STRUCTURE			
Awareness	**Experimenting**	**Implementing**	**Integrating**
The teacher replaces or modifies activities, such as the warm-up, in a way that reduces rigor or deviates from the lesson learning goals. The teacher uses the key components of the lesson with an approach that centers teacher over student thinking (e.g., "I do, we do, you do" direct instruction).	The teacher modifies the lesson by skipping key components (e.g., the activity launches, activity syntheses, or the lesson synthesis), and prevents students from meeting the lesson learning goals. The teacher fluctuates between centering teacher and student thinking (e.g., direct instruction to problem-based instruction and back).	The teacher uses all of the key components of Illustrative Mathematics' problem-based design structure and approach. The teacher may make accommodations to ensure students meet the lesson learning goals.	The teacher orchestrates all of the key components of Illustrative Mathematics' problem-based design structure and approach, ensuring that all students have access and student thinking drives learning.

Source: Danks et al., 2021.

provided in the curriculum materials but does not apply the intended problem-based lesson structure, in which students collaborate to make sense of mathematics. Instead, he writes all of the problems on the board, and students take turns coming up to explain their solutions. There is little student-to-student discourse.

- In the third classroom, the teacher follows the pacing and problems in the instructional materials but skips the closing synthesis activity, the phase in which students' thinking comes together and the teacher facilitates a summary of the main points of the lesson. Instead, the teacher provides students with a set of questions pulled from prior-year state tests. Students complete the items as independent practice and to demonstrate their understanding.

In all of these classrooms, teachers are clearly attempting to use the resources in their new curriculum, but they are doing so incompletely and in varying ways. Imagine being part of the leadership team at this school or in the role of a coach serving several schools like this one. What are the most important points to surface for this team as you think about feedback or next steps?

When thoughtful, ambitious leaders and supervisors visit a set of classrooms like these, they tend to focus on the following areas of feedback:

- Misalignment with the written curriculum: Observers may point out the ways in which instruction diverged from the lesson plans, thinking that deviations such as taking 45 minutes for a math language routine are problematic, no matter why the teacher made that choice.
- Classroom management: Observers often praise teachers for filling the whole period with instruction, believing this is a defining feature of strong instruction, even if it diverges from the expectations in the instructional materials.
- Test readiness: Observers concerned with demonstrating progress on an upcoming state test may be reassured to see students completing items from prior-year exams, even if it means the teacher skipped an essential activity from the instructional materials.

These typical focus areas reflect a lack of clarity on where to begin with implementing a new curriculum. Leaders do not always have the background to recognize what is most important when observing teachers' early-stage practices, especially if they are not familiar with the content area — in this case, math.

They need a way to develop a clear understanding of how to respond in a *content-specific, course-specific* way, to lead shifts in instruction. Improvement in mathematics requires not just feedback on "readily observable aspects of instruction" but feedback on lesson-specific and content-specific pedagogy (Cobb et al., 2018, pp. 182-183).

GAINING CLARITY

In our network, we find that the Implementation Reflection Tool helps provide the needed clarity on where to begin. The tool has three sections, each of which focuses on implementation at a different level — school, team, and classroom. Each of these sections has a progression of practice — a set of levels from beginning to advanced, with descriptions of practice at each level, for multiple different aspects of curriculum use. The levels of practice move from left to right, with the ideal level of implementation on the right.

For our Algebra 1 learning walk scenario, we will focus on the progression of practice in classroom implementation. One of the indicators in this section is implementation of math language routines. Based on the

progression of practice for this indicator (see the table on p. 61), the teacher who spent 45 minutes on math language routines is clearly demonstrating awareness.

An administrator using this tool would probably feel a sense of relief upon seeing the exact situation we observed described as a valid initial stage in the teacher's practice. The administrator can also use the progression of practice to guide additional support for the teacher. As a next step, it would be helpful for a coach to work with the teacher on facilitating the routine more efficiently to ensure consistency with the goal and design.

As the teacher's implementation gets stronger, she could also benefit from learning to incorporate more understanding of students' language development, perhaps with the support of language teachers or interventionists in her building.

We can assess the practice of the other two teachers from the learning walk in a different progression of practice: use of Illustrative Mathematics' design structure. All Illustrative Mathematics lessons follow a common format that supports students' figuring out how to solve problems, then learning from one another's work. This design structure is novel to many teachers.

The second teacher in our learning walk is in the awareness phase with the design structure (see table on p. 62). He "replaces or modifies activities" in a way that is common for teachers starting out with the curriculum. Having students work out problems at the board undermines the collaborative work and problem-solving the lesson should foster.

However, since this mode of classroom instruction is familiar, the teacher may not recognize this as a misunderstanding of the instructional model, and he could therefore benefit from coaching on specific components of the problem-based lesson to move him along the progression of practice.

Finally, the third teacher from the learning walk is slightly further along in the same progression of practice. The instruction is at the experimenting level because the teacher "modifies the lesson by skipping key components" but does have some parts of the lesson that are squarely "centering student thinking." This teacher may benefit from seeing examples of strong lesson syntheses to better understand their value and move her along to the implementing and integrating stages.

SUPPORTING PRACTICE

In addition to observing and supporting individual teachers' classroom practice, the Implementation Reflection Tool can help leaders think about patterns and trends. In our experience, this is a game-changer because it helps those giving feedback and designing professional learning respond based on teachers' assets and strengths, with a view to a clear pathway ahead.

In the learning walk example, there are some clear patterns across classrooms. In the design structure table on p. 62, all three teachers are either in awareness or experimenting stages: using some of the key components of the curriculum materials, with varying degrees of integrity. To move to the next stages, all of the teachers would benefit from opportunities for shared sense-making about the learning goals for Illustrative Mathematics lessons and strategies for effective pacing. Moreover, they could collaborate and learn from one another's specific strengths, such as pacing, use of routines, and fostering discourse.

One school in our network is using the tool to look at patterns in the math language routines. School leaders have theorized that a focus on these routines will foster student discussions and lead to improvements in students' responses on constructed-response questions.

The math team and principal, along with the math coach, determined that the appropriate indicators of focus in the Implementation Reflection Tool should be the use of Illustrative Mathematics' design structure and math language routines and engaging students in meaningful small-group discussions.

When they looked at patterns across classrooms, they were able to see that, while teachers were moving from awareness to experimenting in small-group discussions, students needed more discussion opportunities. Based on this finding, the team's planning has shifted to include more math discussion opportunities and clarify department-wide expectations on math discussions. In this school example, using the Implementation Reflection Tool alongside an existing process for math team planning supported a focus on a high-leverage next step.

We also use the tool to look for patterns across the network. For example, following our first round of learning walk visits to classrooms, we noticed a pattern in the use of instructional routines, which are key features in the Illustrative Mathematics curriculum. While many teachers were enacting them, the instructional routines were taking up a large portion of the lessons. Routines designed to take up 10 minutes at the start of a lesson were dominating much of the class period.

Using the Implementation Reflection Tool, we recognized that this is a common misstep and identified ways to ensure that subsequent professional learning would focus on strategies for more effective pacing and lesson coherence. In this way, we used patterns we saw emerging across schools to shape the overall direction and strategies of the network.

MAKING THE MOST OF THE TOOL

The Implementation Reflection Tool is a powerful resource for learning, but it is important to consider the context and ways in which we use it. Teachers will only adopt tools like the Implementation Reflection Tool in the context of collaborative, trusting relationships because concerns about teacher self-efficacy can come into play.

Taking on a new curriculum makes even the most experienced teacher feel like a novice, and being designated at the awareness level on a

How do we cultivate resilience in an inequitable system?

BY SARAH YOUNG

As an instructional coach and leader, I would be wealthy if I had a dollar for each time I heard an educator describe physical and emotional exhaustion due to systemic breakdowns that have occurred since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Struggling

with staffing shortages and intensified student needs, educators need resilience practices (Young, 2022). Yet what does it mean to ask people to be resilient in a dehumanizing and inequitable system that doesn't provide them with adequate funding, resources, or respect? How do we balance self-care with demands for changes to the systems that

cause the stress in the first place?

Just as importantly, how do we ensure that the steps we take are equitable and honor the voices and perspectives of all educators, including those who have been historically marginalized? As a white leader in adult social and emotional learning (SEL) work, I've had to learn how to take

responsibility for bringing an antiracist lens to work that was once considered universal but was actually framed through a lens of whiteness.

Coaching can be a powerful process for grappling with these questions and taking steps to address them. To illustrate how, I've created a composite story about coaching with an urban high school principal. This story and reflections that follow are drawn from multiple coaching conversations I've had with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) leaders. As the story shows, there are no clear-cut answers for solving the crisis in educator stress and mental health, but we can make progress by recognizing and validating the challenges, supporting self-care, and identifying steps toward systems change, and doing so with an inclusive and culturally responsive lens.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE CHALLENGES

Late one afternoon, I sat down with Sheila Carson, an African American principal in an urban charter school serving mostly Black and Brown students in grades 9-12.

"How is it going this week, Sheila?" I asked.

"I've had it! I'm so tired, and I've had two migraines this week."

I listened, intent on staying open to what she had to say without trying to fix it.

She continued, "I thought the first year and a half of COVID was the worst thing ever, having to jump-start distance learning with no preparation and many of our families without even access to Wi-Fi. The second year, we came back in person, half my staff was out on a regular basis, and the students were not only behind academically, but they were socially regressed, traumatized even. Now, in year three, we've lost

There are no clear-cut answers for solving the crisis in educator stress and mental health, but we can make progress by recognizing and validating the challenges, supporting self-care, and identifying steps toward systems change, and doing so with an inclusive and culturally responsive lens.

staff at every level, and I'm not finding replacements."

Staffing was one of Carson's biggest stressors. Her school was short on math teachers and special ed teachers, and she said, "I have kids learning geometry on a multiple-choice computer program where no teachers interact with them at all." And it wasn't just teachers who were in short supply. Before the pandemic, the school had four mental health counselors, but now it was down to one. Some kids weren't making it to school because there weren't enough bus drivers. Making matters worse, Carson had no substitutes to call. "When staff are sick, I substitute myself and do my principal work at night," she said, adding, "I care about these kids so much, and I feel completely ineffective."

I took a deep breath to find my own stability and validated how hard this situation was. I knew that nurturing resilience could help reduce Carson's migraines and reduce the chance of her quitting at winter break, as was becoming increasingly common for highly stressed teachers and administrators in urban environments.

I flipped through my mental notes about cultivating resilience, drawing, in particular, on the work of Elena Aguilar: Resilient people foster joy,

purpose, and learning; listen deeply and are listened to; practice self-care; focus on sphere of influence and concern; and maintain strong community bonds (Aguilar, 2020). But how could I help her take steps in those directions without falling into shallow platitudes of what is sometimes known as toxic positivity (Psychology Today, 2022)?

I started by responding to her feelings. "Sheila, you say you feel ineffective. But the effectiveness gap is not in you. The gap is in the system. Your school wasn't adequately resourced before COVID, and now you have way fewer people serving students with greater economic, academic, and mental health needs than before." I paused and waited.

"Yes! I don't know how much more I could do even if I were to stop working altogether," Carson acknowledged.

"This is so much bigger than any one person can fix," I said. "It's an untenable situation, and it will take a lot of us working together to find channels for change. And I'd love to see you rested and pain-free before trying to extend your influence even further." I encouraged her to make some space for herself, even though it felt impossible.

RECOGNIZING THE ROLE OF SYSTEMS

At the same time, I wanted Carson to see the bigger picture. "We aren't the only ones having this conversation. There is a larger conversation taking place in the world of education, often led by BIPOC educators, about how to attend to self-care while still challenging a system that has been profoundly underresourced for a long time. Lack of adequate resources is amplified by our schools being served by a predominantly female workforce that is expected to have no personal

boundaries with time, energy, intelligence, and effort."

I pulled up an article entitled, "YES. Teachers don't need to be resilient; schools need to be more human" (Gorelik, 2022), which was inspired by a viral Twitter quote by educator Tracy Edwards: "Sat through a webinar on teacher resilience and was asked to share my thoughts. My answer: I don't want to be resilient. I want school systems designed with humans in mind that don't demand my resilience. I want educators to experience community, care, support, and compensation" (Edwards, 2022).

Gorelik agreed, writing: "What teachers need now, more than ever, is the feeling that their work matters, that who they are matters. The way to do that is to invest in teachers emotionally, physically, and professionally. We want to feel as critically important to the system as the students we are charged with teaching." She called for system leaders to take steps such as inviting and listening to teacher feedback, giving teachers time to rest and recover, and respecting educators for the professional capital they bring (Gorelick, 2022).

"Yes, that's right," Carson said. "Only, where will I find time to fight for adequate resources for my students and compensation for me? And who else can fight? My colleagues are as tired as I am. And now we have white families and financially resourced BIPOC families leaving our schools faster than before. Who's left with money and positional power to advocate?"

I had to think more about Carson's questions and my own role in all this. There was no question she needed rest and health to function, yet how to present it without making her the problem?

After our meeting, I emailed her the Gorelik article and wrote, "Let me know if any part of this helpful." She missed our next meeting, home with another migraine. I worried our

conversation had caused her more stress and she might return more discouraged. Instead, she was more animated.

"I really appreciated that article. I know it was written for teachers, but it applies to principals, too. Nobody is going to give me time to rest and recover. I just have to take it. So I spent a couple of days at home and unplugged, let my brand-new assistant principal take over, and crossed my fingers. He did good enough. I feel much better!"

Carson said she had also done some thinking about the systemic issues and had made phone calls to a few administrator friends. She homed in on the lack of substitutes and the fact that "in the wealthier district up the hill, they have way more subs because they pay them twice as much, and the subs think it's easier to work up there."

She and other principals from less-resourced schools decided they would go to the school board to demand the board seek outside funding to supplement substitute pay in the BIPOC schools. She said, "This is one of the wealthiest counties in the country. We can demand our board go to bat to get funders from the business world to step up. Everyone loves the word 'equity,' so here's a chance to do something about it."

Carson clearly felt empowered by the steps she and her colleagues had taken. She even felt better physically. "Since we wrote this set of demands about outside funding for substitutes, I haven't had a single headache," she said.

APPLYING AN EQUITY LENS

Carson showed me a draft of the principals' demands and asked what I thought. "I think it's brilliant," I said, impressed by the collective, equity-focused, concrete action plan. Yet there was something about the tone of the document that made me uneasy. I told her, "It sounds maybe … too demanding for this board. If you calm it down a little, you might better keep them with you, no?"

Carson leaned back in her chair and narrowed her eyes. "Really?" She drew out the word. "Are you really going to sit there and be one more white woman telling me my tone as a Black woman is too demanding or angry?"

Much as it pained me to be included in this behavior, I knew what she was referring to. My work with white colleagues allowed me to witness many examples of white people assuming BIPOC colleagues were angry instead of considering first if they were speaking with passion and emphasis about issues that affected them deeply. I could see white fragility in everyone — except myself.

I paused, reminded myself that it's OK to be uncomfortable, and grappled with my reaction. I wanted Carson and her colleagues to be successful, and I knew how defensive the members of this predominantly white school board could be, especially when they perceived the request to be angry and not honoring their intentions as the obvious "good guys." My instinct was to advise her to use the ways of being and expressing emotion that I had been raised with. Upon reflection, though, I asked myself, "What makes you think you know the best form of expression for a group of BIPOC educators?"

As a white leader in SEL work, I used to promote the need for leaders and teachers to self-monitor and regulate emotion to help cultivate resilience among adults, as we asked teachers to do for students. My intention was to support educators to have choice about reactivity, reduce stress, and model the same skills for students. However, by doing so with a "color-evasive" lens (K. Walters, personal communication, October 10, 2022), my words sometimes had the impact of dismissing legitimate anger or frustration and silencing displays of powerful emotion.

As I reflected on Carson's challenge to me, I thought about a powerful quote from a colleague and thought partner, Kimberly Walters, who had responded to a previous article of mine

on adult SEL: "The Black and Latinx communities navigate through our lives with a multitude of emotions, which can range from fear and anxiety to anguish and anger as a result of the injustices we experience economically, medically, educationally, criminally, and in many other areas of life. We are conditioned to manage these feelings in order to effectively function in society. These emotions are critical in order to fuel us to speak truth to power as we advocate for equity while causing 'good trouble.' We boldly acknowledge them and wear them as a badge of honor, not as a sign of weakness, but as a sign of perseverance and strength" (K. Walters, personal communication, October 20, 2022).

Carson shared a similar sentiment. "Why can't our righteous anger or our passion be part of our collective resilience?" she asked.

She was right, I realized. It's not her job to take the passion and righteous anger out of the message. And it is my job to advocate with other white people in power, like the school board, for the message to be heard and not be discredited or dismissed because of tone. With a clearer view of my role, I realized I needed to ask Carson how best to support her and her colleagues — and then get to work doing that.

ENGAGING WITH THE HARD QUESTIONS

The project to find funding for substitutes is still a work in progress in Carson's district and in many hard-hit urban areas where massive staffing shortages continue to undermine morale and effectiveness and show no signs of obvious solution. This systemic issue exacerbated by the pandemic continues to lift up real dilemmas where highlighting resilience as a primary strategy can serve to enable systemic injustices.

As I continue to revise my own understanding of resilience, I believe we all have work to do as individuals and as leaders to recognize that resilience is not merely about individuals bounding back from adversity. It is about all of us learning from adversity and moving forward collectively to change unjust systems and untenable situations. And that work demands respect for diversity of voice and expression that is not defined by one particular cultural norm.

Educators like Sheila Carson need self-care *and* support *and* systemic change. It's not an either/or situation but a both/and. We need to be able to soothe the assault of constant stress on our nervous systems, while not denying or becoming complacent about the conditions causing that stress. Coaches and other learning professionals need

to continue the conversation and find resilience practices that uphold us personally and also allow us to join in collective resilience as a force for change. And we all need to speak out and advocate so that those outside of education — policymakers, parents, community members, and others — support efforts to ensure that all educators can thrive in conditions that do not demand extraordinary resilience.

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Professional learning vs. PD: The distinction matters

FOSTER CULTURES OF LEARNING

When leaders shift their mindsets from "professional development" or "PD" to "professional learning" and use Standards of Professional Learning as a guiding framework, they are better positioned to foster powerful professional cultures of learning.

As their own learning is accelerated, they are better equipped to support teacher capacity building, which is the first step toward cultivating a culture of practice where educators are actively engaged in and set the course for their own professional learning.

In this way, educators and leaders can make sustained changes in practice that have meaningful impacts on their students' learning and lives.

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'Are we doing it right?' Tool guides curriculum implementation

curriculum tool could be demoralizing. A collaborative culture and an assets-based, nonevaluative approach to using the tool are essential.

In addition, we recognize that data collection can become burdensome. We have addressed it by weaving data collection into meaningful and fulfilling events like learning walks. We also allow teacher teams to opt into learning walks rather than making them a requirement of the network.

With strategies like these in place, we are hopeful about the potential for tools like the Implementation Reflection Tool to support and accelerate learning about instruction in classrooms, schools, and networks of schools.

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TOOLS
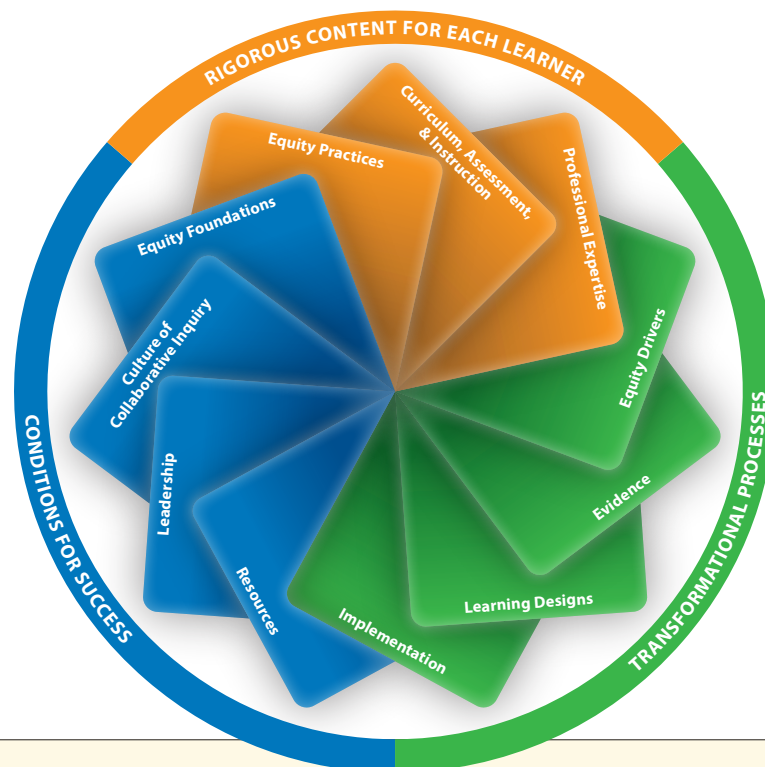
STANDARDS VIGNETTE:
ACHIEVING THE FULL BENEFIT OF NEW CURRICULUM

BY LEARNING FORWARD

To illustrate how Standards for Professional Learning can guide educators in navigating their challenges, Learning Forward created a set of fictional case vignettes that draw on real experiences. The vignettes show educators in varied roles and settings as they apply professional learning to problems of practice. The following narrative homes in on high-quality curriculum and the vital role of professional learning in building educators' capacity to implement it. Prompts for reflection and discussion are included to assist with applying the lessons to other contexts and situations. This vignette can be used alone or in combination with the vignette published in the February 2023 issue of *The Learning Professional*, which focused on equity-centered leadership, or other vignettes available at **standards.learningforward.org**.

Suggestions for use

1. Read the following vignette, using the prompts that follow to track notes, insights, and questions for subsequent conversations.

2. Note or highlight where you see direct or indirect evidence of Standards for Professional Learning throughout the narrative. While themes from Culture of Collaborative Inquiry, Equity Practices, and Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction standards are prominent, aspects of most standards are present to depict a systems approach to implementing high-quality professional learning.

3. Use the notes and insights to inform a team discussion or individual reflection to lead to deeper understanding and shared actions.

IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGE

The science team at Eastside High School is focused on strengthening its capacity to use its new science curriculum over the next year. The science chair, David Morales, and the teachers on his team are concerned about the evidence that the school's students aren't consistently experiencing the quality of teaching they deserve or that the curriculum could yield.

A couple of years earlier, the district had identified sharp declines in enrollment in higher-level science classes, particularly among Black and Latinx students. Several recent graduates enrolled in demanding college courses acknowledged that they weren't prepared for them. To address this challenge, the district adopted the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). District leaders followed up with the purchase of new NGSS-aligned high-quality curriculum and instructional materials. End-of-year surveys revealed that the teachers at Eastside High recognized that, after the initial training, district leaders had an expectation for immediate improved results for students without allocating sufficient time for teachers to shift instruction or practices aligned to the high-quality materials. NGSS-aligned teaching requires teachers to facilitate student experimentation and application more than providing direct instruction. This shift requires dedicated learning time for teachers to build skills, practices, and confidence levels.

While Morales is convinced that the new curriculum materials will help students make great gains in learning, he recognizes that his whole team needs meaningful and sustained professional learning to make the shifts in instruction the materials demand. His principal, Maria Fresno, agrees and serves as a thought partner and resource provider. Fresno is part of the district's

professional learning leadership network, which uses Standards for Professional Learning to guide the work they do districtwide. She brings the resulting knowledge and tools back to the school's leadership team to inform how to transform professional learning. Members of the leadership team use specialized implementation tools (Innovation Configuration maps) to get on the same page in terms of language, goals for improvement, and specific actions to take.

COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL LEARNING NEEDS

As Morales brings ideas and plans to the science team, he engages his colleagues in ongoing conversation about their best next actions. He stresses that knowing and using the new curriculum well is the top priority if their goal is to ensure each student has access to rigorous, grade-level learning. The educators agree to study the whole curriculum as well as their upcoming units in depth in teams, both to build their knowledge and skills and to map out their learning goals for the short and long term. Morales also helps the team recognize that its collaborative study of materials will ultimately save time as the team collectively deepens its expertise and builds a toolbox of strategies and lessons.

Among the teachers, the experience levels vary widely, with one team member fresh out of college and Morales with more than 25 years of experience. Their learning needs are diverse.

While studying the instructional materials, Clara Ortiz-Westin, the team's newest teacher, recognizes her need to go back to the Next Generation Science Standards to bolster her understanding of several key concepts in the physical sciences. Her teammate, Jayne Evans, invites Ortiz-Weston to

her class for an upcoming lesson that Evans believes demonstrates strategies for addressing misconceptions. Fran Maddox, also a long-time educator, commits to contacting the science chair at Long High School, another school in the district that has seen success with the same instructional materials. Based on her conversation with the science chair at Long, Maddox offers suggestions about designing the science team's learning in ways that mirror the learning the students will do as they use the materials. For example, in teams, the teachers study specific lessons and talk about scientific phenomena in the ways they will facilitate students to do. Principal Fresno, who occasionally participates in the team meetings, underscores the importance of every educator experiencing the curriculum as a student would.

ESTABLISHING A RHYTHM FOR IMPROVEMENT

As a team, the teachers agree they find great value in unpacking the content of their instructional materials in collaboration and identifying instructional strategies that meet the varied needs of their students. Morales reminds the team that the student learning goals represented throughout the standards and curriculum are the team's guideposts. In his own study of Standards for Professional Learning, he recognizes that educators set their learning goals based on student needs. Monitoring progress toward shared learning goals must be part of their work.

Six months later, the science faculty has made significant progress by establishing a rhythm of unit-specific team meetings, where teachers identify their learning needs and an agenda to meet them. Not only does each teacher have a more thorough understanding of the instructional materials, but teachers

have also developed, practiced, and modified a range of supplementary adaptations for the students who struggled to achieve grade-level mastery or for those who demonstrated mastery early on and benefited from extended learning options. Principal Fresno enlisted a district science subject specialist coach to join learning teams periodically to help examine data and suggest next steps for study. The coach also joins teachers in their classrooms to observe and debrief lessons.

The team meetings vary depending on what the educators need. They typically start with an analysis of evidence about student progress, including student work artifacts, quiz answers, or unit tests. As a team, the teachers make meaning from the data and discuss implications to help revise the unit, including assessments, continually seeking tight alignment between curriculum, assessment, and instruction. During some conversations, a teacher conducts a brief minilesson to showcase an instructional practice and answer questions. Other times, the teachers watch a video together of a model lesson or discuss a supplemental resource they've agreed to study to strengthen their own subject expertise. They always end by committing to their next agenda.

LOOKING AHEAD

As the year ends, Morales is pleased to see improvement overall, with evidence in every class of advances in student learning on teacher-developed assessments. He knows that in the following year, the team will commit more of its time to learning to use the curriculum.

Morales successfully advocates for an extension of team meeting time with the principal and also makes the case with the curriculum coordinator that a member of his team will serve on the district's instructional materials committee to inform the district's professional learning and implementation practices. ◼

PROMPTS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION:

• What critical school and district challenges are present?

• What strengths and improvement-oriented actions do you see in the vignette? Where do you see room for growth?

• Which Standards for Professional Learning do you see reflected? Note key phrases that represent the standards at work.

• What ideas, questions, or concerns does the vignette spark for your work in your context?

Standards for Professional Learning

Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators ...

EQUITY PRACTICES
... understand their students' historical, cultural, and societal contexts, embrace student assets through instruction, and foster relationships with students, families, and communities.

CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT, AND INSTRUCTION
... prioritize high-quality curriculum and instructional materials for students, assess student learning, and understand curriculum and implement through instruction.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE
... apply standards and research to their work, develop the expertise essential to their roles, and prioritize coherence and alignment in their learning.

RIGOROUS CONTENT FOR EACH LEARNER

Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators ...

EQUITY DRIVERS
... prioritize equity in professional learning practices, identify and address their own biases and beliefs, and collaborate with diverse colleagues.

EVIDENCE
... create expectations and build capacity for use of evidence, leverage evidence, data, and research from multiple sources to plan educator learning, and measure and report the impact of professional learning.

LEARNING DESIGNS
... set relevant and contextualized learning goals, ground their work in research and theories about learning, and implement evidence-based learning designs.

IMPLEMENTATION
... understand and apply research on change management, engage in feedback processes, and implement and sustain professional learning.

TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES

Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators ...

EQUITY FOUNDATIONS
... establish expectations for equity, create structures to ensure equitable access to learning, and sustain a culture of support for all staff.

CULTURE OF COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY
... engage in continuous improvement, build collaboration skills and capacity, and share responsibility for improving learning for all students.

LEADERSHIP
... 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.

RESOURCES
... allocate resources for professional learning, prioritize equity in their resource decisions, and monitor the use and impact of resource investments.

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS
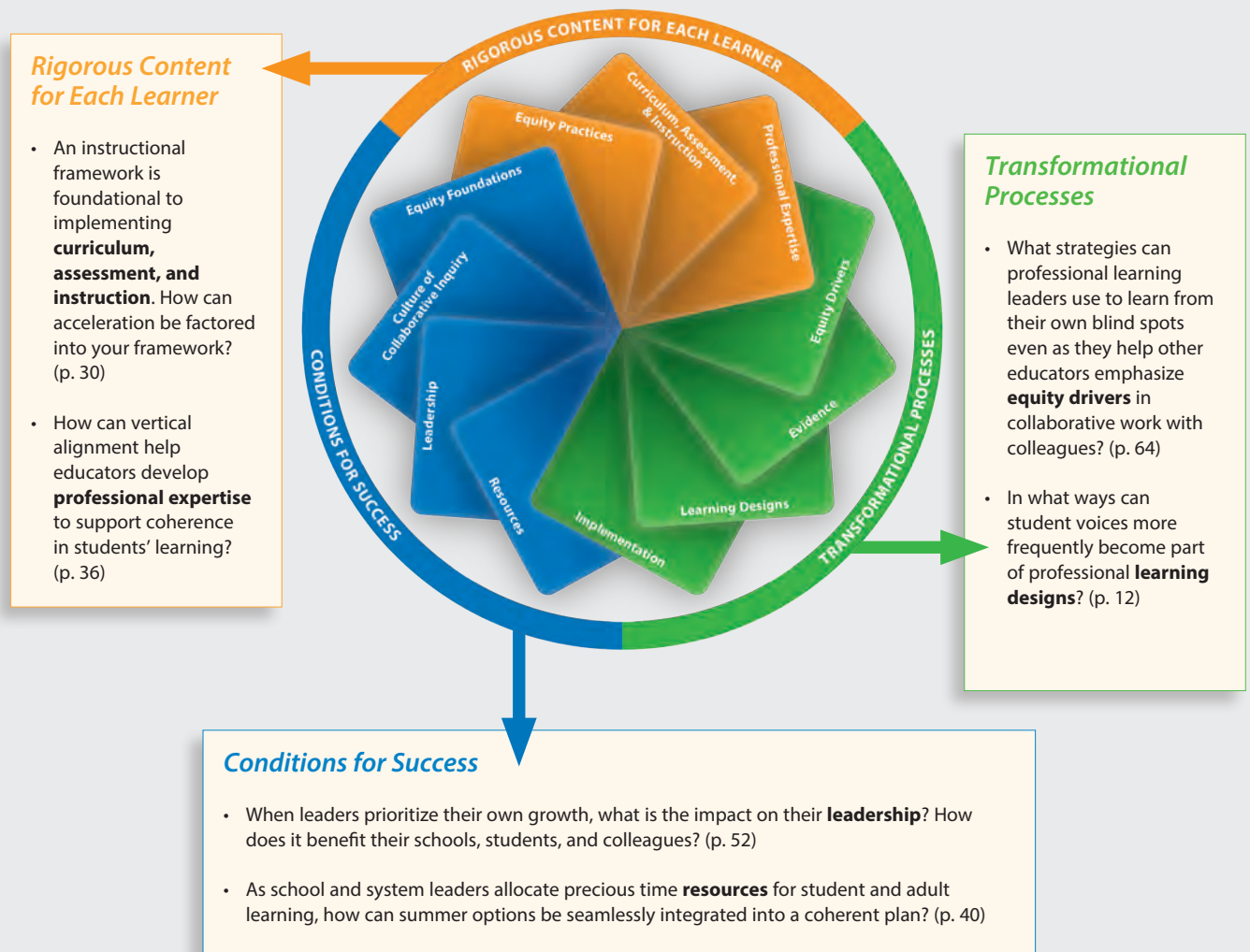

THROUGH THE LENS

OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Standards for Professional Learning describe the content, processes, and conditions of high-quality learning that makes a difference for students and educators. They are organized in a framework of three interconnected categories. Understanding each category and each standard can help learning leaders build systemic professional learning.

To help you deepen your understanding, this tool provides reflection questions that draw on articles from this issue of *The Learning Professional* and connect to standards from each category. You can use these questions to guide your reading of the articles or you can use them in conversations with colleagues — for example, during professional learning communities, observations, or planning discussions.

The page numbers after each question will take you to the article that corresponds to the question.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT STANDARDS TO ACCELERATE LEARNING

Rigorous Content for Each Learner

- An instructional framework is foundational to implementing **curriculum, assessment, and instruction**. How can acceleration be factored into your framework? (p. 30)

- How can vertical alignment help educators develop **professional expertise** to support coherence in students' learning? (p. 36)

Transformational Processes

- What strategies can professional learning leaders use to learn from their own blind spots even as they help other educators emphasize **equity drivers** in collaborative work with colleagues? (p. 64)

- In what ways can student voices more frequently become part of professional **learning designs**? (p. 12)

Conditions for Success

- When leaders prioritize their own growth, what is the impact on their **leadership**? How does it benefit their schools, students, and colleagues? (p. 52)

- As school and system leaders allocate precious time **resources** for student and adult learning, how can summer options be seamlessly integrated into a coherent plan? (p. 40)

AT A GLANCE

Learning acceleration at every level

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DISTRICT OFFICE

SETS THE VISION

SELECTS HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

IDENTIFIES KEY STANDARDS

DETERMINES SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

HOME

INFORMS AND ENGAGES FAMILIES

CONSIDERS THE WHOLE CHILD

SCHOOL

EXTENDED SCHOOL DAY

HIGH-DOSAGE TUTORING

LIBRARY

SUMMER SCHOOL

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES

Professional learning scheduled throughout the school year

CREATES TIME AND SPACE IN THE WORKDAY AND SCHOOL YEAR

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

METHODS
- Professional learning communities (PLCs)
- Coaching
- Learning walks

STANDARDS FRAMEWORK
Rigorous content for each learner

Transformational processes

Conditions for success

PRIORITIZES GRADE-LEVEL LEARNING

Accelerated learning requires the involvement of all education system levels, most importantly the classroom. Through ongoing professional learning, teachers can make grade-level instruction accessible to all students by providing learning support, classroom tools, and flexible student grouping for collaborative learning.

Professional learning for acceleration spans many aspects of teaching and learning, including:

- An understanding of formative assessment options and how to use them to determine what students know and need to know;
- How to analyze data to ensure all students are succeeding, not just certain groups;
- What it means to scaffold learning and offer effective just-in-time learning support;

- Collaboration with same-subject educators on best practices and vertical alignment of standards and skills across grades;
- Effective means for communicating and partnering with caregivers on learning acceleration; and
- Designing learning environments and promoting conditions that foster a sense of belonging so students can thrive and do their best work.