THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL
THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

Learning to pivot

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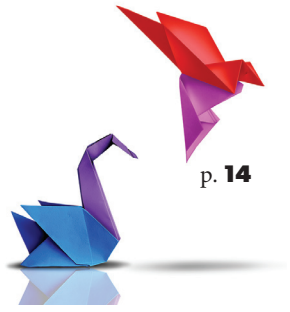

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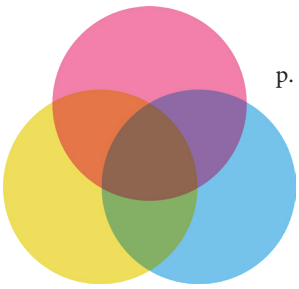

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UPDATES 81

I SAY

Richard Bransfield

Executive director of elementary education, Weymouth Public Schools, Massachusetts

"Literacy instruction today is vastly different from how those of us in leadership positions learned to teach reading. Sitting in professional development sessions alongside teachers in my district recently, I was able to see the challenges they faced in implementing the new curriculum, which demands more of students. And I was able to think about ways to help them. … Training leaders alongside teachers is somewhat uncommon. But it shouldn't be."

— Source: www.the74million.org/article/school-leaders-need-training-in-the-science-of-reading-just-like-teachers/

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Suzanne Bouffard

SUCCESS STORIES HIGHLIGHT HOW EDUCATORS CAN PIVOT

Pivoting in education takes investments in adults' learning and ongoing support to understand, initiate, evaluate, and recalibrate change strategies.

Whenever I hear the word "pivot," I think of a move that's common in many dance forms. You put your foot forward and push off of it to turn your body. A pivot can be a quarter turn or a half turn, but not a full turn. You end up facing a new direction, positioned to move toward a new location. Whether dancers or not, we all make metaphorical pivots from time to time — notable changes in direction that require putting a foot forward and ending up somewhere new. Often, we pivot because new information tells us that what we're doing isn't working or that there's a better way.

In education, that information can take the form of student data, new research on instructional practices, or intentional reflection on the outcomes of past efforts. The need to pivot can also come from changes in our environments. It's hard to think of a more significant pivot than the one necessitated by the physical and social changes wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A dancer's pivot is a basic step that's easy to execute; an educator's is not. In education, it takes investments in adults' learning to understand, initiate, evaluate, and recalibrate change strategies. That's why we have dedicated this issue of *The Learning Professional* to learning to pivot.

Articles look at the what, why, and how of many kinds of pivots, including adapting to the reality of AI in schools, restructuring summer programs, and rethinking approaches to reducing racial disparities in school discipline. A special section focuses on how professional learning is supporting schools to shift to science-based methods of reading instruction, one of schools' current highest-priority pivots. Around the U.S. and beyond, leaders are stressing the urgency of changes in literacy approaches based on alarming statistics about children's low reading skills.

In the U.S., nearly 40% of 4th graders scored below basic on the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2022). As a result, in recent years, 34 states and the District of Columbia have passed policies or regulations requiring that teachers engage in professional learning about the science of reading. (For more information, see p. 85.)

Those policies are encouraging, but to make real change, they must ensure that professional learning is high-quality and aligned to Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022). A one-time workshop or a boxed curriculum without ongoing support is not going to lead to improvements for students, as authors in this issue of *The Learning Professional* know. They describe how their schools, districts, and states are leveraging coaching, job-embedded residencies, leadership development, and online learning to improve educators' literacy practices and close gaps in students' reading proficiency.

The issue also includes tools for helping manage change, and Frederick Brown, Learning Forward's president and CEO, revisits the learning team cycle and shows how it can help educators make shifts both minor and major.

With this issue, we're also doing some pivoting of our own to make the research section as useful to you as possible. As a result of feedback from you, Elizabeth Foster's column will have a broader focus, including evaluation, research tools, and methods and mechanisms for studying your efforts and their impact. We encourage you to send your ideas and questions to shape future issues.

Pivoting can be disorienting, especially when it takes you in a direction you've never faced before. But when you step forward with a clear focus and strong support, you can turn smoothly, ready to glide into your next move.

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

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INSPIRE. EXPRESS. ADVOCATE.

VOICES

CHANGE IS A TEAM EFFORT

It takes a team effort to make meaningful change in schools. Leaders play an important and collaborative role in that process. As Ayesha Farag writes (p. 14), "Whether navigating a crisis like a global pandemic or a more predictable change like a shift in instructional practice or alterations to daily school operations, effective change management is a vital leadership competency. … Leaders' ability to effectively manage the transitions significantly impacts the success of improvement processes."

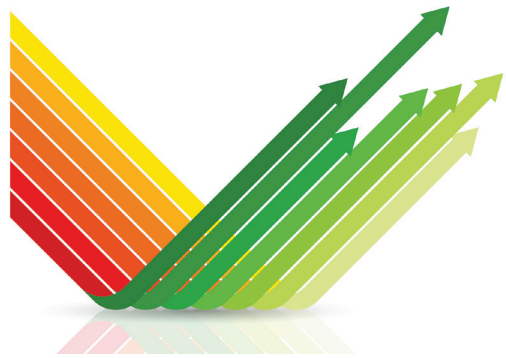
CALL TO ACTION

Frederick Brown

PIVOTING IS MADE EASIER BY AN INTENTIONAL CHANGE PROCESS

Simply knowing what needs to change doesn't tell us how to get there. A learning process can help clarify next steps.

When Learning Forward released the book *Becoming a Learning Team* (Hirsh & Crow, 2017), I was an instant fan. At the heart of the book is the learning team cycle, a collaborative learning process for teams of educators to address problems of practice and improve teaching and learning. The cycle brings clarity and structure to continuous improvement so that teams can work together productively and coherently.



The learning team cycle also provides a way to think about a perpetual challenge and the topic of this issue of *The Learning Professional*: pivoting when the need for change becomes clear. Simply knowing what needs to change doesn't tell us how to get there. A learning process can help clarify next steps.

As we consider some important pivots in schools, it's worth revisiting the learning team cycle. It can be used to address all kinds of changes, from new methods for teaching reading, to reducing racial disparities in school discipline, to understanding how to use AI in schools.

The learning team cycle is a five-stage process aligned with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. The five steps are: Analyze data, set goals, learn individually and collaboratively, implement new learning, and monitor, assess, and adjust practice.

I have used the learning team cycle with educators at both district and school levels, and I have seen how the cycle helps people think about and approach change, whether a major pivot or a minor adjustment.

I have also seen how people change course within the cycle. It's not surprising that I most often see pivots occur during the "monitor, assess, and adjust practice" step. At this stage, teams are encouraged to reflect and adjust based on data, evidence, and insight, using questions like these:

- What evidence do we have that shows we are making progress toward our goals?
- What is the impact of our change on our practice and our students?
- Where do we go from here?
- How can we apply what we are learning in this cycle to upcoming activities?

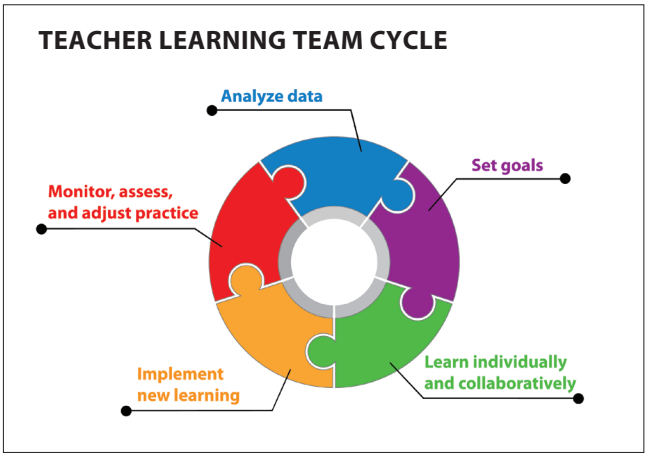
I've learned the following lessons for engaging in this step of monitoring, assessing, and reflecting. Teams looking to pivot may benefit from considering these lessons.

Reflection should be intentional, not an afterthought.

I love this John Dewey truism that is quoted in *Becoming a Learning Team*: "We don't learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience" (Hirsh & Crow, 2017, p. 88). Yet it's so easy for teams to either gloss over or completely skip the reflective process. It takes intentionality to make the reflection process meaningful.

Facilitating meaningful reflection is about more than simply asking ourselves or our colleagues, "How do you think it went?" It's about going deeper and seeking a clear understanding about what happened and what it means for the work going forward. *Becoming a Learning Team* includes some questions that coaches and other learning facilitators might use to drill down on the specifics. They include — but are not limited to — the following categories and questions:

Frederick Brown (frederick.brown@learningforward.org) is president and CEO of Learning Forward.



Source: Hirsh & Crow, 2017.

What happened?

- What did I do? What did students do?
- What was going on around us? When during the day did it occur? Was there anything unusual happening?

Why?

- Why did I choose to act the way I did? What can I surmise about why students acted as they did?
- What was I thinking and feeling, and how might this have affected my behavior?
- How might the context have influenced the experience?
- Are there past experiences — mine or the school's — that may have contributed to the response?

So what?

- What have I learned from this?
- How could I improve?
- How might this change my future thinking, behaving, interactions, lessons?
- What questions remain?

Now what?

- Are there other people I should actively include in reflecting on this lesson?
- Next time a situation like this presents itself, what do I want to remember to think about? How do I want to behave?
- How could I set up conditions to increase the likelihood of productive interactions and learning in the future?

Pivoting doesn't mean failure. It means learning.

I've seen individuals and teams incorrectly think about their need to pivot as some type of failure. "If we had done it right the first time, we would have succeeded," they might say. I suggest an alternative narrative with learning at the core. Phrases this person or team might say include, "Look at what we are learning about ourselves and those we are trying to support," or "Imagine how much stronger we are going to be at addressing this issue as we learn more."

I shared in a previous issue of this journal the story of a high school's leadership team shifting a tardiness policy that was unfairly targeting a subgroup of the building's population. After carefully reflecting on the data and evidence, engaging in conversations with building staff, and carefully reviewing its own enforcement of the policy, the team agreed a pivot was necessary.

From my observations, team members viewed their pivot as a learning experience. They recognized that their new approach would better address the problem they were trying to solve (student tardiness) without unfairly targeting a subgroup population or compromising students' ability to learn (by placing them in detention or suspension as a punishment). It also opened the door for a broader conversation about equity and fairness. Overall, it was a major learning experience and success for the team and the students it supported.

You might need to pivot more than once, and that's OK.

The learning team cycle is a cycle of continuous improvement. That means new data and evidence may cause the team to pivot a second or third time, and that's perfectly fine. Sometimes it takes time to get to the right approach. Other times, external forces push on us to make changes to apply the latest knowledge and best practices to help students achieve.

While I didn't have the language of the team learning cycle when I was a classroom teacher, my fellow 6th-grade teacher and I operated with this mindset. Over the course of a year and across years, student demographics and needs would change, the school would adopt new curricula and instructional materials, and other contextual elements would shift.

Throughout, we would collaborate to adapt as needed. There were times when it felt like we were constantly pivoting, but one thing was consistent: We were always learning and ensuring that the changes we made were supported by data, evidence, and reflection.

Pivoting to a new way of doing things can feel daunting, but following a series of structured yet flexible steps can make the change process more manageable. The learning team cycle is a great way to do that, putting collaboration and high-quality professional learning at the center.

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BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Denise Augustine, former superintendent of Indigenous education, British Columbia, Canada

MAKING A DIFFERENCE WITH STUDENTS DRIVES HER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The more skills I have and the more I understand what I'm doing and why I'm doing it, the more confidence and ability I have to improve the learning environment for each and every learner and the more likely I am to change.

Learning Forward board of trustees member Denise Swee'alt Augustine has been an educator for over 25 years in British Columbia, Canada. Augustine is a First Nations woman who lives in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island, on the unceded lands of the Hul'q'umi'num people. She recently completed a secondment with the British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care, serving as the superintendent of Indigenous education.

How would you like to introduce yourself to our readers?

I identify as the mom of two grown women, as a grandmother, and as an elementary teacher. When I speak to groups of educators, I'm usually introduced in sort of the standard Western way, with my title and a description of the work I'm doing. But if I'm in a crowd of strangers, I don't say anything about my work. I talk about how we raise our children and who we spend time with and the things that are nourishing me and the people I care about.

I also identify as a Hul'q'umi'num woman, which is the name of the language of the First Nations people here in this region of Vancouver Island and surrounding parts of British Columbia. My name is ancestral — I carry the name of my grandmother's sister. It's different than my daughters, whose names have literal translations. My name doesn't have a translation, but it comes with teachings from my aunt, who had the name, teachings about generosity, being humble, and caring for community members.

Why is professional learning important to you?

Being a teacher is such a public job. It's not OK that our systems put adults in front of kids in a public way and expect them to just wing it. Teachers really need to have concrete knowledge and skills. The more skills I have and the more I understand what I'm doing and why I'm doing it, the more confidence and ability I have to improve the learning environment for each and every learner and the more likely I am to change.

I have always really worked hard to improve my practice, and I've always brought some friends along. Informal professional learning communities, the ones that people create themselves, are often the most powerful. For many of us, professional learning has been an integral part of our work, throughout our whole careers.

Can you share an example of how you have seen professional learning lead to educators serving all children more equitably?

The school (where I worked) was about 60% First Nations students, many I was related to. The adults who visited described our school as a warm hug. We didn't have an attendance problem. Everybody loved coming to the school.

But after the principal went to a district meeting, he shared our literacy and numeracy results, and we were doing badly — the bottom of the pile. At that time, the graduation rate for all Indigenous learners was 30%. (In Canada, when we use the word Indigenous, we mean Métis,

Inuit, and First Nations learners.) I found myself looking into the big brown eyes of 22 kindergarten kids, most of them First Nations, thinking, "Based on the current data, only a third of these children will graduate." It's not because they can't learn, nor because they're not curious. This was obviously not a "kid" problem but an "education" problem. That was a significant aha moment. I realized school needed to be more than a warm hug.

One of the other teachers and I dug into literacy to find out: What don't we know and what do we know? We brought a team together. We had a very dedicated staff who decided we were going to change the story.

Together, we made a schoolwide literacy plan, aiming for more than a year's worth of growth every year. Every adult, including the secretary, assessed the kids and found the skills they knew and didn't. We put them in multiage transient groupings, based on what they needed at a given time, and reassessed them. We learned about and documented the needs. The data helped us clarify where we needed to look. The story helped us hold on to what we learned and fueled our dedication to making a difference. Within that first year, we saw significant positive results. It was magical. For me, that is the driver for professional learning.

What aspects of professional learning were especially helpful for your school?

Modeling has always been an important piece. People have a hard time imagining something they haven't seen or experienced.

That is true with parents as well. The work that is closest to my heart is working with other adults to raise the children of our community. I don't know how to do that without standing shoulder to shoulder with parents. When I was a teacher, my classroom was open and I would invite parents in. A number of the parents commented on how much they learned by watching how I interacted with the children.

For example, during one spring performance, a boy with autism got on stage and took more than his time. The parents watched me navigate the situation with gentleness, noting that his classmates knew how to kindly help him move off the stage. Whether it's with parents or other teachers, being transparent has given me the chance to talk about these types of interactions. Someone might ask, "Why didn't you just give him three strikes and sit him on the carpet?" The question is an invitation to sit and learn together.

How is supporting adults different from supporting kids?

I'm smiling because learners are learners. What works for a group of kindergarten kids is just a variation of what works for adults. They sometimes squirm and don't like it in the beginning, and then are inspired and driven. I'm being a bit cheeky, but it's kind of true. (With both adults and kids), we need multiple points of access. Some learners really want to read about it first and some want to get in there and muck about (with trying new strategies). Then we need to be purposeful in going deep because if we only stay at that entry point, it is only surface learning. We bring people together to unpack the work and ask: What did you listen to? What did you try? How did it go? And what will you do differently next time?

What steps is British Columbia taking to integrate Indigenous education and support equity for Indigenous learners?

This is a huge change that takes time, but there are some things we can point to. The creation of the First Peoples Principles of Learning has been influential. The Professional Standards for BC Educators now includes a standard that teachers must work toward reconciliation and integrate First Nations and Indigenous content and perspectives. We have also changed the grad program, which is grades 10,11, and 12. Now three of the (students') credits must be in an Indigenous-focused course.

In November 2023, we passed Bill 40, which has three pieces. First is school of choice, where a First Nation may decide which school their children attend. Second is the requirement that every school district has an Indigenous Education Council that prioritizes local First Nations and approves the spending plan for targeted funding for Indigenous learners. Third, a First Nation can apply a co-created model agreement to the school board from which they're purchasing education. The agreement outlines each party's responsibilities and is a mechanism for improving the relationship between the board and the First Nation. All three components make significant shifts in the balance of power.

What will you take away from your secondment with the Ministry of Education and Child Care?

I always planned on being an elementary school teacher for the whole of my career and didn't have a view of going anywhere beyond the classroom. (But) when some First Nations community members pointed me to an Indigenous education curriculum coordinator position that came up, I put my name forward. I saw the power of professional learning at the school level and was curious about supporting learning across the district.

As I have moved through various leadership roles, I have learned that creating environments where every single student will experience safety, a sense of belonging, and deep learning takes all of us. We can no longer afford to point our fingers at each other and suggest that positive change must start with "them": governments, unions, administrators, teachers, parents, etc. We each have a vital role and must find ways to listen deeply to each other, keeping learning and children at the center of our work. Our children and our planet need us to walk side by side, honoring our ancestors and planning for the generations yet to come. ■

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Kelly Wegley, Worthington City Schools, Ohio

OHIO DISTRICT CONNECTS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Some of the most important professional learning that our teachers do is through the teacher-based teams, which are supported by their building leadership team.

In Worthington, Ohio, K-12 educator professional learning is always happening, even in summer. Worthington City Schools provides sustained and ongoing support to all teachers, leaders, and instructional staff members under the "WorthU" umbrella of learning and teacher leadership growth experiences, coaching and mentorship, and collaborative teamwork. Educators personalize their professional learning in a multitude of ways, said Kelly Wegley, Worthington Schools director of academic achievement and professional learning. Learning from peers at Learning Forward's Annual Conference, honing the skills of instructional coaches, and using the Standards for Professional Learning as foundational resources are ways Worthington City Schools benefits from its Learning Forward membership.

Worthington City Schools uses the Ohio Improvement Process as its platform to drive continuous improvement initiatives and the Ohio Resident Educator Program to support novice teachers throughout their first four years. A central theme of professional learning is maintaining connection among academic and school improvement initiatives. Wegley spoke with Learning Forward recently about how the district is doing just that.

What's been happening this summer?

One summer professional learning focus is preparing for a 2024-25 program where we are piloting two different knowledge-based English language arts curricula. Ohio requires districts to adopt and implement scientifically based reading instruction. Our pilot involves 45 teachers across our elementary schools, across grade levels.

What are your professional learning pillars, and who plays what roles?

What's unique is I am on the academic achievement side of the house, which has helped professional learning to be tightly connected to district academic initiatives. There's not professional learning happening on one side that isn't connected to our improvement initiatives.

We connect into state resources and ensure we are marrying up those programs. For example, new teachers in the Ohio Resident Educator program also participate in our Ohio Improvement Process teacher-based teams. Before, there was some separation, but we realized our new teachers need to participate in teacher-based teams to benefit from that level of ongoing support that ultimately supports growth in our students.

Some of the most important professional learning that our teachers do is through the teacher-based teams, which are supported by their building leadership teams. Those teams are also supported by our district leadership team. When we think about high-quality professional learning that is job-embedded, ongoing, and sustained, our teacher-based teams are an incredibly important part of that process.

District members: Share your experiences with us

The Learning Professional wants to hear from Learning Forward district members so we can share your professional learning success stories. Contact **jefna.cohen@learningforward.org** to schedule a conversation and possibly be featured in a future Member Spotlight column.

How do you use federal Title IIA funds?

We pay a modest stipend to members of our building leadership teams who work in concert with our building leaders. They support the teacher-based teams in their building, which supports ongoing improvement efforts. We're proud to use some of our Title IIA funds for this.

Describe a few successes.

We have an incredible instructional coaching team of six coaches who serve 11 elementary buildings and one middle school, which is a Title I school. We can really see the impact in teacher actions in the classroom and the impact on students and their growth and learning in these buildings. Our instructional coaching and instructional strategies are tightly connected to the curricular resources we are using, and that's been a success for us.

Something else that has helped us be successful with coaches is my partnership with our director of elementary education because we get the principals and coaches together periodically to be able to do shared learning and collaboration. We visit them in their buildings and brainstorm: What is going well? How can we better support them?

We're glad you're part of the Learning Forward community.

The resources available through Learning Forward support the work we are doing. For example, our district completed a special education audit this past year, and members of our professional development advisory council were pleased to see an entire issue of *The Learning Professional* focused on special education. ■

ANNOUNCING THE #PLSIGN CHALLENGE

What does your school sign say when teachers analyze student data, collaborate, and optimize the curriculum? This ongoing, essential, complex work to improve student outcomes is so much more than a "PD day."

We invite all schools to change your #PLsign to educate your communities on the value of educator professional learning. When teachers learn, all students can learn more. The next time students are out of school for a professional learning day, change your #PLsign! Use the hashtag and tag @learningforward on social media.

Ayesha Farag

CHANGE MANAGEMENT HELPS EDUCATORS EMBRACE CONTINUOUS GROWTH

Leaders' ability to effectively manage change significantly impacts the success of improvement processes.

When I hear the word "pivoting" — as in the theme of this issue of *The Learning Professional* — I am instantly transported back to the tumultuous days at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators found ourselves in a constant state of flux, frequently adapting to evolving circumstances. For leaders of schools and districts, this meant thinking flexibly, communicating effectively, and making rapid decisions in the midst of challenges and confusion.

At the time, I was a principal and a member of the Learning Forward Academy, where coach Stacy Winslow introduced me and my academy peers to a helpful way of thinking about change and stress as we grappled with the realities of life in schools during a pandemic. VUCA, which is an acronym for *volatility*, *uncertainty*, *complexity*, and *ambiguity*, is a framework originally developed by the U.S. Army War College that offers a lens for understanding and responding to challenges in conditions of unexpected change and destabilization.

Volatility describes rapid, fluctuating conditions, while uncertainty reflects the lack of predictability and potential for surprises or shifts. Complexity recognizes the presence of a variety of interconnected factors at play, and ambiguity is a characteristic that gets at the lack of clarity or ability about how to interpret information (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

The VUCA framework resonated deeply with my experience at the time. It helped to normalize the feelings and reactions I was having and provided a sense of validation, relief, and empowerment. It also gave me a way to talk about the challenges we were facing, and I began referring to it regularly with my school team.

For me, the pandemic highlighted the invaluable role of frameworks in helping leaders navigate complex circumstances and manage change effectively. Whether navigating a crisis like a global pandemic or a more predictable change like a shift in instructional practice or alterations to daily school operations, effective change management is a vital leadership competency. Change is constant and necessary to meet the goal at the core of educational leadership work — to serve and support all students — and leaders' ability to effectively manage the transitions significantly impacts the success of improvement processes. Grounding this work in a solid change management framework provides leaders with a resource and tools to guide their communities through changes of varied magnitude.

Principal supervisors can play an important role by modeling and supporting the use of relevant frameworks that enhance leaders' understanding of transition dynamics, providing tools for strategic planning, and providing guidance for effective communication and engagement with stakeholders. From my own experience, I advise principal supervisors to choose a favorite framework that helps you to understand and communicate about change processes and to explicitly and regularly use that framework in conversations with principals

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about initiatives and improvement efforts.

While there are many models and frameworks available, one of my go-to resources has been Bridges' (2003) model for navigating transitions. Throughout my 14 years as a principal and now as a district leader, I've found it helpful to refer to the phases of transition it describes: *ending*, *neutral zone*, and *new beginning*. In the Bridges model, the ending phase is a stage when people identify and manage losses, followed by the neutral zone characterized by uncertainty and potential innovation. The final stage, new beginnings, is a time when people develop new identities and ways of being and, with renewed energy, have a revised sense of role and purpose.

An example from my district illustrates how we applied the framework in practice. As we prepared to welcome a new superintendent, principals and central office staff referred to the phases as we discussed our hopes, fears, needs, and things we felt were important to share with the incoming district leader. It helped us to articulate these thoughts, validate the range of reactions, hopes, and concerns we had, and anticipate what future phases might feel like. As a principal supervisor, I continued to periodically reference the model as we navigated the first year with new leadership as a way of normalizing the experiences and emotions of principals during the transition.

In the dynamic field of education, we constantly face changes in response to new research, shifting societal expectations and needs, emerging technologies, and myriad other factors. Our children deserve schools where educators at all levels are committed to addressing those changes by embracing continuous growth and improvement and resisting the comfort of what is known and familiar. Change management frameworks provide a lens through which we can anticipate, interpret, and respond to transitions so we can foster adaptive, responsive, and innovative school environments where all students thrive.

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It takes an effective team, collaborating and building on strengths, to ensure that a school or district is successful.

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Jody Spiro and Douglas Fisher

STRENGTHS-BASED FOCUS BUILDS TEAM COLLABORATION

The hallmark of an effective leadership team is members' ability to collaborate with each other in planning and implementing the steps to achieve the team's vision and objectives. When done well, this collaborative work facilitates the growth of each team member and a learning culture for the larger school community by tapping into the multiple perspectives present in the team.

Collective efficacy is a belief that the group has the power to achive its goals and is fed on evidence of this fact. Collective efficacy depends on members gaining an understanding of others' points of view, especially those that are different from our own, since most of us tend to solicit advice from people who think as we do. This article describes the characteristics of collective efficacy, the main elements needed to achieve it, and how to build on members' strengths to do so.

Essential elements for building collective efficacy include: developing a climate of respect among team members; using everyone's perspectives and experiences; having explicit ground rules that become part of the group's culture; having specific and clear individual responsibilities; ongoing monitoring of the work; stating any nonnegotiables up front; and testing assumptions of what the group has agreed upon before taking action.

Each of these can be fostered or hindered, depending on the focus of the team. Teams that focus on weakness tend to have low expectations for what they can accomplish, whereas teams that focus on and leverage strengths tend to have high expectations.

'I' SKILLS AND 'WE' SKILLS

"I" skills:

- A "just-right" level of self-confidence in my own ability to contribute to the group.
- Seeing myself as a learner.
- Setting group goals.
- Working together while following directions and delegating tasks.
- Identifying challenges and overcoming obstacles.
- Verbal communication skills (conflict resolution, negotiation, desirable argumentation).
- Nonverbal communication skills (eye contact, gestures, body language, facial expressions, tone).

"We" skills:

- Social sensitivity (empathy, acknowledging mistakes, accepting others).
- Potency.
- Motivation to tackle the task together.
- Ability to take turns.
- Flexibility in taking on roles within the group or team.
- Determination to succeed together.
- Collective responsibility for keeping going and meeting deadlines.
- A sense of group responsibility for each other as equal participants.
- Being able to give supportive feedback to each other without diminishing self-efficacy.

SUMMARY OF A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH	
What it is	• Values everyone equally and focuses on what the child can do rather than what the child cannot do. • Describes learning and development respectfully and honestly. • Builds on a child's abilities within their zones of proximal and potential development. • Acknowledges that people experience difficulties and challenges that need attention and support. • Identifies what is taking place when learning and development go well, so that it may be reproduced, further developed, and strengthened.
What it is not	• Focuses only on "positive" things. • Avoids the truth. • Accommodates bad behavior. • Fixates on problems. • Minimizes concerns. • Is one-sided. • Serves as a tool to label individuals.

Adapted from: Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2012). *Strengths-based approach: A guide to writing transition and learning and development statements* (p. 9). www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/professionals/learning/FINAL_Transition-Resource%20Kit_6.4-SBA-only-March-2019.pdf

FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS

Teachers and leaders often focus on deficits — "the perceived weaknesses of individuals or groups, such that the individuals or groups become viewed as 'the problem' " (Artze-Vega & Delgado, 2019). Leaders talk about what the teachers are not doing and lament the ways in which teaching and learning occur. Teachers focus on what students can't do and point to students' past experiences and families as contributing factors.

This focus is counterproductive. When educators — as individuals or as teams — focus on deficits, they lower their expectations for students and each other. In contrast, when teams focus on strengths, they are more likely to increase their expectations and focus on productive ways to build on the strengths. The table above provides a general summary of a strengths-based approach.

A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH TO COLLABORATION

How do teams take a strengths-based approach in their collaborative planning? How do teams avoid the trap of deficit thinking and instead build on the strengths of their members and school communities?

A strengths-based approach in collaborative planning focuses on identifying and leveraging the individual strengths and skills of team members to enhance overall team performance and achieve common goals. By recognizing and using the unique abilities of individuals, teams can create more innovative solutions, improve problem-solving capabilities, and increase their collective impact.

To be effective on a team, people need to focus on their individual contributions and perspectives as well as the ways in which they work with others — in other words, to focus on both "I" skills and "We" skills (Hattie et al., 2021), as shown in the box on p. 16.

REFLECT ON YOUR TEAM'S COLLABORATIVE STRENGTHS

To build your team's strengths-based collaborative planning capacity, invite members to self-assess their skills and identify their strengths. You can use the "I" skills and "We" skills listed here as a starting place. Team members may also want to identify areas for future learning and growth.

Team members can share their strengths and identify areas in which they need to grow or recruit others to compliment them. When people are transparent with their skills and the team relies on those skills to get work done, better decisions and improved impact are more likely.

It takes an effective team, collaborating and building on strengths, to ensure that a school or district is successful. Such a collaborative team is built on the members' ability to see the whole team as more than the sum of its parts.

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CHANGEMAKERS:
CELESTE MARIE ALEXANDER

NOMINATED BY MICHAEL WALKER

Michael Walker, assistant director and teacher center coordinator at the Arkansas River Education Service Cooperative, shines the spotlight on Celeste Marie Alexander, teacher excellence coordinator and special projects coordinator at the same organization, for her leadership and contributions to professional learning in education. "Her efforts have brought about tangible and transformative changes in the school system, making her a true catalyst for positive change in education," Walker said in his nomination.

"Dr. Celeste Marie Alexander consistently demonstrates a strong commitment to improving the recruitment, retention, and instructional effectiveness of teachers in Arkansas, ultimately benefiting students," Walker notes. "She works closely with school districts, supporting their recruitment and retention efforts in a proactive and individualized manner. She embraces the motto 'whatever it takes' to support schools and educators."

ALIGNMENT WITH THE STANDARDS

"Dr. Alexander's work aligns closely with several of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, demonstrating her commitment to fostering effective professional development initiatives that positively impact educators and students. It showcases her dedication to promoting equity, fostering professional expertise, designing effective learning experiences, providing leadership, and leveraging resources effectively to support educator growth and student success.

"She establishes a compelling vision according to the Leadership standard by advocating for the importance of professional development by sharing evidence of its impact, sustaining support to build educator capacity, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. In line with the Learning Designs standard, Dr. Alexander's workshops are designed with relevant and contextualized learning goals and grounded in research and theories about learning. By enacting evidence-based learning designs, she addresses the Implementation standard, ensuring that educators engage in meaningful and effective learning experiences. Dr. Alexander embraces the Culture of Collaborative Inquiry (standard) through resources and evidence-based practices that support true professional learning."

IMPACTING TEACHER RETENTION

"Dr. Alexander has contributed to creating a supportive and empowering environment for educators. … She implemented a structured mentor-teacher training workshop that led to improved support for preservice teachers and enhanced mentorship opportunities for novice educators, resulting in a more confident and prepared teaching force. Since Dr. Alexander began her work, the number of individuals who have earned their teaching licenses and are fully committed to the teaching profession in local school districts has doubled.

"She has presented the Before You Quit Teaching workshop numerous times, which addresses challenges faced by both veteran and novice teachers, leading to increased job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and improved retention rates."

PERSONALIZED, ACCESSIBLE LEARNING

"Dr. Alexander's workshops are grounded in research and standards relevant to educators' roles, consistent with the Professional Expertise standard. She provides educators with the expertise and skills essential to their professional growth, prioritizing coherence and alignment in their learning experiences.

"Alexander's offerings are designed with relevant and contextualized learning goals, grounded in research and theories about learning. She has empowered educators at all levels to take ownership of their professional development and growth. By providing them with practical tools and resources, she has enabled educators to navigate challenges effectively and create meaningful impact in their classrooms and schools. Overall, Dr. Alexander's professional learning initiatives have fostered a culture of excellence, continuous learning, and student-centered focus within the educational system, leading to positive outcomes for both educators and students alike."

•

If you would like to nominate a changemaker, visit ***learningforward.org/changemakers.*** ■

EXAMINE. STUDY. UNDERSTAND.

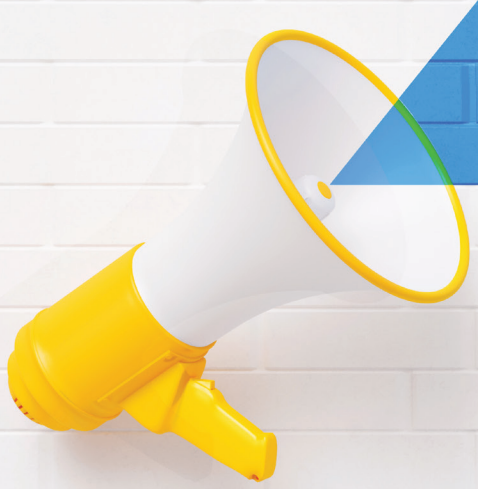
RESEARCH

WE HEAR YOU: MORE CONTENT ON EVALUATION

In the spirit of continuous improvement, we continually look at data on our readers' interests and adapt our resources accordingly. These three articles from the February 2024 issue of *The Learning Professional* have been particularly popular with readers and, along with other data, are informing a shift in the journal's research section.

- "6 things to know about evaluating professional learning" by Learning Forward
- "7 reasons to evaluate professional learning" by Joellen Killion
- "Is your professional learning working? 8 steps to find out" by Joellen Killion

Future issues will include more content on evaluation methods and findings, as Elizabeth Foster describes on p. 20.



Elizabeth Foster

WE'RE BROADENING OUR RESEARCH FOCUS, THANKS TO YOUR FEEDBACK

As professional learning leaders, it is our responsibility to document how improving professional learning systems leads to better outcomes for educators and students.

The decision to pivot — the theme of this issue of *The Learning Professional* — usually comes from new information that suggests a need for change. This column is using information from you, our readers, to pivot to a more expansive focus on professional learning evaluation, evidence, and data alongside its ongoing examination of research studies.

This pivot is in keeping with the Standards for Professional Learning's call to examine a range of data from a variety of sources when making decisions (Learning Forward, 2022) and with our commitment to being responsive to your feedback and current needs. We have heard Learning Forward members, *The Learning Professional* readers, and a focus group of educators at our Annual Conference express an interest in more content about how to conduct and apply evaluation of professional learning.

We also looked at data on the most-read columns and articles from the past year and discovered that the most popular were those that included discussion about the application of research or a data collection tool that could be used to assess aspects of professional learning.

As we make this pivot, we continue to use our analytics but also ask you to provide your own data points. Tell us:

- What columns have been most useful or interesting to you over the years?
- What topics do you hope this column will cover in the future?
- What do you want and need to know about research and evaluation?

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE BASE

This column's pivot also supports Learning Forward's commitment to building the evidence base about what makes professional learning effective. We can't do that work alone, so we're aiming to help you build your capacity for evaluation and research.

The field needs more evidence about how professional learning leads to improved outcomes for both educators and students. As professional learning leaders, it is our responsibility to document how improving professional learning systems leads to better outcomes for educators and students. The current threats to professional learning funding at all levels compel us to make a better case for investing in and sustaining coherent, meaningful, effective professional learning.

The Research Partnership for Professional Learning (RPPL) has recently articulated the need to first understand what the research says (and doesn't say) about effective professional learning (RPPL, 2022), as well as the reality that measuring professional learning outcomes is challenging because of the complexity and variation in how professional learning is designed and implemented (RPPL, 2023).

Yet we know this research can be done. The Standards for Professional Learning meta-analysis conducted by AIR (Garrett et al., 2021) demonstrated the positive impacts of professional learning,

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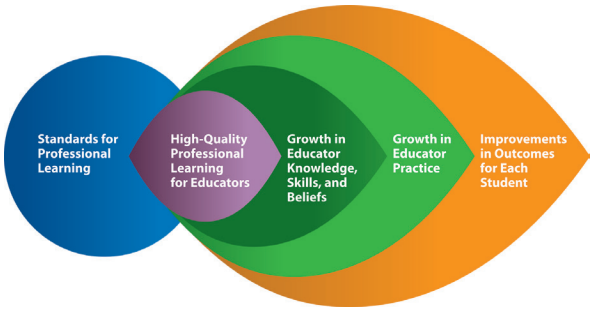
HOW STANDARDS LEAD TO IMPROVEMENT FOR ALL LEARNERS



while also pointing to areas in need of further research, such as the conditions that bolster effective professional learning and strategies that work for students who have traditionally been marginalized.

A helpful structure for thinking about where we need to bolster the evidence is the graphic about how the Standards for Professional Learning lead to impact for educators and students (see figure above). The standards inform and guide a comprehensive professional learning system, which provides equitable access to relevant and meaningful professional learning for all educators, leading to growth in their knowledge, skills, beliefs, and practices, and in turn, leads to improved outcomes for all students.

Learning Forward uses a framework adapted from Guskey (2002) to articulate what is important to measure along the causal pathway from professional learning to its impact — from the quality of professional learning all the way to whether and how what is experienced in professional learning impacts student outcomes. This requires collecting data related to the knowledge and skills participants gained, as well as how identified changes were implemented in the classroom.

TOPICS FOR FUTURE EXPLORATION

Future columns will cover topics such as the following.

What constitutes evidence? Defining and providing examples of data and artifacts that provide important information about professional learning quality, implementation, and impact can be valuable for everyone in the field.

What types of evidence are most meaningful and useful at different points along the pathway of impact shown in the figure? While improved student outcomes should always be the ultimate goal of professional learning, those student outcome indicators lag behind leading indicators such as those related to increased teacher knowledge or changed beliefs. We need to consider both lagging and leading indicators and move away from arguing which is more important.

What can we learn from Learning Forward's efforts to document our impact? We can all learn from one another's efforts at establishing common processes and resources across projects and systematically collecting and using data, even in the absence of a formal evaluation.

How can we better understand and build professional learning at the system level? This column will examine how districts and states are using the Standards Assessment Inventory, the valid and reliable instrument designed to provide data about how well a professional learning system is aligned to the Standards for Professional Learning, and results of systems-level evaluations like that of the What Matters Now Network, which documented the impact of educators collaboratively using a protocol to look at student work to improve their instructional strategies.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO LEARN?

I would love to hear your input and ideas to make this column as relevant and useful as possible. Please contact me at **Elizabeth.Foster@learningforward.org** or tag @learningforward on social media to let me know what you'd like to learn from this column and how you hope to use the information.

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DATA POINTS

4 KEY FINDINGS FOR TEACHER TEAMS

A CRPE study reports positive, early-stage findings from a strategic school staffing initiative called the Next Education Workforce (NEW) in Mesa, Arizona. In this model, teachers work in a team, draw expertise from one another, and share responsibility for a student roster. The approach allows educators to differentiate roles, distribute responsibilities, and engage in collaboration and support. Compared to peers in non-teamed classrooms, NEW teachers are more likely to remain at their school the following year, plan to stay in the profession for five years, are more likely to recommend teaching to a friend, and have higher evaluation ratings.
bit.ly/4bzdY3I

47% GREATER LIKELIHOOD OF BECOMING A TEACHER IN MARYLAND PROGRAM

A working paper on grow-your-own program effectiveness found that the Teacher Academy of Maryland, offering a career-technical education pathway for high school students going into teaching, created more teacher candidates, increased graduation rates, and led to a 5% increase in pay once hired. Participating students in public Maryland high schools were 0.6 percentage points likelier to choose a teaching career after high school. With so few students entering teaching overall, that small amount marks a jump of 47%. Black girls who took part were 80% more likely to become teachers after high school.
bit.ly/4cSIRBm

9th GRADERS BOOST GPA THROUGH CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT METHODS

A report examined early impacts of the Networks for School Improvement (NSI), established by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to increase the proportion of Black and Latino students and those experiencing poverty who are on track to graduate high school and enroll in college. NSI schools saw increases in 9th-grade students' GPA, core course pass rate, and credit completion. Networks that focused on boosting the percentage of 9th graders on track to graduate saw a 0.13-point increase in GPA. To foster sustainability of the continuous improvement work, protected team time, coaching for school teams, and professional learning for district leaders are needed to facilitate the efforts.
bit.ly/3Wf78Mr

19% DROP IN TEACHER STRESS

The RAND Corporation published findings from the 2024 State of the American Teacher Survey, completed by 1,479 nationally representative K-12 teachers. Job-related stress has returned to prepandemic levels: 59% reported a lot of stress, down from 78% in 2021. Despite the drop, twice as many teachers report frequent burnout and stress compared to similar working adults. Teachers reported they were as likely to leave their jobs by the end of the 2023-24 school year as similarly employed peers. Teachers work nine more hours per week than similar working adults (53 versus 44) yet earn about $18,000 less in average base pay. Black teachers reported significantly more hours of work per week than their peers, while female teachers indicated greater rates of recurring job-related stress and burnout than males.
bit.ly/4cyliN7

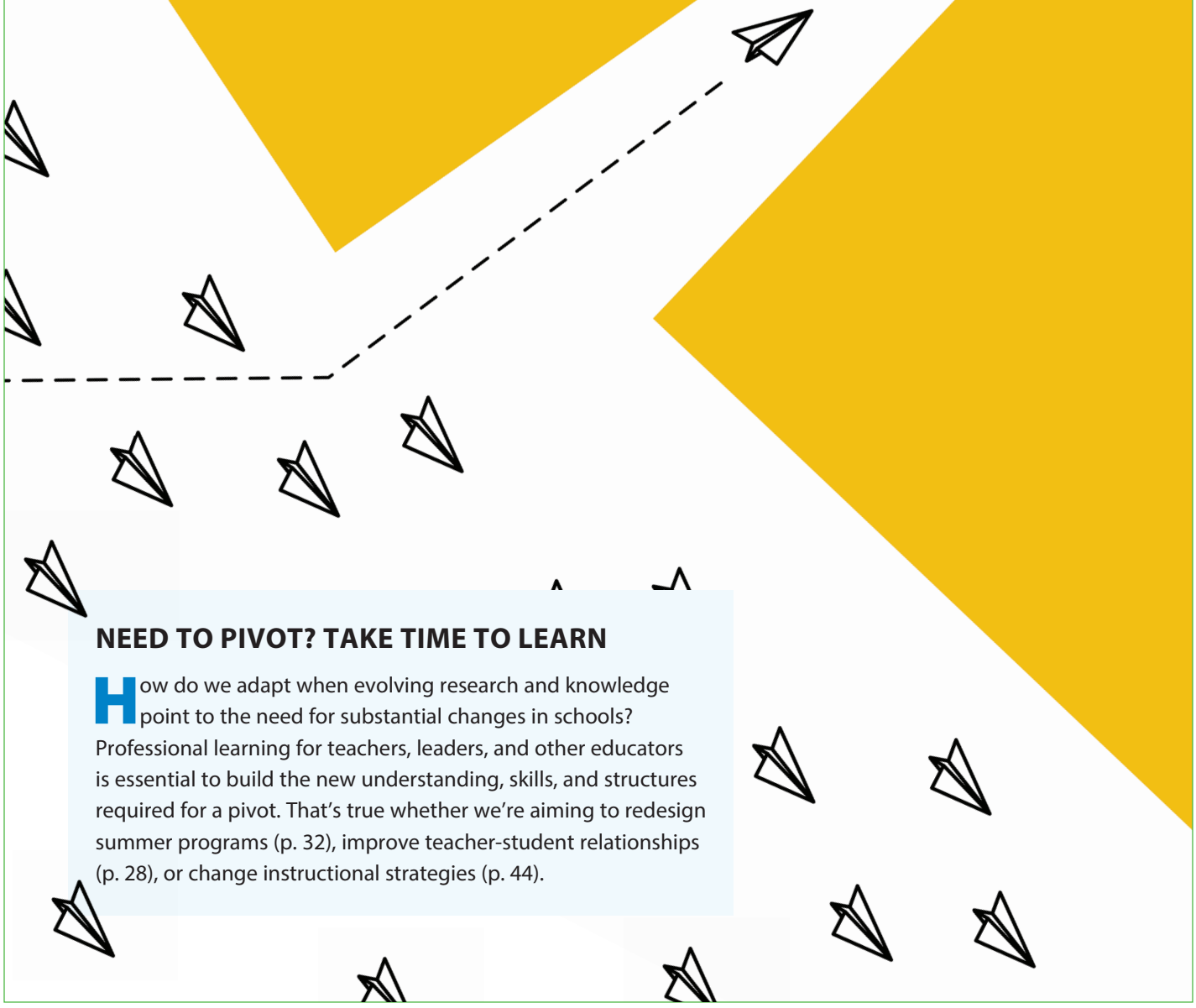
63% OF TEACHERS WANT MORE COLLABORATION TIME

Teachers are calling for more collaborative and dynamic work environments, according to the Voices From the Classroom 2024 survey by Educators for Excellence. 62% of teachers reported having built-in professional learning experiences with teacher-to-teacher collaboration on instructional improvement, but only 46% described the profession as "collaborative." 63% want even more time to collaborate with colleagues. 50% said they favored the idea of team teaching, and 31% said they were open to it but wanted to learn more about it. 83% of teachers of color favored co-teaching models.
bit.ly/3xOj3Hw

INFORM. ENGAGE. IMMERSE.

FOCUS

LEARNING TO PIVOT



NEED TO PIVOT? TAKE TIME TO LEARN

How do we adapt when evolving research and knowledge point to the need for substantial changes in schools? Professional learning for teachers, leaders, and other educators is essential to build the new understanding, skills, and structures required for a pivot. That's true whether we're aiming to redesign summer programs (p. 32), improve teacher-student relationships (p. 28), or change instructional strategies (p. 44).

AI is here.
Let's learn to use it wisely
Q&A with A.J. Juliani

BY SUZANNE BOUFFARD

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is on educators' minds and on the agenda for the Learning Forward 2024 Annual Conference in Aurora, Colorado. Educator and innovator A.J. Juliani will give a keynote address about meaningful and relevant practices for teaching and learning in the age of AI and distraction. He'll share insights, strategies, and examples to help educators prepare themselves and their colleagues for the future of teaching and learning.

Juliani is the author of *Adaptable* and several other books on education innovation, founder of Adaptable Learning, and an instructor at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education Penn Literacy Network. He was formerly director of learning and innovation for Centennial School District in Pennsylvania and has worked as a curriculum coordinator, tech director, English teacher, football coach, and K-12 instructional coach.

A.J. Juliani

The title of your conference keynote is "Learning in the AI age." What has changed about teaching and learning since AI tools became widely available in the past couple of years?

Right now, we are at a hinge of history. There have been a lot of technological advancements that changed human history, like the printing press, the telegraph, the personal computer, and we didn't know how big the impacts were going to be. But with AI, pretty much everybody agrees, we're in a moment when everything is going to change, including in schools. How do we handle that, as educators, as leaders, as folks who are leading professional learning?

We're also living with a challenge from the last real hinge of history — the internet. We're now living in an era where people are very distracted because we're walking around with devices buzzing, computers in our pockets, and 18 tabs open on the web browser. There's a term that (technology writer and consultant) Linda Stone came up with to describe this: continuous partial attention. And here comes AI, which could be the biggest distraction ever.

In an era of AI and distraction, a lot of things that previously worked with our students aren't working. So how does learning need to change? We have to make learning meaningful and relevant for our learners, more so than ever before — and that's all learners, including our adult professional learners.

AI can actually help us create these more engaging and meaningful and relevant lessons, activities, assignments. But the flip side is that we also have to be more human than ever in an AI world. No one wants teachers to use AI to create all the lesson plans and kids using AI to do all the work. We need to keep the human, the social, the meaning center, the language base. It's a fine balance, and something I'll be sharing in some stories and examples at the conference.

Navigating AI in the classroom can feel overwhelming. What's your advice about how to start?

We should address the use of AI on every assignment. There are certain ways that we can do that, to make it a little bit easier for educators, students, and parents.

One example is a traffic light protocol that Garnet Valley School District in Pennsylvania is using. In this protocol, red is no use of AI allowed, yellow is kids can ask for permission, and green is an open case scenario. When teachers see this protocol, their first reaction is often that an assignment has to be just one of those colors. But educators who are becoming proficient with using AI are weaving all three of those into an assignment or project.

So the teacher might start the class with a writing assignment, and say, "For the first 30 minutes of class, we are going to be completely red. I want you brainstorming topics and finding some things from the text that you want to write about." And then after that first 30 minutes, the teacher says, "For the rest of the class, we're going to be yellow. Take your top two topics and flesh out an outline of what your essay might be. You can use Google or Microsoft AI tools if you want to, but you don't have to."

The kids finish class with their outlines, and when they come back the next day, the teacher says, "We're going to red again to flesh out your outline into a rough draft. This is all you. Write stream of consciousness, not editing, for the next 30 minutes." Then when they've got a rough draft, the teacher says, "For homework, we're going to go green. You can take that rough draft and use Grammarly, spell check, whatever, to flesh it out into a final draft."

By using the Draftback extension in Google docs, the teacher can then look back at the entire writing process, play a video of it, and understand how the students got from the first draft to the final. That's what it looks like to use technology purposefully in the classroom.

How have you seen student learning change when you use that protocol?

A key piece is for the teacher to say, "Be prepared when you come into class tomorrow to talk about how AI helped you — what the changes were from the rough draft, what the benefits were, and some of the drawbacks." And when they come back for that discussion, I promise, you've never seen such engaged peer conversation before.

And, when we open up the opportunities and conversations, kids start coming and saying, "Can I use Grammarly to proofread this?" or "Can I use Photomath if I get stuck on a problem?" If we don't allow the conversation to happen, both of those scenarios would just be cheating. Instead, they're supporting learning.

What you're describing sounds amazing, but it also sounds like a lot of work, at least in the beginning.

I think it's like anything else — when you first do it, it can feel overwhelming. So I tell people to start small. Just start with the brainstorming and outlining piece. And then the next time you assign a paper, add the rough draft piece, and so on. Eventually, you get to the full process.

One of the stepping stones I have teachers do to start using AI is give students an assignment and then say, "Here's what AI created when I gave it this assignment." It might be a lab report, or a paragraph response, or an essay. Then they ask students to improve upon what the AI did, to make it a B-level or A-level response. This acknowledges that what AI puts out isn't as good as what students can do when they bring their thinking to it.

Where it gets easier for teachers is when they start to understand the flow of when they want to use AI versus when they don't. Walking teachers through some of these processes helps them because it eliminates the confusion a little bit. And what I've seen with teachers everywhere is that it's like any other kind of pedagogical change — it's going to take time, it's going to be new, but then they start seeing the benefit with the students.

What does it look like to facilitate professional learning for this kind of teaching? How do you do that at scale?

I'll start with what not to do. One of the biggest issues I see is tool-based professional learning, where educators are just learning about one specific technology tool. We need embedded professional learning opportunities and activities that are framed around the pedagogical issue at hand and then talk about how AI can help us in this context. It can't just be, "Hey, there's this new cool tool that will help you save time." Technology has to be embedded into the context of your PLC, your department team, your grade-level planning, or whatever your collaborative learning looks like.

Instead of starting with, "Today we're going to learn how to use Curipod," I start with the learning goal. I'll say, "Who wants to have more interactive classroom discussions — the kind where, every time you ask a question, 25 hands go up instead of the same three that usually do?" All the educators tune in. And then I say, "Tell me something you really struggled to get the kids talking about." Once we all know what we're trying to accomplish and why, I walk them through the process of using Curipod to get the whole class engaged.

Also, when I share a new tool, I don't do it under the premise that it saves time. For example, when I use Magic School, I start by showing them the first two tools on the site — worksheet generator and quiz generator — and I say, "We're going to scroll past those because what we're trying to do is create more meaningful and relevant lessons, not make it faster to do the same old thing."

I go to my favorite section, which is called "make it relevant" and I ask the teachers what their kids are into, and I show them how the tool generates different ideas for making a real-world connection between the lesson and students' interests, whether it's sports or Taylor Swift or whatever. Then, we take one of those ideas and flesh it out with a lesson planning protocol. I point out that we still need our human intelligence to take what the artificial intelligence did, how it got us started down the path, and flesh it out into something that you can actually use.

I'm not trying to put you out of business, but it sounds like we don't need a tech expert to run the professional learning. We need the people who are facilitating PLCs, coaching, and the like to open these discussions.

Right. I think the term "tech expert" is something that doesn't even really exist in today's world. I remember when my school district went one-to-one (one computer per student), and I was a K-12 technology staff developer. For my first six months, I was just kind of showing them how to use stuff. But I realized when I started doing some classroom walk-throughs that a lot of classrooms were just using technology in a passive way — as what we called a teenage pacifier. I felt like there was something really wrong with that, so I started focusing on embedding the technology into learning goals. Eventually, it started to be something that teachers really wanted.

As simple as it sounds, our role as facilitators of any type of professional learning is to figure out: How can this lead to better learning experiences? Technology can be a piece of that, but without the pedagogy and the instructional practices behind it, the technology falls flat.

What do you want school and district leaders to know about AI professional learning?

We need professional learning now more than ever. It's a little bit worrisome for me that we've been so slow to develop professional learning around this. With previous technologies like one-to-one initiatives, we had three-year rollout plans, embedded technology coaches, and more. But we don't have that kind of time with AI. It's here — it's on every single one of our devices and our kids' devices. So the conversations about how to use it have to be embedded in our professional learning. We have to get beyond simple questions like "How can we use it to save time?" We have to say, "How can we use this for good, from a pedagogical and instructional perspective?"

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LEARN MORE ABOUT AI AT THE LEARNING FORWARD ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Hear more from A.J. Juliani at Learning Forward's Annual Conference in Denver, Colorado. Juliani's keynote speech on Dec. 11 is titled "Learning in the AI Age: Meaningful and Relevant Practices."

The conference, to be held Dec. 8-11 at the Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center, will also include concurrent sessions on AI, with topics such as how to integrate AI into instructional design, when and how to use AI in professional learning, and how to create a toolkit of effective AI strategies.

Learn more about the conference and register at **conference.learningforward.org**

A new way of thinking about reducing racial disparities in discipline

BY JASON OKONOFUA

About 1 in 20 K-12 students are suspended from school each year. For many years of my education, I was one of them. As a Black boy growing up in Memphis, Tennessee, I excelled at my schoolwork but struggled with school discipline.

I once stood up for another kid who was about to get paddled in front of the class. I said it wasn't right. The teacher said that I would get paddled next. I refused, so I was sent to the principal's office.

With each incident like this, my sense of frustration and unfairness mounted, and so did my disciplinary record. By 10th grade, I had attended a half-dozen schools, getting suspended four times and expelled once.

Students from marginalized groups — including Black and Latinx students and students with individualized education plans (IEPs) — experience suspension much more frequently than their peers. In other words, students

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about Empathic Instruction, visit **empathicinstruction.org**.

like me are suspended not just for what they do, but also for who they are. Not only does this cost students learning time, but it also carries long-term consequences, as suspensions are associated with higher risks of underemployment and incarceration.

As a Black male with a history of suspensions, I was disproportionately likely to be branded as a troublemaker and suspended repeatedly. This unforgiving cycle could have easily derailed my education. Instead, I went on to earn a PhD in social psychology and study research-based methods for helping students succeed in school and reducing suspension rates.

GOOD INTENTIONS, FAULTY ASSUMPTIONS

Teachers come to school to teach, and kids come to school to learn. Teachers feel pressure to make sure students are learning what they should. If a student misbehaves, teachers might worry that they might not reach the student learning goals they're held accountable for. Students, meanwhile, have their own goals for their lives and their learning. If they are punished for their behavior, they might wonder if a teacher respects them or dislikes them in some way.

When you put those goals and worries in the same classroom, sometimes a vicious cycle can ensue. A student misbehaves, and a teacher punishes the student. The student responds to the punishment with more — and more severe — misbehavior.

Unfortunately, negative stereotypes can accelerate and escalate this growing tension. Under duress, both teacher and student draw on assumptions about the other, particularly if students are from a marginalized group. The teacher may label the student as a troublemaker. The student, responding to perceived bias, may label the teacher as unfair.

These fixed labels feed a self-fulfilling prophecy. Stereotypes serve as glue, sticking otherwise unrelated behavior together to make it seem like a pattern. The label "troublemaker" leads teachers to discipline the student more severely because they see the behavior as a sign of disrespect. In the long run, this cycle can alienate students from school. It also leads to significant frustration and job dissatisfaction for teachers and interrupted learning time for other students in the classroom.

LIMITED EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING INTERVENTIONS

One of the most striking things about the racial disparities in suspensions is how consistent they are. This problem has been well-documented for years (e.g., Wu et al., 1982). There is no shortage of well-intentioned efforts to address bias, yet gaps persist. In general, most strategies to contend with racial bias aim to reduce racial bias itself. Yet these approaches show weak and short-lived results at best and do little to change behavior (Paluck et al., 2021).

In school, approaches to racial disparities in discipline have focused on prescriptive policies or intensive skill-building programs, each with mixed results. First, some states have banned the use of out-of-school suspension as a consequence for common interpersonal offenses for which racial disparities are largest (e.g., "willful defiance"). These approaches may reduce this classification of offenses, but they do not necessarily prevent the offenses or students' exclusion from the classroom by other means, such as in-school suspensions.

Second, many districts have

adopted Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which uses multitiered models that call for resource-intensive skill-building programs such as professional behavioral coaches and individualized learning experiences for students to learn better behavior. PBIS has reduced overall suspension rates in elementary schools but is rarely effective at higher grade levels when both suspension rates and racial disparities spike (e.g., Vincent et al., 2015).

INTERVENTION THROUGH EMPATHY

Given the lack of sustained improvement, it's time to pivot. Research shows that it's more effective to build empathy than to try to reduce bias directly. In some settings (e.g., schools), inequities can be mitigated with a mindset focused on empathy or "getting perspective." And with more perspective, bias is less likely to shape decision-making, a process called disambiguation (Spencer et al., 2016).

In 2016, my colleagues and I conducted a rigorous study on the power of empathy in reducing student-teacher conflict (Okonofua et al., 2016). We worked with teachers of about 1,600 students in middle schools across three school districts in California. Some teachers were randomly assigned to complete a brief, online exercise focused on empathic teaching practices, such as seeking to learn from students what they think and experience.

Teachers who completed this exercise were better equipped to support positive behavior, and their students were 50% less likely to be suspended over the coming school year, compared to teachers who were randomly assigned to a control exercise about incorporating technology in teaching practices.

Why did this approach work when other efforts to address bias tend to fall short? We believe it's because, instead of trying to rewire a lifetime of unconscious assumptions, we instead seek to sideline bias and reduce its control over teachers' behavior. To do so, we elevate an ideal self in teachers, one that prioritizes strong working relationships with students, especially when they misbehave, and a goal — to help students grow and improve — for which bias would be maladaptive.

By activating empathy, teachers are primed to start by seeking to understand why the student is misbehaving and focus on sustaining positive relationships even when students misbehave, rather than immediately focusing on disciplinary action.

The concept of empathy is not new to teachers, but under stress, teachers can easily lose sight of the relationships they want to build with their students and the goals they have for their students' success. What we wanted to do is help teachers renew their empathy and access it in stressful environments. By activating empathy, teachers are primed to start by seeking to understand why the student is misbehaving and focus on sustaining positive relationships even when students misbehave, rather than immediately focusing on disciplinary action.

A SCALABLE INTERVENTION

To scale this approach, my colleagues and I designed a short course for educators called Empathic Instruction. The 45-minute online professional learning course, implemented in partnership with TNTP, builds on the latest psychological research and is, to date, the only science-based intervention to reduce disparities in suspension rates.

Participating teachers begin by affirming their values and sharing why they became teachers. Then educators briefly reflect on why students might misbehave and how they might respond to student misbehavior while also understanding the student's perspective, believing in student growth, and operating in alignment with their values and the reasons they became teachers.

This activity helps teachers take a different perspective and consider a different narrative when students misbehave. Rather than labeling a misbehaving student a troublemaker, teachers respond with empathy and tell themselves the student is trying their best.

This may sound simple, but it can be powerful in practice. Longitudinal studies of this intervention with 66 middle school math teachers and more than 5,800 students show that the intervention improved student-teacher relationships and student behavior and decreased suspension rates, particularly for students of color and those with IEPs, as measured by eligibility for special education. Pilot research shows it may also increase teacher job satisfaction, a key predictor of teacher retention.

Moreover, the reduction in suspensions persisted through the next year when students interacted with different teachers, suggesting that empathic treatment with even one teacher in a critical period can improve students' trajectories through school (Okonofua et al., 2022). We don't yet know exactly why. The improved relationship with one teacher may support a stronger sense of belonging at school and improve student behavior overall. Perhaps the experience shifted adolescents' developing beliefs about the kinds of relationships they have or can have with teachers, beliefs that underlie their behavior in school.

As we scale this approach to different school contexts, many research questions remain: Is this approach equally powerful in different grades and subjects? How do we balance in-school and out-of-school suspensions? Can teachers maintain

this empathic mindset year after year, or do they need a regular refresher with each new class of students?

No single intervention is a panacea. Empathic Instruction reduces the racial gaps in suspensions, but it does not close them fully. For example, it reduced the racial disparity in suspension rates by 45%. However, the potential for a brief, online, and low-cost approach to reduce suspensions is significant for theory, practice, and policy. We have powerful new evidence that we can create a more affirming, equitable experience for students by focusing less on reducing bias and more on building empathy.

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Learning network shifts districts' approach to summer programs

BY NANCY GANNON AND SARA DOUGHTON

Even in the best of times, significant education problems are rarely fixed with easy solutions, and 2021 was not the best of times. The COVID-19 Omicron variant was causing a new wave of infections and, because of school and life disruptions, students were struggling with learning loss and a decline in mental and emotional health.

Against this backdrop, FHI 360, an organization whose education initiatives aim to dismantle obstacles and give students the tools they need to succeed in school, designed and launched the District Summer Learning Network with funding from The Wallace Foundation. The network helps districts pivot in their approach to summer learning as a strategy to mitigate the pandemic's worst impacts by igniting learning and improving student well-being.

Helping districts navigate the complex challenges of the pandemic required understanding two separate

The District Summer Learning Network has helped over 125 districts across the U.S. design and implement high-quality summer programs that accelerate learning and improve student well-being. In designing professional learning, the network's goal was to help districts shift their thinking about what summer learning could be and give them tools to create high-quality, evidence-based programs that benefit young people.

but related problem types. *Technical problems* have clear parameters and can be solved with existing expertise and solutions. *Adaptive challenges* call for new ways of thinking and acting and require changes in people, processes, and systems (Heifetz et al., 2009).

The technical problems of rethinking summer learning programs included the need for districts to track new funding, comply with state and federal reporting requirements, and apply district policy checklists to program design and planning. The main adaptive problem was reframing the purpose and methods of summer programs.

District leaders realized the traditional summer school model rooted in remediation, often framed as the punitive result of failing classes, wouldn't work. Students needed to re-engage in school and reconnect with one another and with adults in a positive environment that was responsive to their needs, including the need to learn material they missed because of the pandemic. Districts often had to rethink all aspects of their summer program, including whom they served, what their goal was, and what they taught.

To solve complex problems like this, it is important to invest in professional learning that can help educators learn and implement both technical and adaptive solutions and to design, test, and scale solutions that truly address the problem. This results in interventions that are more likely to be successful and sustained, and participants who are likely to be better equipped for the next complex challenge they encounter.

The District Summer Learning Network team has taken this investment seriously, blending technical and adaptive learning approaches to help leaders shift their approach to summer learning. Throughout, we have supported professional learning leaders to address the summer learning challenges and prepare to address future complex challenges that require shifting mindsets and systems.

The network has helped over 125 districts across the U.S. design and implement high-quality summer programs that accelerate learning and improve student well-being. In designing our model for professional learning, our goal was to help districts shift their thinking about what summer learning could be and give them tools to create high-quality, evidence-based programs that benefit young people.

Our model had to consider the challenges our district partners faced, such as competing priorities that made it hard to focus on summer programs, time constraints that limited districts' ability to create meaningful professional learning for teachers, silos around key collaborators such as federal programs and curriculum teams, teacher and staff burnout, and operational challenges such as a lack of buses for summer programs.

We found the following elements critical for facilitating both technical solutions implementation and adaptive problem-solving in support of high-quality summer learning.

Start with a solid research base to inform both technical and adaptive professional learning.

The District Summer Learning Network's theory of action draws heavily from Wallace's National Summer Learning Project, which shows long-term benefits for students who participate in multiple years of summer programs that incorporate key program elements (McCombs et al., 2020; Schwartz et al., 2018).

Based on these findings, we designed the network model to promote four pillars of effective summer learning: academic quality, equity, community partnerships, and whole child development. We help districts operationalize these pillars by implementing the evidence-based practices that are most likely to produce positive outcomes for students.

The network model also leans on Elena Aguilar's approach to coaching, which focuses on strong relationships between coach and coachee to shift behaviors and mindsets to achieve

systemic change (Aguilar, 2013). This "transformational coaching approach" can help create an understanding that change is possible and open pathways to effect that change (see box on p. 35).

The District Summer Learning Network values social interaction and collaborative knowledge building to help leaders achieve lasting changes in mindsets and practice, informed by Vygotsky's sociocultural theories of development (Eun, 2008). To that end, we hired coaches with significant experience, gave them space to build strong relationships, and provided regular time and space to reflect across the work.

The coaches leveraged their expertise in professional learning, curriculum and instruction, educational leadership, and out-of-school time learning. Coach preparation challenged them to work adaptively with their districts as they co-designed plans to achieve districts' goals.

The network also regularly draws on the Stanford d.school's Liberatory Design Principles to help participants center equity questions in their program reflection and design (Anaissie et al., 2021), with each learning session opening with a reminder of those principles.

Create multiple, supportive pathways for learning.

We knew teams needed space to both absorb new technical content and develop and adapt their thinking as they created better and more context-specific programs. Therefore, the District Summer Learning Network offers ample opportunities for inquiry, job-embedded learning, and reflection with teams and peers to understand what's working and what needs to change. These include:

- **Whole-group professional learning:** A biweekly or monthly session for all member districts that includes current research, one or more districts sharing their model, and opportunities to socialize new learning with peers.
- **Individual coaching:** Four to eight hours a week where the district-designated lead (districts often designate the out-of-school time lead, a curriculum lead, or a summer lead if their district has one) can meet one-on-one or in small groups with a coach who works within that district's context to rethink summer learning. Coaches might share technical resources, such as professional learning agendas or budget templates, while also working with districts to develop adaptive solutions as they navigate team dynamics and disagreements over summer learning goals.
- **Small learning communities:** Biweekly sessions or a short series where districts can opt in to a series of learning sessions focused on an array of high-needs topics, including multilingual learners, rural districts, literacy, etc.
- **Internal learning sessions:** Biweekly sessions where all coaches meet with FHI 360 staff to deepen understanding across the team around challenges, opportunities, successes, and struggles. Coaches also complete an extensive onboarding process and use their regular meetings to plan and reflect together on coaching practices focused on inquiry, change management, and adult learning.

These professional learning opportunities provide space for summer learning leaders to practice applying evidenced-based tools — some provided by The Wallace Foundation and some by FHI 360 — in a community of peers.

Apply a systems lens to problem-solving.

Before our member districts could engage in technical problem-solving to incorporate evidence-based summer learning practices — such as shifting to programs that run for at least six weeks and incorporate at least 90 minutes of math and English language arts per day — district leaders had to start with a deep dive into their current state and then move to the adaptive process of envisioning possibilities.

The District Summer Learning Network walks them through this process, using Peter Senge's (2006) work on systems thinking and examining how the system structures and mental models they operate within are a product of their district's history, context, and current work. Using a systems lens helps leaders look beyond initial assumptions to identify the root causes of the challenges they want to address, such as low student attendance and engagement, as well as mindsets adults may hold about student learning and the purpose of summer programs that work against inclusive, engaging, and enriching summer programs.

Network members are encouraged to use these reflection questions:

- **Events:** What just happened?
- **Trend/patterns:** What have we been seeing over time?
- **System structure:** How are the parts related? What influences the patterns?
- **Mental models:** What assumptions, beliefs, values, and models are held? How do they keep the system in place?

The answers are sometimes surprising. For example, one team used a tool that helps districts strategically plan summer learning-related communication to address what they thought was an information flow issue (FHI 360, 2022). As the team went deeper in its analysis, it identified the problem: Its communication strategy missed an important slice of its population. Members realized they needed to apply an equity lens to their messaging and communication channels.

Creating a systemwide map of the root problem lets districts design purposeful goals and holistic action plans to reach them, making space for effective implementation of technical solutions.

AN EXAMPLE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL COACHING FOR ADAPTIVE AND TECHNICAL PROBLEM-SOLVING

While planning for summer 2024, one district faced massive cuts to its summer learning budget ahead of the sunsetting of federal ESSER funds. The district planning team was, understandably, pessimistic about its ability to continue meeting the demand for engaging and academically strong summer programs. During a brainstorming session, the team's coach asked team members to list everything they'd want to accomplish if they had unlimited funds. After reviewing the list, the team realized that several of the most high-impact ideas were doable even within its budget constraints using existing resources and teams.

Support goal-driven planning and long-term thinking with opportunities to reflect and revise.

When districts feel stuck, multiyear visioning can help them understand what success looks like and set goals to achieve the desired end state. But we've found that it's important to create a scaffold for change.

Some districts in our network initially tried to plan for too many shifts at once, creating a sense of overwhelm as they simultaneously attempted to tackle high-quality instruction, program expansions to better serve the students who were most impacted by COVID-19, new partner collaborations, and improvements to social-emotional learning components.

Working flexibly with a three-year road map allows us to support a comprehensive mission and vision process while also understanding the incremental steps needed to achieve those objectives. Coaches made clear that districts could leave spaces blank if they were not ready to tackle an area.

This year, we incorporated planning for an audacious goal — an ambitious, achievable objective that focuses on one change lever that could affect the whole system and strengthen the student learning environment. Audacious goals let districts develop action plans, test specific interventions to understand their impact, learn from the results, and reapply learning to new goals.

For summer 2024, some of our districts' audacious goals included:

- Transforming their program narrative to create more excitement, buy-in, and interpersonal engagement among students, teachers, parents, and communities.
- Distributing summer learning leadership to bring collaborators from across the district into planning conversations from the outset and maximize resources.
- Designing an integrated middle and high school program that involves career and technical education, with opportunities for students to contribute to their community.

Prepare teams to measure, reflect, and act on learning.

Continuous improvement is essential in both technical and adaptive change efforts to understand what is working and where adjustments are needed. We understand continuous improvement as initially a technical solution, but making sense of the data and using that information to improve initiatives often incorporates adaptive moves.

In the District Summer Learning Network, coaches work with districts to understand: What did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off? For some districts, this means expanding data collection beyond state or federal requirements to answer specific questions they have about their programs. For others, it means focusing data collection so they can dive into their findings, instead of gathering too much information to process.

Based on their continuous improvement data, districts can refine their planning process. In one district that used student focus groups as part of data collection, students repeatedly commented on the impact the summer learning climate had on them, saying they wished they had powerful relationships during the school year like they did during the summer. That prompted the district to continue to prioritize site climate in summer and explore how to replicate those relationships during the year.

THE RESULTS

As we wrap up our third year, over 90% of District Summer Learning Network districts are on track to submit their three-year road map for summer transformation, and districts' engagement and satisfaction rates with the network consistently track upward of 98%.

More importantly, members keep telling us how the network has helped shift their thinking and how they are implementing engaging, enriching summer programs that produce tangible results for students.

With federal funding for summer learning coming to an end, they are exploring new funding avenues, building community partnerships, and designing creative staffing plans to continue providing high-quality programs. Some are even collaborating with peer districts to synthesize program data and document successes to make the case for funding summer learning.

Whether they are continuing to refine their summer learning approach or considering how to pivot in other areas, districts will face complex challenges that require a blend of technical and adaptive responses. The District Summer Learning Network model offers a blueprint for addressing these challenges through a unique job-embedded professional learning plan that allows educators space to create meaningful solutions to their toughest problems and to support students in an extraordinary moment in time.

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SPOTLIGHT ON THE SCIENCE OF READING

How children best learn to read has long been a sticking point among researchers, educators, policymakers, the media, and the public. Today, most educators are aware of the tension between balanced literacy methods and the body of evidence called the science of reading, and the shift toward the latter.

With the spotlight now on the effectiveness of science of reading methods — and the compelling student data to prove it — many education systems are shifting to these evidence-based literacy practices. To do this successfully, however, schools and districts have to abandon old ways. Educators have to be open to new learning. They need high-quality curriculum and effective, job-embedded professional learning to support their transition to using new strategies and materials.

In the first of our special section articles on the science of reading, Shannon Bogle, Learning Forward's director of networks and academy and a former literacy coach, writes, "Supporting teachers to understand the science of reading and implement high-quality instructional practices is essential for improving literacy outcomes for students of all backgrounds."

Professional learning is key to improving reading

BY SHANNON BOGLE

Education systems are making sweeping changes in how they approach literacy instruction as they acknowledge a reading crisis: In the U.S., 45 million adults — five times the population of New York City — cannot read (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). People who cannot read are at significantly increased risk of dropping out of high school, entering the criminal justice system, and living in poverty (Cree et al., 2022).

This trajectory is established early. Students who are not reading proficiently by 4th grade are far more likely than their peers to struggle in school and life (Snow et al., 1998). It is therefore alarming that, in 2022, 37% of U.S. 4th graders scored below basic on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, often known as "the nation's report card," and just a third scored at the proficient level (NAEP, 2022).

States and districts are aiming to change these trends by shifting their instructional approaches to reflect the science of reading, a body of scientific evidence that informs educators and

parents about how students learn to read and write.

Literacy instruction grounded in the science of reading focuses on the systematic and explicit teaching of phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. It prioritizes the foundational skills necessary for decoding and understanding text, aiming to address and prevent reading difficulties more effectively.

The research on how the brain learns to read is not new. The science of reading has accumulated over many years from various disciplines such as psychology, education, and neuroscience. For example, the widely accepted Simple View of Reading framework, developed in the 1980s, draws on research findings that students need to develop both word recognition and language comprehension to achieve reading comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Word recognition involves translating a word from print to speech using knowledge of sound-symbol (letter) correspondences, while language comprehension involves making meaning from something heard (oral comprehension) or read (reading comprehension).

Yet, despite the research, schools have been plagued by philosophical debates about reading instruction for decades. Many systems' recent shift toward applying the principles of the science of reading represents a move away from balanced literacy or whole-language methods that have remained stubbornly popular.

Supporting teachers to understand the science of reading and implement high-quality instructional practices is essential for improving literacy outcomes for students of all backgrounds. Many current teachers and leaders learned about outdated instructional methods — or no literacy instructional methods at all — during their teacher preparation programs. Some have never had access to curricula that have been shown to develop foundational reading skills.

Simply put, schools cannot improve the troubling trends in student literacy without investing in meaningful, sustained professional learning about the science of reading for teachers, leaders, coaches, specialists, and other staff.

As of April 2024, 38 U.S. states and the District of Columbia have laws or policies related to evidence-based reading instruction (Schwartz, 2024). To ensure the success of these efforts, educators need and deserve multifaceted support that involves professional learning, curriculum resources, ongoing support from leaders and coaches, and a collaborative school culture that encourages all staff to improve together.

Fortunately, education leaders can turn to Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022) to design and provide support that makes a difference for students. All of the standards work together to ensure high-quality professional learning is effective, regardless of topic or discipline. To help education leaders begin to shape their literacy professional learning, consider how the following Learning Forward standards can support teachers and, ultimately, students.

CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT, AND INSTRUCTION

A crucial component in shifting practice is the availability of high-quality instructional materials and educators' ability to use them to plan and implement daily lessons. The Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction standard of the Standards for Professional Learning underscores this, as does the influential publication *Transforming Teaching Through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning: The Elements* (Short & Hirsh, 2022), both of which draw on research about the value of instructional materials. High-quality literacy instructional materials are designed to provide a structured and systematic approach to teaching reading, ensuring that students build foundational skills in a logical progression.

Districts should start by assessing to determine if the curriculum and materials they are using are high-quality and support the instructional shifts. EdReports is one resource that districts can use to evaluate whether their curriculum supports evidence-based practices. Materials that do not support evidence-based instruction should be abandoned and new ones selected. In districts where teachers are involved in curriculum selection, it is recommended that teachers first engage in foundational learning about the science of reading.

But teachers need more than just initial training on how to navigate the curriculum. They must be engaged in ongoing learning and inquiry, with the curriculum at the center, an approach referred to as curriculum-based professional learning.

In such learning, teachers explore, plan, and practice using the curriculum in teams to ensure the kind of deep and contextualized learning that is required for successful implementation. Curriculum-based professional learning requires that teachers have designated time each week to investigate and plan, using collaborative inquiry as a means of learning and implementation.

High-quality instructional materials are educative, meaning they include support in the form of specific teacher-

focused guidance and resources to help teachers learn and prepare for student learning. However, the authors of high-quality instructional materials emphasize that these resources are not meant to be used as scripts.

Rather, teachers who use these resources with integrity, making adaptations based on student needs, see improved student outcomes compared to those who either use them as scripts or deviate too far from the intended outcomes.

Through its Curriculum Equity Initiative, Chicago Public Schools has not only prioritized high-quality instructional materials but has also committed to providing teachers with extensive professional learning centered in the curriculum. This effort is built on recognition that teachers need to buy in to the reasons for and approaches to changed practices as well as support to build their capacity to use those new practices (Hirsh & Ben-Isvey, 2021).

According to data from the Illinois Assessment of Readiness, 31% of elementary school students in Chicago Public Schools were proficient in reading in 2024, compared to 26% in 2023 and 28% in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic (Chicago Public Schools, 2024), and an independent study found that Chicago students are recovering from the pandemic in reading skills more quickly than those in most other large districts.

IMPLEMENTATION

Shifting to evidence-based practices aligned with the science of reading requires strategic planning and time. Before any professional learning, leaders strategically plan for implementation, applying change management strategies to help anticipate any challenges or resistance. The Implementation standard articulates the importance of change management strategies, including clearly communicating a vision and the reasons for change, as well as a plan for collective action and clear indicators of progress.

Starting with a theory of change, districts can articulate how professional learning will lead to changes in literacy instruction, which will in turn lead to improvements in literacy instruction, and then to improved student reading outcomes. A simple "if, then" statement allows educators in a district to understand why the shift is happening and what it will ultimately lead to.

Once a theory of change is articulated, system leaders, working with their teams, should develop SMARTIE goals and articulate clear outcomes for literacy professional learning. Most educators have been writing goals in the SMART format for years, ensuring goals are *strategic*, *measurable*, *achievable*, *relevant*, and *time-bound*. At Learning Forward, we suggest adding *inclusivity* and *equity* to ensure that all educators and students are being considered in the goals (Learning Forward, 2021).

An example SMARTIE goal for implementing structured literacy might read like this:

"Our goal is to implement a structured literacy program across all K-3 classrooms in the district within the next academic year. We aim to achieve a 20% increase in student reading proficiency scores by the end of the year. This will be accomplished by providing professional learning and coaching for teachers, ensuring differentiated support for all students, including those with learning disabilities and English language learners, and equitably allocating resources to close the literacy achievement gap."

Systems can use the KASAB framework, developed by Joellen Killion (2018), to determine and articulate the specific outcomes to focus on during both the planning and evaluation of the professional learning. KASAB is an acronym for knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors of the educators implementing change. The table on p. 41 shows examples of professional learning outcomes organized by the KASAB framework. This kind of a table can help leaders organize their thinking about desired outcomes and then incorporate them into a logic model to develop a coherent plan for change.

LEARNING DESIGNS AND CULTURE OF COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Job-embedded professional learning relies heavily on time and space for collaboration. The Culture of Collaborative Inquiry standard emphasizes the work that must be done beyond a discrete learning event so that educators engage in continuous improvement, build collaboration skills and capacity, and share responsibility for improving learning for all students.

A crucial part of shifting teacher practice is ensuring that they regularly engage in dialogue with their colleagues about the instructional materials they are implementing. Professional learning communities (PLCs) and teacher teams are most effective when they provide teachers with the space and structure to explore their misconceptions about the materials and content, how they will implement that content to best meet their students' needs, and prioritize the teaching moves for each unit.

Collaborative planning supports the implementation of the science of reading by fostering a shared understanding among educators about evidence-based literacy practices. When teachers work together, they can align their instructional strategies, analyze student data collectively, and develop consistent approaches to teaching reading.

This teamwork enhances professional learning, allows for the exchange of

What are some key outcomes we want to focus on as we shift toward structured literacy?

Knowledge Conceptual understanding of information, theories, principles, research	• **Structured literacy:** Familiarity with the principles and components of structured literacy, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. • **Science of reading:** Comprehensive knowledge of the research and evidence supporting the science of reading, including how children learn to read and the cognitive processes involved. • **Developmental stages:** Awareness of the different stages of reading development and the specific needs of students at each stage. • **Assessment tools:** Knowledge of various assessment tools and methods to monitor student progress and identify areas needing intervention. • **Instructional strategies:** Understanding effective instructional strategies for teaching reading, including explicit and systematic instruction.
Attitude Beliefs about the value of particular information or strategies	• **Commitment to student success:** A deep-seated belief in the potential of every student to learn to read, regardless of background or initial skill level. • **Openness to evidence-based practices:** Willingness to adopt and implement practices supported by scientific research, even if they differ from traditional methods. • **Reflective mindset:** Openness to self-reflection and ongoing improvement in teaching practices. • **Resilience and patience:** Patience in the face of challenges and a commitment to persist through difficulties to support student growth.
Skills Strategies and processes to apply knowledge	• **Explicit instruction:** Ability to provide clear, direct, and systematic instruction in literacy components. • **Diagnostic teaching:** Skills in using assessments to diagnose student needs and tailor instruction accordingly. • **Differentiation:** Proficiency in differentiating instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners. • **Engagement techniques:** Techniques to engage students and maintain their interest and motivation in learning to read. • **Data analysis:** Skills in analyzing student data to inform instruction and track progress.
Aspirations Desires, or internal motivation, to engage in a particular practice	• **Professional growth:** Desire to continually improve literacy instruction through professional learning and staying current with research. • **Student empowerment**: Aspiration to empower students with strong reading skills that will serve them throughout their academic and personal lives. • **Collaborative improvement:** Commitment to working with colleagues to share best practices and improve literacy instruction collectively. • **Innovative practices:** Ambition to explore and implement innovative teaching practices that enhance reading instruction.
Behaviors Consistent application of knowledge and skills	• **Consistent implementation:** Regular and consistent use of structured literacy practices in the classroom. • **Data-driven instruction:** Routine use of student data to guide instructional decisions and interventions. • **Professional learning:** Active participation in professional learning focused on the science of reading. • **Collaboration:** Engaging with peers, literacy coaches, and other professionals to share insights and strategies. • **Feedback and adjustment:** Regularly seeking and incorporating feedback to refine instructional practices.

effective techniques, and ensures that all students receive high-quality, research-based reading instruction. Additionally, collaborative planning provides a platform for ongoing reflection and adjustment, which is crucial for meeting the diverse needs of learners and improving literacy outcomes.

Short and Hirsh (2022) point out that certain conditions and structural design elements enable meaningful and collaborative curriculum-based professional learning. One of these elements is time. Teachers who are provided time to work in collaborative teams can make use of the opportunity to annotate lesson plans, rehearse lessons, and analyze student results. With a

structured meeting schedule and clear expectations for the use of time, teachers use an inquiry model to improve their use of instructional materials.

Charleston County School District in South Carolina has focused on creating conditions that support the implementation of structured literacy, with the support of Leading Educators. Enabling structural conditions include 300 minutes of planning time per week, 60 minutes of collaborative PLC time per week, quarterly professional learning sessions, and a literacy coach designated full time for each school. With this investment, the district saw a 7.5% improvement in literacy test scores at the district's most vulnerable schools from 2021 to 2022 (CCSD, 2023).

In my previous work with school district leaders implementing high-quality instructional materials for literacy, our leadership team ensured that teachers had at least one weekly collaborative planning time built into their workday. Additionally, they had a half to a full day of planning for each upcoming classroom module to ensure they had a clear understanding of its purpose and flow, a process often referred to as lesson or module internalization.

LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING DESIGNS

Districts need to ensure that district and site-based leaders are knowledgeable and ready to support educators in implementing any new innovation, including improved literacy instruction. Leaders should be equipped to provide guidance, lead data collection and analysis, provide feedback, and coach teachers as they embrace these changes.

Leadership is essential to ensure that the knowledge teachers build in courses, workshops, and coaching is translated into classroom practice in an ongoing way. Research shows that, without ongoing support, new knowledge and skills rarely transfer to the classroom. To get a 75% to 90% chance of successful implementation, educators must have the opportunity to practice, receive feedback, and reflect (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Of course, district and school leaders cannot facilitate teachers' learning on their own. They should be part of a team that includes coaches and literacy specialists. Instructional coaches are trained to work alongside teachers to determine areas for improvement, set action steps, collect data to determine changes, and support reflection through coaching conversations, providing feedback as needed. The coach role is layered and complex and includes supporting the planning process as well as conducting coaching cycles around the implementation of what was planned in collaborative planning meetings.

Systems-level leaders should look to the Learning Designs standard to determine how to structure professional learning and whom to engage in that work, and they should be sure to engage leaders, coaches, and all staff in their own professional learning, relevant to their roles.

Learning Forward has been collaborating with the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce literacy team to help with ReadOhio, the state's plan to raise literacy achievement. We are working alongside regional literacy specialists to create tools that assist districts at all phases of implementation. This effort recognizes that everyone involved, including literacy specialists, benefits from ongoing learning and support.

EVIDENCE

The Evidence standard should be applied at all phases of teachers' professional learning and implementation of high-quality curriculum and literacy practices. Collecting data is crucial to determining progress (or lack thereof) toward identified outcomes and goals. By gathering and analyzing relevant information, educators can assess the effectiveness of teaching strategies and make informed adjustments to improve results.

Data collection can be considered for initial and intermediate outcomes as well as long-term ones. For example, when collecting data on initial outcomes of teacher use of curriculum, a district might use the Instructional Practice Guides from Achieve the Core (Achieve the Core, 2018) to gauge levels of implementation.

When examining intermediate outcomes of quality and short-term impact, educators may use classroom walk-throughs, formal rubric-based observations, coaching cycles, and student work to determine if both students and teachers are accessing the curriculum with integrity. Finally, data is collected that aligns directly with SMARTIE goals to determine if student outcomes are being positively impacted by the new practice.

Creating an evaluation plan for implementation can provide a structure for how and when these data are collected, considering what data are already available, and what other data sources would be beneficial.

START WITH A STRONG PLAN

As districts and states make an important shift toward evidence-based reading instruction, it is essential to make a strong and thoughtful plan with high-quality curriculum and high-quality professional learning at the center. Such a plan can help educators at all levels succeed in making a shift that many find challenging because of habitual practices that run counter to the

science of reading. Intentionality and support, coupled with patience and ongoing reflection, will support systems in making changes that students so urgently need.

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Ohio invests in coaching to improve literacy

ReadOhio initiative emphasizes professional learning to improve instruction

BY MELISSA WEBER-MAYRER, SHERINE R. TAMBYRAJA, AND STEPHANIE VANDYKE

In 2023, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine made a historic investment to improve literacy proficiency for all Ohio students, from preschool through grade 12. House Bill 33, which was signed into law in June 2023, outlined numerous mandates and funding allocations to ensure that all students in Ohio would have access to evidence-based reading instruction.

These laws, collectively referred to as the ReadOhio initiative, include requirements for the use of high-quality instructional materials, stipends for educators to engage in professional learning about the science of reading, and funding for the provision of literacy coaches for Ohio's lowest-performing schools. Professional learning is at the heart of this work.

This substantial investment in literacy validated what has been a long-standing effort in Ohio to develop robust literacy support grounded in evidence. In 2018, Ohio established a state plan to raise literacy achievement that placed a priority on literacy coaching for teachers.

Decades of research have found that coaching can be a powerful and effective mechanism to improve teachers' instructional practices and, in turn, increase students' literacy proficiency (Kraft et al., 2018; Lockwood et al., 2010). Ohio's coaching framework initially relied on two federal funding sources (the 2016 State Systemic Improvement Plan and the 2017 State Personnel Development Grant) to test two types of coaching models — *systems coaching* and *instructional coaching*.

Systems coaching is used to implement systems-level school improvement initiatives that will build capacity and strengthen infrastructure. Data from systems-level inventories, such as the *Reading – Tiered Fidelity Inventory* (St. Martin et al., 2023), are used to identify gaps in a school building's implementation of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) that ensures all students are receiving appropriate reading instruction.

In Ohio, the state's regional network of literacy specialists and state support teams for central office and district leaders provided systems coaching to build an infrastructure to support the use of evidence-based language and literacy practices. Coaching addresses school improvement action planning to ensure all students receive high-quality reading instruction.

Whereas systems coaching is implemented at the administration and leadership level and used to build structural support, *instructional coaching* is implemented at the classroom level and used to build teacher knowledge and facilitate changes in teacher practice.

The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce used the instructional coaching model to promote professional learning in the science of reading. The model placed emphasis on allowing for teacher voice and autonomy and empowering teachers to identify gaps in their practices and areas where they would want coaching supports.

Following the passage of the ReadOhio laws, which underscored the urgency of accelerating reading improvement for students, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce expanded Ohio's coaching framework to incorporate *student-focused coaching* as a way to center student data as the driver of teacher learning and improvements in practice.

In this model, coaches and teachers work collaboratively to examine students' literacy data and identify evidence-based strategies that will augment instructional practices specifically tied to student needs.

To reach as many students and educators as possible using the student-focused coaching model, coaching services are offered within a four-tiered system, in which the dosage and intensity of coaching vary across tiers. All teachers receive support via newsletters that offer important information and links to evidence-based instructional resources.

The self-guided tier of coaching allows teachers to attend biweekly office hours with a literacy coach on an as-needed basis so that teachers can get support on specific topics. Building principals help identify teachers who are potential candidates for small-group coaching, and individual teachers can then choose to receive one-on-one coaching.

Small-group coaching is offered in a format similar to a teacher-based team so that coaches can work closely with teachers within the same grade level to examine student data, discuss student needs, and determine next steps for instruction. Finally, one-on-one coaching is available for teachers who may benefit from a high level of support and structure, with a focus on specific students or a target group.

In the first year of ReadOhio coaching (school year 2023-24), coaching sessions across all four tiers focused on incorporating evidence-based strategies and how to use and analyze student data, which suggests coaching has focused on the intended goals and is meeting the expectations of the coaching initiative thus far. In the 2023-24 school year, 54 schools engaged in ReadOhio coaching, reaching over 1,000 teachers and building administrators.

Because the state does not yet have sufficient funding for all schools to have in-house literacy coaches, the education department considered ways to capitalize on teachers' knowledge and ability to support one another. Specifically, the department supported a peer coaching model, which uses the instructional coaching model as a guide to maintain consistency of focus on teachers' instructional practices.

The companion piece to this article describes one way peer coaching was implemented in an Ohio district, with teachers completing professional learning in reading instruction in tandem with a peer coach. The article describes this process in greater detail and reports preliminary findings on the feasibility of this coaching model to support teachers' reading instruction.

Although this model diverges from the current direction of Ohio's coaching framework with respect to the focus on student data and the four-tiered framework of coaching support, the general model of peer coaching has the

potential to be effective in schools and districts that have seasoned educators who are skilled in using student data to drive instruction.

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Pilot study examines the feasibility of a peer coaching model

BY MEGAN LEAMON, JULIE Q. MORRISON, DANIEL S. NEWMAN, AND TODD HAYDON

Peer coaching involves two or more professionals collaborating to reflect on and refine current skills and practices (Yee, 2016). In K-12 education, peer coaching is a collaborative and nonevaluative approach to developing professional expertise of teachers, with a peer coach providing feedback and insight to a fellow teacher (Allison & Harbour, 2009).

Research indicates that peer coaching improves classroom instructional practices (Bowman & McCormick, 2000; Hasbrouck, 1997; Shaaban, 2022). Most studies have been conducted with preservice teachers, but some studies among elementary school teachers have found positive changes in instructional practices and routines for collaborative learning (Kohler et al., 1997; Murray et al., 2009).

We conducted an evaluation to examine the feasibility of peer coaching for improving teachers' reading instructional practices in an Ohio elementary school. The peer coaching model described in this article focused on grades K-2, a critical time for the

development of students' reading skills.

Ohio's Model for Peer Coaching for Literacy (Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, 2019) was based on research in instructional coaching (Knight et al., 2015) and the four-step process of planning, observation, analysis, and debrief that is detailed in Sheehy and Ceballos (2018). In this model, teachers work in pairs to identify goals, observe each other, and provide each other with feedback for improvement.

In the 2022-23 school year, we conducted a small pilot study of a program based on the model at Clermont Northeastern Elementary in Batavia, Ohio, initiated that year. The school is in a rural area and had an enrollment of 603 students, the majority of whom were white (92.5%), while 2.6% were Hispanic, and 4.4% were multiracial. Students from economically disadvantaged families, defined by those eligible for free and reduced lunch, represented 35.9% of the population, and the percentage of students identified as having an educational disability was 12.6%.

We began with six teachers — teams of two matched by grade level — who were part of the instructional leadership team and were enthusiastic about piloting peer coaching in preparation for a possible schoolwide rollout.

The six teachers began by completing a series of online modules about peer coaching developed by the state department of education. The research team then tested the teachers' knowledge with a quiz they created based on the state's model and shared with teachers a checklist of peer coaching components that they could use as a reference throughout their coaching.

To establish a baseline measure of teachers' instruction, we conducted video observations of teachers' classrooms. We assessed teachers' practices with a measure we created based on Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS), a professional learning program rooted in the science of reading and a structured literacy approach (Folsom et al., 2017; Moats & Tolman, 2019) and on the LETRS Applications of Concept Tool (Moats & Tolman, 2019). This measure was designed to be used as a self-assessment as well as an observer-rated tool. All teachers had previously engaged in LETRS professional learning and were familiar with the target practices.

IMPLEMENTING THE PEER COACHING MODEL

During planning, the teacher and peer coach jointly assessed the teacher's instruction and identified a skill to target for improved instructional practice based on LETRS. Teacher and coach jointly agreed on a measurable goal that was individualized to the teacher's needs.

Observation, the next phase of the peer coaching model, involved the direct observation of the teacher's instructional practices. With technical support from the researchers, teachers video recorded their instruction for 10 to 15 minutes at times of their choosing.

During analysis, teacher and coach viewed the video together to evaluate the teacher's implementation of the instructional practice they had previously prioritized, using the LETRS-aligned rubric. They noted up to three areas of strength and up to three areas of growth.

In the debrief phase, teachers asked each other a few scripted reflective questions (e.g., What worked well in the lesson? What was challenging? How do you think the lesson went based on your goal?) to guide the conversation and encourage each other to reflect on the lesson to inform and guide their professional learning. The teacher and peer coach then discussed actions that could be taken to improve instructional delivery.

Teachers met weekly, and each team engaged in five to six coaching cycles over the course of the year, following the same steps in each cycle.

FINDINGS: PEER COACHING'S VALUE AND CHALLENGES

According to researchers' observations, results indicated high levels of implementation fidelity to Ohio's Model for Peer Coaching for Literacy, with average percentages of steps completed between 87% and 98% across the three teams.

Results also suggested that teachers' literacy instruction, as measured by alignment with LETRS, improved over the course of the peer coaching. It's important to note that the teachers who participated already had strong literacy instruction practices before the peer coaching, as assessed by baseline observations. The selection of strong teachers was intentional so that the school could pilot the intervention under the most conducive conditions and then determine next steps for the rest of the school.

Nonetheless, among each of the teacher teams, at baseline, one teacher demonstrated higher fidelity implementation of LETRS-based instruction and one teacher demonstrated fidelity at a slightly lower level. After peer coaching, the teacher with lower-level fidelity improved enough to close the gap.

For example, in one pair, one teacher's fidelity to LETRS remained high throughout the process, with an average of 99.5% fidelity. Her peer coach partner averaged 82.9% fidelity at baseline, but after peer coaching, she was implementing LETRS-based instruction at an average of 95.6% fidelity — a change that represented a statistically large effect size.

We also developed a survey to assess teachers' perceptions of the coaching. All of the teacher participants agreed or strongly agreed that peer coaching helped them apply LETRS-based instruction in practice, achieve their instructional goals, increase

their confidence in their instructional practice, improve their use of inquiry and reflection (in leadership, instruction, and teams), and improve student engagement and learning.

Responses to open-ended questions showed that teachers found many aspects of peer coaching valuable. Themes included: giving and receiving feedback from a teacher they trust, learning from one another, sharing ideas about opportunities to improve student engagement and instructional practices, and having the opportunity to reflect on their practice and work toward goals in a structured way. One teacher said, "Peer coaching allowed me the opportunity to feel validated with successes and struggles within my classroom with a peer going through similar trials."

But teachers also noted some challenges. Five of the six teachers reported that it was difficult to find time to meet to discuss the observation. In addition, some teachers found video recording to be challenging and said that sometimes the students got distracted by video recording and had more energy than usual. Some cited lack of coverage for their classrooms while they were engaged in peer coaching in another classroom. One of the teachers suggested that peer coaching should occur on a monthly basis instead of weekly basis.

NEXT STEPS

We designed the pilot study to examine the feasibility of peer coaching. The small sample size (six teachers total) does not allow for causal claims about impact, but it is a helpful way to document and understand the process and teachers' experiences to determine whether to keep investing time and resources in both the program and a more rigorous evaluation.

Following the pilot year, the school is continuing to gradually roll out peer coaching to other teachers, with some modifications to the process. For example, teachers are observing each other in person rather than recording and reviewing video. The work is now also supported by a district literacy coach.

Based on the results of our pilot study, we recommend that, as schools and districts implement peer coaching, they pay close attention to readiness for implementation, preparing teachers for their new roles and responsibilities as peer coaches, and logistical details such as the scheduling needs of the teachers. For example, schools may benefit from implementing peer coaching during designated, protected time for professional learning rather than adding additional expectations to reduce demands on teachers.

With attention to feasibility, peer coaching has the potential to benefit teachers and students. Future studies should continue to examine changes in teachers' instructional practices and monitor student outcomes. In this pilot study, we heard teachers describe their peer coaching experiences by saying things like, "When I watched that part of the lesson (that my peer coach did), I was like, 'Oh, I definitely want to incorporate that the next time I teach.' " That kind of learning should be documented, measured, and expanded.

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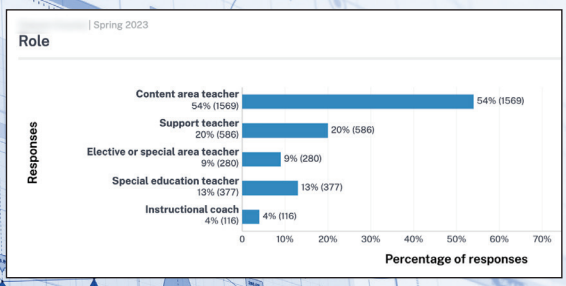
[NEW]

Standards Assessment Inventory

Learning Forward's Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) is a valid and reliable survey administered to instructional staff that measures alignment of school and system practices to the Standards for Professional Learning.

The SAI provides crucial data on professional learning in your schools to help you identify needs, maximize resources, and focus on areas of greatest priority to improve teaching and students' success.

Survey responses from your instructional staff reveal the state of high-quality learning in your school, district, or system.



THE STANDARDS ASSESSMENT INVENTORY:

- Provides data on teachers' perceptions of the professional learning they experience in their schools.
- Reveals the degree of success or challenges systems face with professional learning practices and implementation in the system as a whole and in individual schools.
- Provides data on the quality of professional learning as defined by the Standards for Professional Learning, a system's alignment of professional learning to the standards, and the relationship of the standards to improvements in educator effectiveness and student achievement.
- Elicits extensive collegial conversations among teachers and administrators about the qualities of professional learning that produce results for students.
- Connects the Standards for Professional Learning (vision) with educator Action Guides, Innovation Configuration maps, and other planning and implementation tools.
- Helps schools focus on particular actions that contribute to higher-quality professional learning as guided by the questions on the inventory.

SAI PRICING:

One school	$500
Systems with fewer than 15	$750 plus $70 per school participating schools
Systems with more than 15	$1,000 plus $70 per school participating schools
State/provinces with 30% of all schools	$60 per school participating
States/provinces with less than 30% of all schools participating	$1,000 plus $70 per school
Regional service centers	$1,000 plus $70 per school

Projects that do not fit into the categories above will be priced on an individual basis. Price includes two administrations of the survey in one school year, detailed district and school reports available on the SAI website, additional resources and support materials, and a 45-minute data analysis consultation with Learning Forward.

For more information on the SAI, contact **Tom Manning**, senior vice president, professional services, Learning Forward, at **tom.manning@learningforward.org**.

learningforward
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION
STANDARDS ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

Strong leaders help teachers adapt to improved literacy instruction

BY KELLY HASTINGS AND JENNIFER PAULSEN

Embarking on an initiative to implement evidence-based reading instruction can be both exhilarating and daunting for school and district leaders. Some may think that adopting a curriculum grounded in the principles of the science of reading will automatically ensure success. Choosing a strong curriculum is a crucial step, but it's important to remember that change happens because of the people involved, and, for many, change is hard.

Despite our best intentions, many initiatives falter due to a lack of fidelity in implementation. This gap between vision and execution can stem from various factors, including inadequate professional learning, resistance to change, top-down demands, a failure to sustain momentum over time, and difficulty translating theory into practice (Hall & Hord, 2015; Joyce & Showers, 2002).

A common pain point for school and district leaders is the discrepancy between the desired outcomes and the

actual practices observed in classrooms. Many education systems adopt a science of reading approach to better address students' literacy deficiencies and invest in professional learning and resources, but find that educators struggle to put new instructional approaches into practice, especially if they don't receive feedback about whether they are implementing the initiative with fidelity. This challenge not only hampers student progress but also undermines trust, credibility, and sustainability.

Given the complexity of change, leaders play an essential role in achieving implementation fidelity. They face challenges and pressures in making such a transition, from aligning instructional practices to fostering a culture of continuous improvement. But by leveraging strong leadership strategies and the principles of implementation science, they can navigate these challenges and shepherd their schools to higher literacy achievement.

NURTURING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR CHANGE

School and district leaders must cultivate their leadership skills to avoid implementation pitfalls and effectively guide changes in practice. Leaders who possess the following set of foundational skills are better equipped to inspire, guide, and sustain change (Fullan, 2014).

Leaders play an essential role in achieving implementation fidelity. By leveraging strong leadership strategies and the principles of implementation science, they can navigate challenges and shepherd their schools to higher literacy achievement.

Self-awareness and respect form the bedrock of effective leadership. Leaders who deeply understand their values, strengths, limitations, and opportunities for improvement are better able to navigate challenges with authenticity and integrity and can cultivate a culture of openness, where diverse perspectives are valued.

Leaders overseeing transitions to the science of reading must first understand their own beliefs and biases about reading instruction, let go of conflicting beliefs, and trust the evidence on how children learn to read. They must also have respect for the learning process in themselves and others to model a commitment to continuous improvement.

Self-regulation and intuition enable leaders to navigate uncertainty and complexity with confidence and adaptability. In times of change, leaders must remain composed under pressure and make sound decisions based on both data and intuition (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

By balancing analytical insights with intuitive understanding, principals can make well-rounded decisions. This approach not only helps in navigating the complexities of changing literacy strategies, but also supports teachers and inspires confidence. Consequently, the school community experiences a sense of stability and shared purpose.

Effective communication is essential for building trust and alignment among stakeholders. Principals leading a science of reading transition benefit from actively listening to teachers' experiences and concerns to better understand classroom-level challenges and needs. Soliciting regular feedback through meetings or surveys is one way to get this information.

Another is by assembling a school-based implementation team with grade-level representatives for vertical and horizontal conversations. Other effective communication strategies are to ask thoughtful questions, promote ongoing professional learning, engage in classroom walk-throughs, and collaboratively provide constructive feedback.

Promoting continuous learning for oneself and others is essential for staying relevant and resilient in an ever-evolving educational landscape. By investing in professional learning, coaching, and collaborative inquiry, leaders empower their teams to embrace change as an opportunity for growth and improvement.

When making a science of reading instructional transition, a leader needs to have enough knowledge to lead the change process, but also adopt a learner's stance and encourage teachers to do the same.

By prioritizing professional learning, principals equip teachers with the latest research-based literacy strategies, enhance their instructional skills, and foster a collaborative culture.

Celebrating team and individual successes fosters a sense of camaraderie and motivation, sustains momentum and morale, and reinforces achievement and excellence. Principals can publicly commend teachers for using new instructional strategies that show student progress by throwing a celebration when the school achieves a proficiency milestone. Celebrating individual and collective efforts highlights the importance of each teacher's contribution and the power of collaborative success.

A positive mindset that values change as an opportunity underpins all of the other leadership skills mentioned above. In addition, leaders who approach challenges with empathy, patience, and curiosity inspire team confidence and resilience.

Leadership coaching is a valuable form of professional learning that helps leaders develop the critical skills mentioned above and navigate the complexities of change management with ongoing feedback and support. Coaches serve as confidential allies who offer perspective, challenge assumptions, provide guidance based on best practices in leadership theory and practice, and encourage leaders to identify and leverage their unique talents and capabilities.

HARNESSING IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE

Once the leadership foundation is set, leaders and their teams can turn to the principles of implementation science as a guiding framework to ensure implementation fidelity. Implementation science offers a systematic approach to understanding how innovations are adopted, implemented, and sustained within organizations. This approach is noticeably different from — and more effective than — the way new initiatives are often rolled out, which is simply to start and figure it out as you go.

Implementation science emphasizes the importance of creating an organizational climate that supports innovation and continuous learning with a shared vision for change. One key aspect is recognizing that change is a dynamic and iterative process (Aarons et al., 2015).

Rather than expecting immediate results, educators must embrace a long-term perspective that also acknowledges the ambiguity of teaching and learning. This entails conducting thorough needs assessments, establishing clear implementation goals, and monitoring progress through ongoing data collection and analysis from different perspectives as collaborative activities.

Key to this effort is the creation of an implementation team, which must include teachers because the team's purpose is to support the people carrying out the change effort (Pizzuto & Carney, 2024). The implementation team designs and carries out a comprehensive plan that includes the needed professional learning.

The plan should address these questions: What will teachers be doing? What will students be doing? What resources will be needed? How will this initiative be evaluated? It should have transparent and explicit look-fors (observable practices such as the use of evidence-based instructional materials), articulation of what will be measured or evaluated, and processes and protocols for district leader, school leader, and teacher walk-throughs tied to the same look-for instrument. Having transparent and explicit expectations for walk-throughs ensures consistency in observation and feedback for all levels.

Conducting a continual needs assessment is another essential part of an implementation science approach. Leaders should regularly assess the evolving needs and priorities of educators and students to inform decision-making and resource allocation.

This includes teachers observing one another and providing feedback and asking questions, as well as collaboratively using data to monitor progress, identify areas for improvement, and make evidence-based adjustments to implementation strategies. Leaders cannot tell teachers what needs to change; it needs to be a two-way discussion. This builds the capacity of the team and solidifies trust.

Using formative assessments to monitor the implementation and success rate of instruction that reflects the science of reading research will allow the organization to continually monitor both the successes and the needs of the initiative. The implementation team may need to make midcourse adjustments to individual and group challenges based on ongoing data.

In leveraging the strengths of the group, leaders can highlight bright spots of instruction and use those classrooms for peer-to-peer observation sites. Growing the skills of all teachers through capacity building, collaboration, and trusting relationships is at the heart of successful change management.

Once positive changes begin to occur, the team should document the processes in place to achieve success, as well as the input from all stakeholders, to understand and sustain the change. Then it's time to plan for the next stage, including embedding professional learning for next year's new teachers and administrators. Too often, people forget about sustaining the change, so it is important to consider it throughout the entire implementation process.

PIVOT AND ADAPT

As school and district leaders seek to build leadership and embed implementation science with a focus

on professional learning, they must also be prepared to pivot and adapt their strategies based on emerging needs and challenges that teachers bring to the forefront.

This is possible when leaders are in classrooms regularly, discuss what they see with teachers without judgment, and collaborate with teachers on the implementation team to listen to what is going well and provide the support teachers need.

This requires a willingness to embrace innovation, iterate on existing practices, and course correct as necessary. It can be messy. By pivoting strategically and embracing a culture of continuous improvement, school and district leaders can forge a path for improved student success toward the transformative potential of powerful literacy education for all students.

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Residency model powers district's structured literacy reform

BY JEANNE SINCLAIR, JOELLE RODWAY, DELLA MAGNUSSON, BRITNEY MORRISH, AND NORMA ST. CROIX

The Canadian education system receives accolades on international assessments, yet nearly 1 in 5 of Canadian adults' literacy skills are at a basic level or below (Statistics Canada, 2013). For decades, Canadian early literacy instruction has tended to emphasize implicit, inquiry-based teaching of global competencies, to the exclusion of explicit skills instruction (Wyse & Bradbury, 2022).

While about 50% of children learn to read regardless of instructional style, many require explicit teaching in foundational skills to become successful readers. In fact, with effective instruction, over 90% of children can learn to read (Moats, 2020).

In 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that learning to read is a fundamental human right and failure to provide appropriate education

for students with reading disabilities is discriminatory (Moore v. British Columbia, 2012).

In Ontario, Canada's most populous province, the Human Rights Commission's inquiry in 2022 found the province's educational system was not adequately honoring this right, and its report called for policy and curricular changes across system levels. Provinces such as Manitoba and Saskatchewan recently launched similar Right to Read inquiries.

As a result, Evergreen School Division, in the Interlake region of Manitoba, initiated a change to structured literacy for its reading instruction, intervention, and assessment. Evergreen borders the shores of Lake Winnipeg from Chalet Beach north to Hecla Island. Its eight schools, with about 1,400 students, are situated in the four diverse communities of Arborg, Gimli, Riverton, and Winnipeg Beach.

During Evergreen's 2019 transition to a new superintendent, the division integrated student services and curriculum departments. This effort aimed to make available the full breadth of the division's expertise and talent for each priority — especially literacy. Meanwhile, Evergreen's learning coordinator was fielding questions from division principals about clinical assessment referrals and processes for identifying students to receive reading interventions.

Evergreen's middle and high schools were reporting that incoming students had significant literacy challenges. In addition, each primary school had its own variously rigorous system of identifying and monitoring students for literacy intervention.

Rather than relying on vague indicators of literacy proficiency such as running records (a formative assessment tool for coding and analyzing reading behaviors of a text read aloud), the divisional team sought evidence-based assessments that provided actionable insights into students' reading abilities.

Evergreen began a transition toward structured literacy to equip students with a literacy foundation by focusing on explicit instruction in decoding skills, fluency, vocabulary, and background knowledge. The vision for organizational change was clear: to equip teachers with tools that accurately assessed students' reading and to adapt teaching practices to meet learners' diverse needs.

In 2019, Evergreen's learning coordinator, with the school psychologist and speech-language pathologist, worked together to determine appropriate steps to improve reading instruction in Evergreen, which led to implementing structured literacy practices.

CULTIVATING A RESPONSIVE, SYSTEMWIDE LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

Building capacity for effective instruction is the responsibility of all educators within a school division (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016). From the onset, Evergreen's senior leaders understood that the successful integration of structured literacy would require cultivating a systemwide learning ecosystem (Díaz-Gibson et al., 2021). This ecosystem included educators across all levels, including senior leaders, school leaders, and, most importantly, classroom teachers and school-level support staff.

Evergreen's strategic approach began when upper-level administration recruited a learning coordinator to integrate curriculum and student services. Division leaders cultivated strong working relationships with

primary and elementary principals so the leadership team could have open, trusting conversations about current programs and curricula.

This enabled division leaders to understand principals' willingness to make significant changes to Tier 1, or whole-class, reading instruction, and Tier 2 and Tier 3 (more intensive) small-group interventions.

Across the system, educators supported and learned from and with each other as they sought to build their expertise. The result is a strengthened foundation that supports teachers' development of knowledge and expertise to integrate structured literacy into their diverse classroom contexts. In doing so, school and system leaders also built on their knowledge, particularly by creating conditions that empower teachers to invest in their instructional practice (Grissom et al., 2021).

In fall 2020, division leaders began learning as much as possible about structured literacy: reading articles, taking online courses, reviewing instructional resources, and talking to knowledgeable professionals. They hired a literacy consultant in 2022 who worked with principals to develop a plan that would be consistent across the division.

Evergreen offered school-based professional learning for teachers, and in spring 2022, a local Orton-Gillingham expert offered sessions to middle leadership. Around the same time, Evergreen established a research collaboration with faculty at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and together they drafted an explicit, foundational word knowledge scope and sequence to augment the Manitoba language curriculum.

Teachers engaged in comprehensive structured literacy professional learning in spring 2022. Following this, they participated in a virtual professional learning community (PLC) to introduce the new scope and sequence.

However, it quickly became apparent that this approach did not adequately support teachers, who reported being overwhelmed and discouraged by the rollout. This was partly due to simultaneously managing COVID-19 learning loss and associated behavioral challenges.

PIVOTING TO A RESIDENCY MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Within weeks, Evergreen pivoted to a residency model of classroom-embedded professional learning. Evergreen's literacy consultant identified teachers interested in exploring new structured literacy curriculum materials. She organized weeklong residencies where she demonstrated daily lessons and equipped teachers with resources to sustain the instruction independently. Initially, she reached out to teachers with whom she had previous relationships.

Despite initial reservations about a scripted curriculum, teachers quickly realized its advantages in maintaining consistency and alignment, providing clarity, enhancing efficiency, fostering student engagement, and implementing evidence-based practice. Many reported the scripts were a powerful learning resource.

Enthusiasm spread throughout the school, prompting requests from other teachers. Educators across the division eagerly signed up for residencies. Following each week-long residency, the consultant conducted visits to support teachers as they implemented the new curriculum, ensuring fidelity to the instructional approach. Additionally, she collaborated with teachers to review and refine the divisional scope and sequence, ensuring alignment with grade-level expectations.

To support Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention, Evergreen's speech-language pathologist developed a PLC model whereby interventionists met once every six weeks to discuss student data and responsive teaching. Teachers engaged in professional learning and shared videos of their teaching for feedback. Between PLCs, the speech-language pathologist met with each interventionist to observe lessons, discuss data, and provide feedback.

DATA REVEAL CONSISTENT IMPROVEMENT

We conducted an impact study, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (grant number 892-2022-3020), and the early results are promising. The chart on p. 57 illustrates a trend of closing the literacy skills gap over the 2022-23 school year, but perhaps even more consequential is that the 2023-24 data reveal smaller disparities between the beginning and end of the year than in the previous year.

IMPLICATIONS

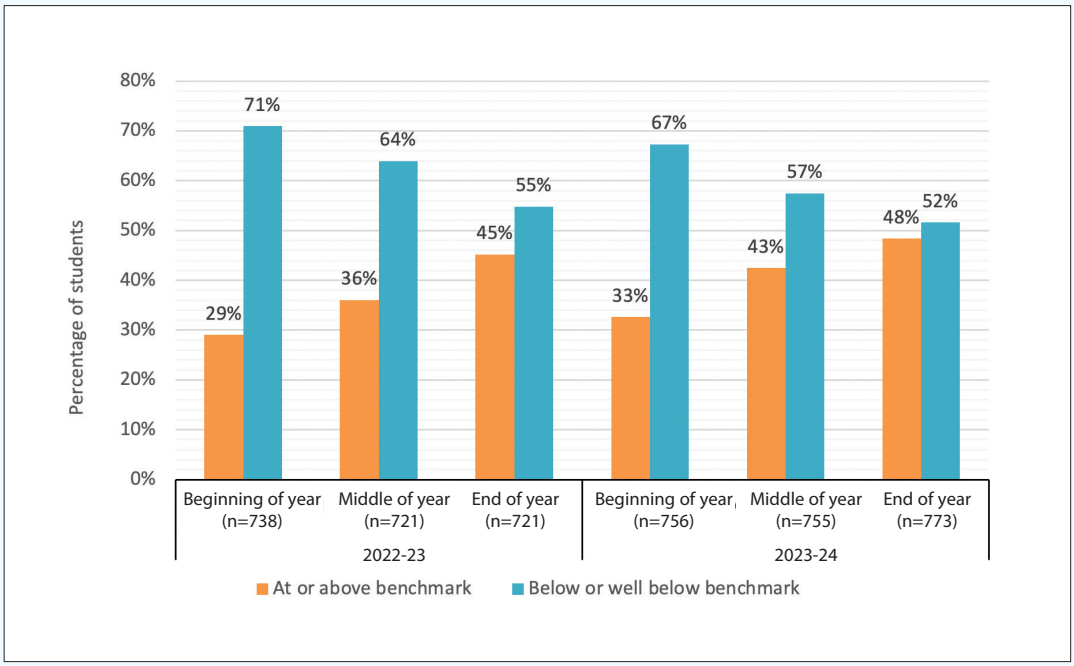
Evergreen's locally developed structured literacy initiative was galvanized by the Right to Read inquiries that continue to resonate across Canada. While Evergreen has made great strides toward achieving its goals, fidelity to the structured literacy program is still a work in progress.

The division's ongoing commitment to cultivating strong relationships enables collaboration and consistency across schools: deep and sustained learning through continuous, targeted, and practical professional learning, regular assessment of program effectiveness, and adjustments based on feedback and outcomes.

Our learning over the past three years emphasizes the importance of creating new positions that enable creative leadership and finding the right people to realize and evolve those positions, nurturing trusting relationships among educators at all levels of the system, and fostering an environment for all educators and leaders to be able to be learners — that is, where they can make themselves vulnerable.

Evergreen's model illustrates system reform through a lens of an intrinsic, educator-motivated, data-driven

CHANGES IN EVERGREEN'S READING BENCHMARK SCORES 2022-24



Note: Data are DIBELS composite scores, grades K-6.

approach. This model emphasizes improvement in teaching based on local needs and input, rather than external pressures.

Sustained investment in communication, trust-building, and deprivatization of practice can continue to generate new resources and ideas to support Evergreen's systemwide reform. In highlighting critical elements of a model that is leading to successful educational reform, our hope is that Evergreen's story can serve as a case study to prompt discussion, reflection, and learning for colleagues who are focused on improving reading instruction.

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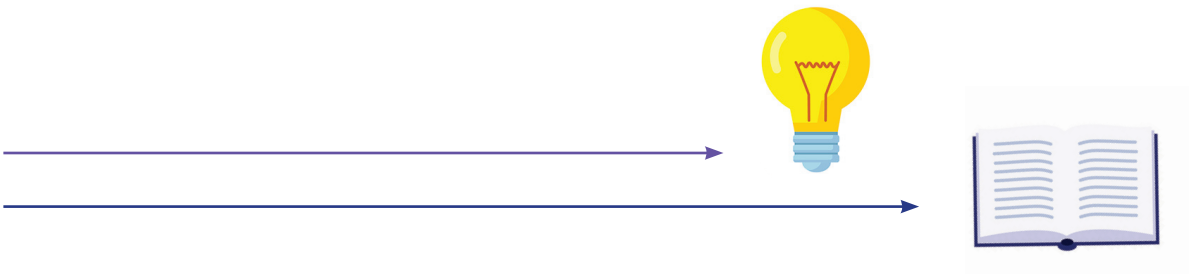
Choice and agency drive educators' engagement in online literacy course

BY MCKENZIE RABENN AND PAMELA BECK

Many teachers have strong beliefs about the way literacy should be taught, despite what the research shows about how students learn best. If an educator's existing beliefs about literacy clash with updated instructional understandings and methods about the science of reading, there's a likelihood that teachers may resist embracing change and filter out new learning, regardless of its strong research base. However, our recent study indicated the potential for overcoming initial resistance when professional learning incorporates certain design principles (Rabenn, 2023).

The qualitative study focused on teachers' experiences with a mandated science of reading self-paced online course to examine teachers' level of engagement and buy-in. The course was designed for K-3 teachers and included 15 hours of content over six modules to be completed at participants' own pace within four months of enrollment.



We conducted semi-structured interviews with seven participants located throughout a sparsely populated Midwestern state using the Zoom platform. The participants were elementary school teachers, interventionists, and administrators at diverse stages in their careers, with experience ranging from five years to 42.

At the beginning of the course, participants held initial hesitancy and skepticism regarding the relevance and effectiveness of the science of reading. For example, one said, "I'm a 4th-grade teacher. So, I thought, well, how could this be relevant to me?" Another said, "I did have a little bit of doubt, like, 'Oh, here comes another (program such as) whole language or focus on phonics or whatever.' " Another participant said, "I was a little defensive … like, 'Well, you know, what's the big difference? This has worked for other kids for years and years. Why would we change it?' "

Despite initial resistance, however, participants exhibited a positive shift in their perceptions of the science of reading after taking the course. One initially hesitant teacher said, "I truly value the course. It aids my students." Another said, "I feel much more confident and assured now. I can assess students and better understand how to assist them."

Our interviews with participants suggested the shift occurred, in part, because the program allowed a high degree of educator autonomy and choices that encouraged participants' engagement, satisfaction, and depth of learning.

AUTONOMY WITH SETTING, LEARNING PATHS, AND PACING

With adult learning, offering autonomy over the learning process has been shown to be effective in enhancing motivation, decreasing stress levels, and boosting participation and achievement (Paterson & Neufeld, 1995; Drea, 2021). Autonomy in choosing reading material bolsters intrinsic motivation and engagement, subsequently influencing knowledge acquisition (Cho & Perry, 2012; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014).

Consistent with such approaches, participants in this online course had varying degrees of choice with learning engagement and in pacing the readings. Participants took varied approaches to these choices. Some selectively engaged with articles, selecting what resonated most. Others were compelled to read every article, regardless of personal interest, but they reported less engagement and satisfaction.

Participants also had choices in how they completed a journal reflection at the completion of each module. The journal assignment began with a plethora of prompts. Some were consistent between modules — for example, "Talk about your takeaways from this module." Others were tied to a specific article within a module — for example, "After reading the blog post on 'Five things every teacher should know about vocabulary instruction,' what elements of the article resonate with you?"

Writing about what interested them empowered participants to reflect on what was most relevant. This had a positive influence on their engagement, promoted deeper thinking, and sparked transformative shifts in beliefs as evidenced in participants' instructional plans.

Choice of learning environment also proved critical in facilitating comfort and focus. Opting for familiar and conducive environments reduced distractions, positively influencing satisfaction and knowledge acquisition. By selecting where they took the course, participants could engage more deeply with the material compared to a potentially restrictive in-person setting.

The self-paced nature of the course allowed participants to tailor their learning, considering personal schedules and readiness. The pause feature in the program ensured they didn't miss out on valuable content, a luxury not available when in person. Pausing allowed educators to address distractions, actively manage their time, and optimize learning. This practice aligns with markers of effective online learning, fostering a deeper understanding of the content.

BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

In adult learning, it is paramount to build on learners' rich experiences

and prior knowledge. Failing to acknowledge expertise can lead to resistance and hinder confidence. One way this course addressed that was by reassuring participants that some practices used in balanced literacy approaches are also encouraged in science of reading, such as using high-quality read-alouds.

The course also built on participants' prior experiences by asking participants to create lesson plans that integrated new knowledge with existing expertise. While we didn't expect participants would teach the lesson plan with their students, our hope was that the lesson plan would allow participants to think about the ways in which they could implement the topics from the course with their own students.

This process of reflection and application ensured the learning was not solely theoretical, which facilitated a deeper understanding of the content and prompted changes in their instructional beliefs. It also supported engagement and built confidence. Creating lesson plans prompted participants to rethink how to apply course learning to their grade levels, and this resulted in shifts in teaching practice.

Throughout, the course acknowledged that many teachers had been taught about meaning-based literacy practices and balanced literacy in their education coursework and schools' curriculum materials, absolving teachers from guilt over having used methodologies that are not grounded in research on how students actually learn to read. Additionally, the difficulties of teachers' work and the level of change that was being asked of them was acknowledged (Margolis & Nagel, 2006).

It also reassured participants about the intersection between meaning-based and code-based practices. Code-based and meaning-based instruction have been hotly debated topics in the field of education for decades.

Meaning-based approaches place an emphasis on getting students

engaged in texts first and then teaching skills within those texts. Proponents for meaning-based approaches argue that reading is as natural a process as learning to walk or talk and that exposure to print will eventually lead to skilled readers. In a code-based or phonics approach, teachers organize instruction around a scope and sequence of word reading skills, moving from simpler to more complex skills.

LIMITATIONS

The autonomous online approach did present some drawbacks. Some participants expressed a desire for collaborative engagement, and the absence of peer interaction negatively impacted overall program satisfaction for some.

This desire for more interaction was consistent with the Culture of Collaborative Inquiry standard in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, which calls for the ongoing development of collective knowledge to best meet student needs (Learning Forward, 2022). This highlighted the intrinsic value of peer support and collaboration in reinforcing new concepts and boosting confidence.

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

Going forward, the long-term sustainability of integrating practices aligned with the science of reading demands a continuous focus on professional learning and ongoing support for educators. To best equip educators, sustained momentum relies on fostering a culture of continuous learning and establishing a framework for continuous support and learning opportunities that address the evolving educator needs and integrate opportunities for teacher autonomy. Through professional learning that includes educator agency, educational paradigm shifts like this are possible.

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REACH. INVESTIGATE. DISCOVER.

IDEAS

FACTORS THAT SHAPE COACHING

Instructional coaching is a complex role that is shaped by many factors, including internal beliefs and external structures. Joellen Killion (p. 62) describes how beliefs about coaching, comfort, and challenge shape whether coaches engage in "coaching heavy" or "coaching light." Evthokia Stephanie Saclarides and Jen Munson (p. 68) examine how school leaders and structures affect coaches' access to classrooms, along with tips for leaders to support their coach colleagues.

Coaching heavy, coaching light: How to deepen professional practice

BY JOELLEN KILLION

In 2008, I introduced the concepts of coaching heavy and coaching light as a way to think about the depth and impact of coaching practice (Killion, 2008). When I first wrote about this, the terms *heavy* and *light* were often misunderstood. Some readers perceived that heavy coaching is critical, directive, and even abrasive, while light coaching might be frivolous.

The confusion continued because coaching heavy and light can appear similar in practice to an untrained eye and ear because both involve communication strategies such as listening, questioning, paraphrasing, pausing, and positive presuppositions. These misconceptions often interfered with a deeper understanding of the concepts and their application in practice.

In subsequent pieces (Killion, 2009, 2010), I addressed some of the

I use the terms *heavy* and *light* because they emphasize the weight, seriousness, and significance of each type of coaching. *Heavy* connotes that a greater level of effort is required by both the coach and client and also that this type of coaching leads to more significant impact. Coaching heavy is about facing what is overwhelming and scary and daunting — and also meaningful and impactful.

controversial points and clarified the concept, such as emphasizing that the difference comes more from the coaches' beliefs about coaching and their identity rather than their actions.

Yet while many coaches and supervisors now stress the distinction between coaching heavy and coaching light, there remains some confusion. In essence, the distinction for some remains locked inside how coaching is done rather than in the driving beliefs and intentions of the coach. In this article, I draw on extensive interactions with coaches and supervisors and my own deepened understanding to offer more clarity about how coaches' beliefs and intended outcomes affect their actions and ultimately their coaching practice.

By exploring the distinction more deeply from the perspectives of beliefs, challenges, and comfort, I hope to encourage coaches and their supervisors to examine the distinction between coaching heavy and coaching light and their impact on clients.

WHAT THESE TERMS MEAN

Let me begin by saying what coaching heavy and coaching light are not. They are not equivalent to directive and facilitative coaching, approaches described by my colleague Jim Knight. Nor are they about being harsh versus soft or about correcting ineffective practices versus ignoring them, as some have assumed. Others have incorrectly assumed that coaching heavy is more mentoring or consulting than coaching.

I use the terms *heavy* and *light* because they emphasize the weight, seriousness, and significance of each type of coaching. *Heavy* connotes that a greater level of effort is required by both the coach and client and also that this type of coaching leads to more significant impact. Coaching heavy is about facing what is overwhelming and scary and daunting — and also meaningful and impactful.

The work instructional coaches do when they are coaching heavy in schools is about students' academic and social-emotional and physical well-being. It is about students succeeding in school to contribute to their future potential beyond school. It is also about educators' well-being and their engagement in reaching their full potential as professionals within an environment that values learning and continuous improvement.

In contrast, coaching light is less about the client needs and more about the coach needs. I find that, when coaching light, coaches are often driven by unacknowledged or unrealized intentions to be perceived as experts or as rescuers. In their drive to be liked and appreciated by their clients, coaches fail to challenge clients, believe in their professional capacity or potential, or allow them to manifest agency in their work. Clients may end up becoming perceived or real victims who are being rescued or even persecuted by a coach. This dynamic creates a subconscious force leading to resistance to coaching.

Coaching heavy may have a greater effect on student learning and teaching practices because it moves the work of coaching into the professional realm of continuous growth. When coaching is light, it can be perceived as frivolous or not useful because it doesn't tackle the challenges and dilemmas teachers face in their classrooms. Teachers may perceive that they are going through the motions, even serving the coach more than the other way around.

In my first article about this topic (Killion, 2008), I shared that some coaches preferred the terms *coaching shallow* and *coaching deep*. I appreciated their choice of alternate words to soften the impact of heavy and light and invoke a swimming metaphor. In shallow water, I explained, both the coach and teacher feel safe. They can touch bottom. But they have a limited perspective of what it means to swim

CONTRASTING BELIEFS	
Coaching light	**Coaching heavy**
Taking extended time to build a trusting relationship is essential for successful coaching.	Productive, constructive, and trusting relationships emerge from engaging with integrity in significant work together.
Being accepted gives me more leverage to support teachers.	Being accepted interferes with the willingness to engage in conversation on what matters most — student learning.
Being viewed as credible is essential to being a coach.	Credibility emerges from the alignment between one's actions and one's words. Acting on what matters builds credibility.
Teachers seek me out for my expertise.	Being an expert imbalances the relationship between the coach and client and limits the client's potential and capacity.
The work of coaches is to support teachers.	A coach's primary responsibility is to improve student learning through building teachers' capacity. Saying that a coach's role is to support teachers misleads teachers and may contribute to unintended resistance.
Teachers resist change.	As professionals, teachers want to be the best they can be. Teachers may not be ready for change until they understand the reasons for it, understand how to make the change, feel supported in the process, and trust that their efforts will make a difference.
Coaches are not accountable or responsible for teachers' decisions and actions.	Coaches emphasize teachers' agency, efficacy, and expertise.
Coaches build teachers' knowledge base about effective instruction.	Coaches support teachers to be accountable to themselves and responsible for their students' success by examining the interaction among their decisions, actions, and results and exploring barriers to the desired outcomes. By engaging in dialogue to surface the assumptions, reflective questioning, and examining data, coaches can influence what teachers think and do.
Coaches build teachers' knowledge base about effective instruction.	Coaches' primary responsibility is moving knowledge to practice so students benefit from excellent teaching. Knowing is not the same as doing.

because they can still stand. They are experiencing neither the stress nor the rewards of being in open water.

In deep water, however, both the coach and the teacher are out of their comfort zone since they must depend on their swimming skills to be safe (unless they are experienced and highly competent "swimmers"). Depending on their skills, they may experience anxiety or even fear. This dissonance requires novice swimmers to pay closer attention to their decisions and lean into coaching to gain the expertise to swim. Coaches can alleviate their clients' fear with temporary flotation devices while they remind clients of their training, reinforce their belief that they can swim, help them navigate their fears, and celebrate with them the feeling of being safe in the water.

HOW BELIEFS IMPACT COACHING

The distinction between coaching heavy and light is rooted in coaches' intentions and beliefs as well as their willingness to step out of their comfort zone. Digging deeply to identify existing beliefs, examining them, and adjusting them as necessary is hard work, yet the rewards are boundless.

Some beliefs interfere with coaches' capability to coach heavy, holding them firmly in a coaching light space, unknowingly or knowingly, and therefore limiting the potential impact of their coaching. The list of contrasting beliefs above illustrates how coaches' beliefs can have side effects that influence coaching and its results.

When a coach's beliefs are centered more on the left side, the resulting

MAKING THE TRANSITION	
From coaching light …	**To coaching heavy**
Focus on teaching practices identified by teachers.	Focus on student learning and the use of specific practices within the school's or district's instructional framework, teachers' performance standards, or aligned with the adopted curriculum.
Share data from observations of teaching practices.	Use data from observations on the interaction among student learning, engagement, and achievement and teaching practices.
Invite teacher self-assessment based on perceptions or opinions.	Use student data to assess the results of instruction.
Solicit voluntary coaching clients — only those teachers who request coaching receive it.	Expect all teachers to engage in coaching for continuous improvement through coach-mediated inquiry about planning and reflection on instruction and student learning.
Focus on implementing or refining low effect-size instructional practices.	Focus on deep understanding of the theory and research underlying high effect-size instructional practices to attain executive control.
Focus on the process of instructional practices.	Focus on examining beliefs and testing assumptions for deep transformation of practice.
Emphasize teacher's feeling of being supported.	Emphasize teacher's agency, efficacy, and expertise.
Accept excuses.	Focus on next actions.
Share guidance, advice, or own experiences.	Ask questions to create the preferred future.
Hold a fixed mindset about self and client.	Hold a growth mindset about self and client.

coaching is lighter. For example, if a coach shows up as an expert in a conversation, she is driven by the belief that she deeply understands the context and has the solutions to the presenting problem.

With this assumption, the coach moves into the role of a consultant with a list of *you shoulds*. The teacher has limited opportunity to engage in cognitive struggle, explore the situation and its impact on the presenting problem, consider a wide range of options available, and engage in the process of making decisions — hallmarks of coaching heavy.

What the coach believes, how the coach shows up in the conversation, what the conversation is about, and the level and depth of the teacher's cognitive engagement determine the heaviness of the coaching interaction.

Beliefs are not immutable, of course, and neither are coaching practices. But making the shift from coaching light to coaching heavy requires first that coaches examine their own mental models about who they are as coaches, the expectations of their coaching program and supervisors, and the expectations of their clients.

In some cases, coaches are caught between conflicting expectations and beliefs of others and themselves. The list of contrasting beliefs can help coaches assess their own beliefs and serve as a reference point for the coach and coaching program supervisors to unpack the beliefs and expectations they hold about coaching.

Once coaches' beliefs are aligned with coaching heavy, they can transition their practice by focusing on content and using the practices, described in the table above, associated with coaching heavy. It is important to note that coaches can use some of these practices while coaching light, yet they will have less impact if the root beliefs driving the actions are not aligned.

MIXING COMFORT AND CHALLENGE

Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990) wrote about flow, a mental state in which an individual is fully immersed in an activity, focused to the point of being unaware of outside distractions, and deriving satisfaction from their

COMFORT-CHALLENGE MATRIX: THE COACH PERSPECTIVE

Degree of comfort		Low challenge	High challenge
	High	• Gives advice. • Seeks to be perceived as expert. • Perceives the client as victim of circumstances. • Rescues client from challenging situations. • Builds dependency on coach. • Feels confident and useful. • Avoids using data.	• Sees client as capable and growth-oriented. • Engages client in cognitive struggle to examine and address challenges as routine, invited, and expected for continuous growth and learning. • Holds client responsible for generating or seeking co-production of options to address complex situations. • Feels tension of uncertainty and vulnerability. • Holds client accountable for choosing next actions.
	Low	• Accepts current state. • Offers little or no encouragement for change. • Avoids addressing possible areas for growth.	• Fosters mistrust. • Damages relationship. • Contributes to client's defensiveness or withdrawal from coaching. • Fosters the client's perception of coach as persecutor.
		Low	High
		Degree of challenge	

COMFORT-CHALLENGE MATRIX: THE CLIENT PERSPECTIVE

Degree of comfort		Low challenge	High challenge
	High	• Perceives coaching as time-consuming. • Appreciates being recognized as a professional. • Enjoys the conversations and companionship. • Appreciates knowing others experience similar situations. • Appreciates being a member of the community. • Feels little urgency for change.	• Feels cognitively and professionally challenged. • Explores and addresses challenges as routine, invited, and expected for continuous growth and learning as a professional. • Holds self responsible and accountable for generating or seeking options to address complex situations. • Engages in a community of practice. • Uses data to drive decisions. • Feels an urgency to extend, refine, or change practice to increase student results. • Gains efficacy, agency, and expertise.
	Low	• Appreciates sympathy. • Hesitates to identify or acknowledge challenges or problems. • Appreciates compliments and advice. • Perceives little value in coaching. • Compares self to coach.	• Lacks psychological safety. • Damages relationship. • Defends or rationalizes actions and decisions. • Blames conditions and others, especially students. • Withdraws from or resists coaching. • Feels judged or evaluated. • Fears data. • Feels overwhelmed.
		Low	High
		Degree of challenge	

engagement. For many people, flow is when they do their best and most fulfilling work.

Flow is facilitated by situations in which one's level of skill and degree of challenge are balanced so that the work seems significant and doable. When the work is too challenging, those without appropriate skills may not persist or believe they can find a way forward. When the work is too easy, it loses its significance, and those engaged may not find it valuable.

When coaches help teachers experience a state of flow, coaching can have a deep impact and facilitate clients' thinking to recognize their ability to achieve results and realize their potential. Coaching heavy is more conducive to flow than coaching light. In coaching heavy, teachers feel a sense of challenge and are supported to develop efficacy and agency to address the challenges they face through an inquiry lens. Conversely, when teachers perceive their interactions with coaches as light, they may perceive them as time-consuming, not valuable, or not worth the effort.

The tables on p. 66 depict the interaction between comfort and challenge from both the coach's and client's perspectives. When the degree of comfort and challenge for both the coach and client are high (the shaded top right quadrants of the tables), coaching heavy is occurring and the client has the greatest potential to benefit from coaching.

When coaching heavy, coaches develop a relationship with their clients by engaging in challenging work, acknowledging the complexity of teaching, and cultivating self-efficacy and agency in their clients. They let go of the need to be the expert, are willing to take risks to engage in uncomfortable interactions, and encourage and share vulnerability.

They believe, as do their clients, that the answers to the most complex questions about teaching and learning are worth the effort to discover. As Michael Bungay Stanier states, "We unlock our greatness by working on the hard things. That's because the hard things break the status quo and break us out of the comfort of our Present Self. Growth means getting a little bent out of shape. And bent into the new shape of Future You" (Stanier, 2024).

MAKING THE CHOICE TO COACH HEAVY

To coach heavy means first that coaches examine their own beliefs about the purpose of coaching, how change happens, and the expected results of coaching, then situate these beliefs in the context in which they coach. They are aware of their clients' beliefs about coaching and explore those beliefs with their clients.

Not all instructional coaching programs expect coaches to promote reflection, metacognition, curiosity, and inquiry as the means to achieve results for students through developing professional expertise, efficacy, and agency. Some expect coaches to work from a technical or expert stance to develop, implement, and even evaluate particular practices that have been adopted for use. In either case, coaches still have the potential to coach heavy or light.

Coaching heavy requires that coaches move to the edge of or beyond their comfort zone and even their competence to model for and invite teachers to acknowledge that vulnerability and uncertainty lead to openness and willingness to refine practice and results. When coaches opt to stay in their own or in teachers' comfort zone too long, they limit the impact of their work and even waste their precious time and limit the impact of coaching. For some coaches, the thought of this produces tremendous anxiety, hence an openness to what might seem overwhelming and scary to reap rewards and what originally seemed daunting.

The decision to coach heavy or light is the coach's to make, yet the immediate impacts on the client and their future development are significant. Some might argue that coaching light builds relationships and is appropriate for early coaching interactions. The danger here is establishing a precedent that cannot be easily altered.

Coaching light may also become or be a habit developed over years of practice and, as a result, has become a normative practice and expectation in schools. Yet all habits, even this one, can change with persistence and practice. How a coach coaches affects not only teachers and their instructional practice but also their students and the field of coaching as well.

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Forces that shape coaches' classroom access

BY EVTHOKIA STEPHANIE SACLARIDES AND JEN MUNSON

For coaches, access to classrooms isn't straightforward and is far from guaranteed. Access is a prerequisite for coaching, yet there are many barriers beyond a coach's control, making their job difficult to impossible.

In our recent interview study with 28 content-focused coaches in one school district with an established coaching program, we asked coaches about their access to classrooms for coaching work (Munson & Saclarides, 2022, 2024; Saclarides & Munson, 2022).

They described both the barriers and the support, which we refer to as forces, that influenced their classroom access but were beyond their control. Of note, coaches pointed to administrators and school structures as formidable forces that played a meaningful role in either facilitating or impeding their classroom access (Munson & Saclarides, 2024).

For instance, Eliza, an English

language arts coach in the study, said that administrators who sent coaches into classrooms to covertly gather and report information on teachers could have a tangible impact on the coach's relationships with teachers and their trust for the coach, ultimately influencing whether those teachers granted the coach entry. "If I felt the pressure of administration to find information or go into rooms, that would really put me at a major disadvantage and really break my relationships (with teachers)," she said.

For Claire, an elementary mathematics coach, school schedules were a significant barrier to access because when math instruction and intervention were scheduled simultaneously, Claire's capacity to offer coaching was limited. Claire said, "I have (student intervention) groups many times when teachers are teaching math. So I can't get into the classrooms. … That is a real dilemma for me, and I think it's a real dilemma for a lot of us."

In this article, we detail how five administrative and structural forces shaped coaches' access to teachers' classrooms. We include recommendations for school and district leaders for how to best support coach access and, ultimately, the efficacy of coaching programs.

HOW SCHOOL LEADERS IMPACT COACHES' ACCESS TO CLASSROOMS

Coaches said district and school administrators shaped their classroom access for coaching work in three ways: their value for the coach's role, their direct actions to promote or protect coaching, and their efforts to foster a culture of professional learning.

Administrator value for coaches' role

From the coaches' perspectives, their school and district administrators' value (or lack thereof) for the coaching role was an important force that impacted their classroom access for coaching work.

Coaches had greater access when supportive school- and district-level administrators fostered an open door policy with the coach, promoted ongoing communication with the coach, and asked coaches about their needs.

Coaches felt supported when they shared a common vision with their administrator for the coaching role, one whose primary function was to support teacher learning and instructional improvement.

On the other hand, coaches said that when administrators didn't understand or value their role as coaches, classroom access could be constrained. For example, when administrators didn't perceive that the coach's primary role was to support teaching and learning through professional learning at schools, or when administrators tried to position their coaches as fellow administrators or evaluators of teachers, coaches' access was inhibited, and teachers didn't open their classroom doors for coaching work.

Direct administrator actions that promote or protect coaching

Coaches frequently pointed to the different ways in which direct actions from administrators could support or limit their classroom access for coaching work. Giving coaches autonomy about issues related to coaching, such as creating their own coaching schedules and deciding

which teachers to coach, enhanced coaches' access because they could make decisions that responded to new opportunities or teacher needs.

Administrators who provided coaches with materials, such as mathematics manipulatives or leveled readers, to use with teachers in the context of professional learning publicly positioned coaches as a form of professional support to all teachers.

Alternatively, coaches pointed to administrator actions that disrupted their classroom access. In particular, classroom access was strained when administrators assigned coaches additional duties that took them away from coaching or didn't provide sufficient direction.

Administrator fosters a culture of professional learning

Coaches said the culture of professional learning that an administrator fostered — or didn't foster — at their school sites actively shaped their classroom access. In our dataset, this force was only discussed in a supportive manner.

Coaches' access was enhanced when their administrator communicated a vision for high-quality instruction to the entire school community, which encompassed articulating an instructional improvement vision and promoting public practice among teachers to support ongoing professional learning.

Although coaches didn't talk about this force as inhibiting their classroom access, the converse is likely true: The lack of an administrator-articulated culture of professional learning could ultimately hurt coaches' access to teachers' classrooms. For example, if a school administrator doesn't create norms of an open door policy among teachers, then teachers may be more reluctant to make their teaching public and open their classroom to a coach.

HOW SCHOOL STRUCTURES IMPACT COACHES' ACCESS TO CLASSROOMS

Coaches also described two ways that school and district structures shaped their access to teachers' classrooms for coaching work: structures of time and workload and district policies toward coaching.

Structures of time and workload

Most coaches pointed to the influence of time and workload structures on their classroom access. In particular, coaches' access was supported when they had structured professional learning time with teachers (e.g., grade-level team meetings, whole-school professional learning) built into the school schedule.

These professional learning structures enabled coaches to come into regular contact with teachers, gather information about their professional learning interests and needs, and use access-granting strategies to spark coaching work.

Coaches also said structured professional learning time to meet with other coaches in their district enabled them, as a coaching community, to discuss their shared problems of practice — such as gaining classroom access for coaching work — and problem-solve.

Conversely, coaches pointed to several time and workload structures that impeded classroom access. For example, access was negatively impacted when the school schedule didn't provide them with sufficient time to meet with teachers or they were responsible for coaching too many teachers to make any tangible impact.

District policies toward coaching

Last, coaches noted how particular district policies shaped their access to teachers' classrooms. Similar to the administrative force of fostering a culture of professional learning, coaches only described how district policies seemed to enhance their classroom access.

Coaches said a clear and focused job description for the coach's role sent the message to teachers that the coach's job was to support teacher learning. Coaches also said the implementation of new policies at the district level, such as new formative assessment and technology tools, supported their access by creating new learning needs for teachers, who, in turn, sought out coaching.

Last, coaches said teacher growth plans supported their classroom access as teachers often sought coaches' help to meet their professional learning goals. One can easily imagine how district policies could have the opposite effect and negatively impact coaches' access to teachers' classrooms. For example, a school district could lack a job description for the coach's role completely, or have one that is unfocused or unclear, which could ultimately obscure the coach's role or position the coach as an evaluator, hindering access to teachers' classrooms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

If you have coaches in your school district or building, you likely want them to gain access to classrooms so they can support teacher learning and instructional improvement. So what is your role?

Our research shows that administrators and school structures play a powerful role in shaping coaches' access. To use the authority you have to support coaches' access, and ultimately your coaching program, we have developed the following tips.

Understand the coach's role and how that role can support teacher learning, district goals, and school leaders' vision. View the coach as an integral part of a healthy and growing professional community. Cultivate a culture of professional learning that all engage in — through professional learning, coaching, and collaboration — toward a shared vision of teaching and learning.

Have a focused and clear job description for coaches that articulates that the coach's job is to support teacher learning. Stick to the job description and resist the urge to assign coaches other duties that are significantly time-consuming, such as testing coordinator, interventionist, or substitute teacher. Protecting time for coaching sends the message to all that engaging in coaching is valued and supported.

Position coaches as support for all teachers to access, not only new or struggling teachers. Make participation in coaching normative and valued in your school. Promote participating in coaching as a way teachers can engage deeply with their practice and the questions that inevitably arise when they strive to meet the needs of all learners.

Set aside time for coaches to meet with teachers for professional learning (e.g., co-planning, co-teaching, lesson study, etc.), and make it normative for coaches to be involved in this work with teachers. Think about how these times can be distributed across the school schedule so that coaches can take part in the maximum number of opportunities to collaborate with teachers.

For content-focused coaches who coach teachers in just one academic discipline, consider spreading out the teaching of a given discipline across the day so coaches have increased access. This is particularly true for elementary schools, where school schedules sometimes concentrate the teaching of disciplines like English language arts and math in the morning, making it challenging for coaches to access all classrooms.

Be mindful of your coaches' workload. How many teachers is it reasonable and possible for one coach to support in a school year? If too much is demanded, coaching will either be absent in many classrooms or so diluted it may not have a meaningful impact.

Carefully consider the role coaches can and should play in new district-level initiatives or policies. When these initiatives involve teacher learning, they may allow coaches access to classrooms that are currently off-limits. However, resist using coaches to enforce or police policies, which can damage coach-teacher relationships and compromise access.

Coaches need community. For districts or schools with multiple coaches, create ways for coaches to connect to develop strategies for gaining access and support one another's professional learning.

While much attention has understandably focused on what coaches do to support teaching and learning — the activities, structures, and tools of effective professional learning — we can't take for granted that coaches will be invited into classrooms and teachers' practice to do this work.

School leaders and school structures can play a pivotal role in supporting or constraining classroom access and, ultimately, the entire coaching endeavor. Given the substantial resources that establishing a coaching program requires (Knight, 2012), it is incumbent on districts and administrators to leverage their authority to position coaches for effectiveness.

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3 practices promote intercultural understanding in Canada

BY DENISE HEPPNER

From 2008 to 2014, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada documented the stories of thousands of Indigenous residential school survivors. Released in 2015, the final report included 94 Calls to Action: instructions to guide governments, communities, and faith groups towards reconciliation.

Several of these Calls to Action are related to education, including asking that teachers engage in professional learning on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms and building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

In Saskatchewan, teachers are guided by educational policy that envisions placing Indigenous knowledge systems, cultures, and languages at the

foundation of our structures, policies, and curricula to create a system that is equitable and inclusive, benefiting all learners (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018).

Educators see the importance of this vision and genuinely work toward this goal. However, non-Indigenous teachers remain uncertain about how to do this within their classrooms. Some comments from a recent professional learning opportunity for educators are revealing: "As someone who is not Indigenous, I don't feel like I can teach the content fairly. I'm not educated enough — how can I educate our youth? I'm trying!" "I don't know how to do it!" "I don't understand!"

Saskatchewan teachers are not alone. Research shows that teachers across Canada feel unprepared to incorporate Indigenous content and perspectives into the classroom (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2015). The challenge is that when people feel uncomfortable and intimidated, they may choose not to engage in it at all. As a result, Indigenous children don't see themselves reflected in their classrooms, and non-Indigenous children don't learn about this land's first — and continuing — inhabitants.

This is vulnerable work, requiring both personal and professional learning. What follows are three transformative concepts — two from Indigenous cultures — that I, as a non-Indigenous educator, found useful in my own learning as well as guiding the learning of teachers and school-based leaders. These concepts created a shift in thinking and practice.

1.

WAYFINDING

Wayfinding refers to the various ways in which people orient themselves in physical space and how they navigate from place to place. This term has been expanded to encompass the idea that we can adopt the spirit of wayfinding as we navigate cultures that are not our own.

Disorientation is a common occurrence as we enter unfamiliar locations or experiences. It can be uncomfortable and even scary as we might feel lost during such moments. There might be mistakes, confrontations, apologies, clarifications, and reorientations, but navigating the journey of getting lost and finding our way is a process.

Wayfinding encourages continuous reorientation for effective teaching and a deeper connection with students. Being lost involves struggle and growth. It "is not a location; it is a transformation" (Gonzales, 2003), one that assists us in finding our way.

Modeling this stance while leading professional learning has led to deep conversations around feeling lost, vulnerability, and a growth mindset. Embracing challenges and taking risks in adopting a growth mindset is inherently messy.

The twists and turns of this nonlinear learning process contribute to personal development. To thrive, one must get comfortable with being uncomfortable, as discomfort signals the expansion of one's knowledge boundaries, fostering innovation and self-improvement.

After exploring the concept of wayfinding, teachers have reported feeling a notable shift in that they are willing to consider taking more risks and adopting an inquiry stance alongside their students. This transformation is marked by an increasing understanding that as teachers it's OK to admit when we don't know or might be wrong.

For example, one teacher assumed the role of learner alongside her students when an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper led the class through stretching and fleshing a moose hide. She said,

"Knowing the journey and honoring this sacrifice of this animal, tracing the veins with my finger, has stirred something deep. I am so excited to continue this journey and learn alongside some inspiring and humble humans."

A collaborative learning environment that allows vulnerability and humility contributes to a more enriching learning environment, enhances teacher-student relationships, and fosters a culture of adaptability and lifelong learning.

2.

TWO-EYED SEEING

Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall coined the term *two-eyed seeing* as a model for education and a guiding principle for cross-cultural collaboration. "Two-eyed seeing is to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" for the benefit of all (Hatcher & Bartlett, 2010).

In working with Indigenous educators, I have learned that two-eyed seeing is a type of cultural humility. By engaging in the process of self-reflection, I humbly acknowledged myself as a learner when it came to understanding the experiences of my Indigenous colleagues. In recognizing personal and systemic biases and strengths, we can move toward an educational system that honors the diverse teaching and knowledge foundations of both Western and Indigenous societies.

Two-eyed seeing asks that Western and Indigenous ways of knowing work together as eyes do in binocular vision, but, depending on the situation, we can choose to call on the strengths of one or the other. This requires an understanding of the core differences between worldviews to achieve respectful relationships and cultural harmony.

Marshall explains, "We need teachers who can weave back and forth between the knowledges" (Hatcher & Bartlett, 2010), and that successful cultural border crossing requires flexibility, critical thinking, and self-reflection.

Intercultural understanding and cultural competence begin with each of us. As a non-Indigenous educator, I must make a conscious decision to do what is necessary to obtain multiple perspectives, persevering through a sometimes disconcerting feeling of two-eyed seeing.

During a recent K-12 professional learning event on culturally responsive pedagogy for integrating Indigenous perspectives into classroom practice in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, teachers explored the concept of knowledge coexistence.

The goal is not to replace their Western thought or inherent culture but instead to create a learning environment in which both Indigenous and Western perspectives can exist in mutually respectful and inclusive relationships, where both are honored and valued in the classroom.

The educators were relieved that no one was asking them to rewrite their entire curriculum. Instead, they were encouraged to develop a habit of mind where the integration of Indigenous perspectives became a consistent part of their planning, resource collection, and teaching.

3.

CULTURAL INTERFACE

Australia's Indigenous scholar, Martin Nakata (2007), established the concept of the cultural interface, where two knowledge systems converge. According to the Regional Aboriginal Education Team (2024), at the surface levels of academic knowledge, there are only differences across cultures; however, common ground and innovation are found at higher levels of knowledge, not the *content* for example, but the *process* of learning.

The findings from my doctoral research in this area reveal that Indigenous pedagogies work in a complementary way with Western teaching methods. For example, scaffolded literacy instruction, beginning with teacher modeling with a gradual shift to student self-directed learning, overlaps with Indigenous ways of learning involving a balance of social support and autonomy.

The Regional Aboriginal Education Team (2024) highlights the reconciling potential of the cultural interface and envisions it as a calm, safe space for bringing teachers into cross-cultural conversations and understandings. When engaging in professional learning about the overlap between some Western and Indigenous pedagogies, many educators feel reassured: "I'm not doing it all wrong — I'm already using some of these teaching strategies!"

A useful starting point for educational reform is recognizing the similarities between Indigenous and Western systems of knowledge, rather than focusing on their differences (Battiste, 2002). Educators can start with what they know and are comfortable with and add new pedagogies as they incorporate them into their understanding and teaching repertoire.

For example, oral storytelling forms the foundation for much traditional Indigenous teaching and learning. One teacher said he embeds story into each unit as a source of knowledge and understanding and has extended this to his math class using Math Catcher, an initiative through Simon Fraser University that uses Indigenous imagery and storytelling to engage students in math and science (Simon Fraser University, n.d.).

ALIGNED WITH STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Applying the three transformative concepts of wayfinding, two-eyed seeing, and the cultural interface in professional learning aligns with the

Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022).

The Equity Practices standard is reflected when educators understand and activate students' historical, cultural, and societal contexts and embrace those assets through instruction.

The Equity Drivers standard guides educators to create more equitable learning environments when building knowledge "about how to demonstrate understanding and affirm each person's identity and contribution." This standard supports reflection on how learners' backgrounds and experiences impact teaching, learning, and culture.

Educators address the Equity Foundations standard when establishing expectations for equity and create structures to ensure equitable access to learning. Integrating Western and Indigenous cultural ways of knowing contributes to these equity-affirming educational practices.

Wayfinding, two-eyed seeing, and cultural interface encourage identification and examination of our own biases and beliefs. They are a means to explore and understand students' historical and cultural contexts and assist us in creating structures to ensure equitable access to learning for all of our students.

Teachers' daily work of translating these concepts into their practices with students benefits all learners and contributes to nourishing an education system that includes intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. Much can be gained through integrating intercultural understanding into our schools and, even more importantly, into the hearts and minds of all those who live on this land.

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Your system does exactly what it is *designed* to do

Don't blame the system. It's doing the best it was designed to do. Over time, system policies, structures, and practices that worked in the past can slowly become outdated or disconnected from current needs and goals. As educational needs and best practices change over time, so must your system.

Don't keep fighting a system that isn't designed to get the results you need now. It won't get better. The sooner you inventory and adjust the parts of the system that no longer serve your needs, the sooner all your efforts will result in impact.

Learning Forward can support system improvement by partnering with you for strategic planning, comprehensive professional learning plan design, program evaluation, or implementation of Standards for Professional Learning. Take a strong step forward today to ensure systemwide intentionality that produces results.

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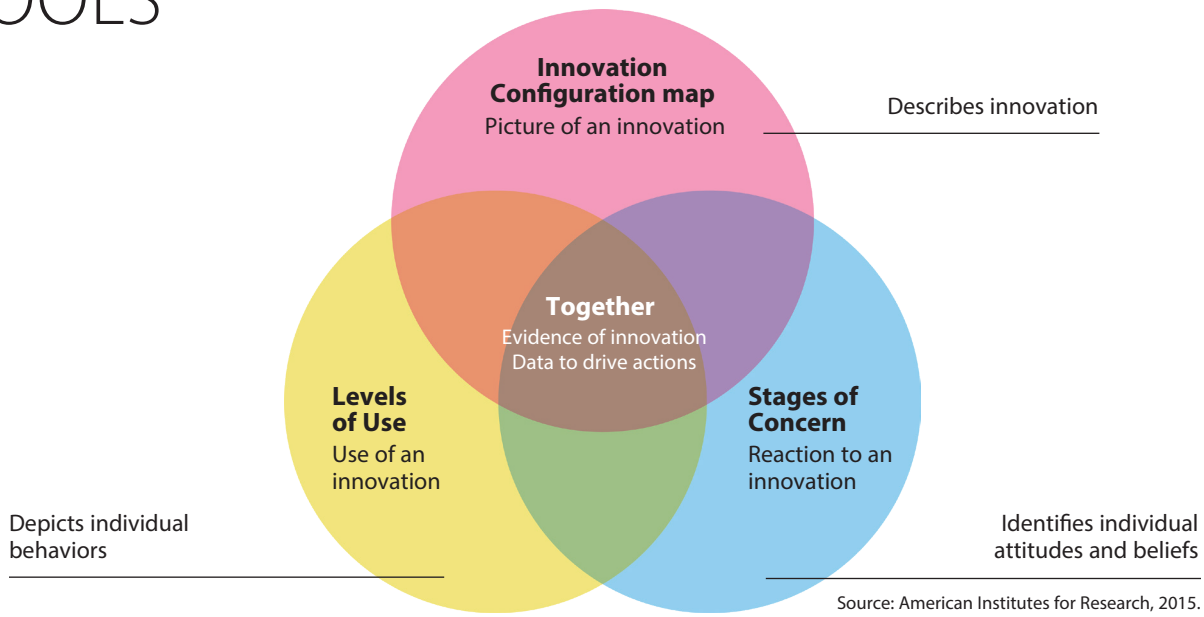
TOOLS

A WAY TO ADDRESS CONCERNS ABOUT CHANGE

Change initiatives only work if all stakeholders are on board. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) can help educators navigate change by providing a way to surface and address stakeholders' common concerns. An update to a classic tool on p. 78 guides one important step in the three-part CBAM model: examining Stages of Concern.



Source: American Institutes for Research, 2015.

A tool to address educators' concerns about change

BY LEARNING FORWARD

Too often, schools or districts introduce an innovation or program with high hopes for student improvement only to see the expensive, time-consuming effort fizzle out. When that happens, they may try another program, and then another, eager for different results. However, the problem is usually not the program, but the way educators respond to it.

To avoid this cycle, educators need to better understand the change process so that new initiatives work effectively and achieve the desired results. Change is a process, not an event, and it occurs when the individuals in an organization work to make it happen. Researchers have found that all individuals approach a new program or change with a personal set of concerns, and those concerns end up impacting a group or organizational response (Psencik et al., 2020).

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model, or CBAM, offers a way to understand change and address common concerns related to it (Hord & Roussin, 2013). It is a conceptual framework with tools and techniques for assessing a change process in an educational environment.

CBAM includes three dimensions: Stages of Concern, Levels of Use, and Innovation Configurations (American Institutes for Research, 2015). Educators can use the three dimensions to examine the components of an innovation, track implementation progress, report the findings objectively, and design interventions or strategies to move the process forward.

In the Stages of Concern, leaders address the concerns of the people charged with implementing the change effort and assess attitudes and feelings. The Levels of Use tool helps determine how well staff are using a program, ranging from nonuse to advanced use. An Innovation Configuration map provides a clear picture of what high-quality implementation looks like in classroom use.

Together, the dimensions give a better understanding of where educators are in the process of change and where they need to go. The following tool outlines seven Stages of Concern commonly experienced by educators encountering change.

REFERENCES

American Institutes for Research. (2015, December 8). *CBAM: The Concerns-Based Adoption Model*. Author. www.air.org/resource/cbam-concerns-based-adoption-model

Hord, S.M. & Roussin, J.L. (2013). *Implementing change through learning: Concerns-based concepts, tools, and strategies for guiding change*. Corwin Press.

Psencik, K., Brown, F., & Hirsh, S. (2020). *The learning principal: Becoming a learning leader*. Learning Forward.

IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS EDUCATORS' STAGES OF CONCERN

Examining Stages of Concern is a process that includes a questionnaire, interviews, and open-ended statements, enabling leaders to identify staff members' attitudes and beliefs toward a new program or initiative. This tool presents statements typical to each stage in the change process and strategies leaders can use to move their staff from one stage to the next toward more thorough program implementation.

Stage 0: Unconcerned (Awareness) *Educators are aware that an innovation is being introduced but not really interested or concerned with it.*

Typical responses include:
- I'm not really concerned about this innovation.
- I don't really care what this innovation involves.

Strategies leaders might employ:	Strategies I want to try:
• If possible, involve teachers in discussions and decisions about the innovation and its implementation. • Share enough information to arouse interest but not so much it overwhelms. • Acknowledge that a lack of awareness is expected and reasonable and there are no foolish questions.	

Stage 1: Informational *Educators are interested in some information about the change.*

Typical responses include:
- I want to know more about this innovation.
- There is a lot I don't know about this, but I'm reading and asking questions.

Strategies leaders might employ:	Strategies I want to try:
• Provide clear and accurate information about the innovation. • Use several ways to share information — verbally, in writing, and through available media. Communicate with large and small groups and individuals. • Help teachers see how the innovation relates to their current practices — the similarities and the differences.	

Stage 2: Personal *Educators want to know the personal impact of the change.*

Typical responses include:
- How is this going to affect me?
- I'm concerned about whether I can do this.

Strategies leaders might employ:	Strategies I want to try:
• Legitimize the existence and expression of personal concerns. • Use personal notes and conversations to provide encouragement and reinforce personal adequacy. • Connect these teachers with others whose personal concerns have diminished and who will be supportive.	

Stage 3: Management *Educators are concerned about how the change will be managed in practice.*

Typical responses include:
- I seem to be spending all my time getting materials ready.
- I'm concerned we'll be spending more time in meetings.

Strategies leaders might employ:	Strategies I want to try:
• Clarify the steps and components of the innovation. • Provide answers that address the small, specific how-to issues. • Demonstrate exact and practical solutions to the logistical problems that contribute to these concerns.	

Stage 4: Consequence *Educators are interested in the impact on students or the school.*

Typical responses include:
- How is using this going to affect my students?
- I'm concerned about whether I can change my practice and ensure that students will learn better.

Strategies leaders might employ:	Strategies I want to try:
• Provide individuals with opportunities to visit other settings where the innovation is in use and to attend conferences on the topic. • Make sure these teachers are not overlooked. Give positive feedback and needed support. • Find opportunities for these teachers to share their skills with others.	

Stage 5: Collaboration *Educators are interested in working with colleagues to make the change effective.*

Typical responses include:
- I'm concerned about relating what I'm doing to what other teachers are doing.
- Let's work together to move this idea forward.

Strategies leaders might employ:	Strategies I want to try:
• Provide opportunities to develop skills for working collaboratively. • Bring together, from inside and outside the school, those who are interested in working collaboratively. • Use these teachers to assist others.	

Stage 6: Refocusing *Educators begin refining the innovation to improve student learning results.*

Typical responses include:
- I have some ideas about something that would work even better than this.
- I think we can take this initiative to a whole new level.

Strategies leaders might employ:	Strategies I want to try:
• Respect and encourage the interest these individuals have for finding a better way. • Help these teachers channel their ideas and energies productively. • Help these teachers access the resources they need to refine their ideas and put them into practice.	

Source: Adapted from **Psencik, K., Brown, F., & Hirsh, S. (2020)**. *The learning principal: Becoming a learning leader*. Learning Forward.

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UPDATES

TOOLKIT HELPS YOU GET READY FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR

Learning Forward has assembled a back-to-school toolkit to start your school year with focused professional learning intentions. Hone your system's professional learning strategies and remind everyone in your community about the importance of educators' ongoing learning. With this member resource, you can:

1. Spread the word about the value of professional learning with a two-page handout.
2. Strengthen your professional learning strategy with four member-favorite tools.
3. Support new and veteran teachers with selected resources, such as a support map for new teachers.

This resource collection is designed to help you and your colleagues have a productive start to the school year. To access the toolkit, go to **learningforward.org/backtoschool**

UPDATES

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AWARDS GRANT TO LEARNING FORWARD

Learning Forward was awarded a System of Professional Learning Grant from the Maryland State Department of Education. The $1.9 million competitive grant supports professional learning for teams from 24 districts, with the goal of improving all teachers' capacity to positively impact pre-K-12 student outcomes.

Learning Forward is leading development of the new professional learning system, aligned with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, an initiative to elevate the teaching profession through strategies that are rooted in evidence of positive impact on learners, including those who have been historically underserved.

The initiative is organized around five pillars: early childhood education, high-quality and diverse teachers and leaders, college and career readiness, more resources to ensure that all students are successful, and governance.

Frederick Brown, Learning Forward president and CEO, said "The work funded through this grant will help Maryland advance critical aspects of its Blueprint plan to invest meaningfully in teachers' capacity and career paths. We applaud Maryland for elevating the critical role of high-quality professional learning in high-performing schools and for making an investment at the system level."

The project involves aligning Maryland's systemwide professional learning and includes the design of learning modules with content focused on eight areas. They are:

- Lead and mentor teams of professionals to promote professional learning among colleagues.
- Collaborate with colleagues to improve student performance.
- Design and support collaborative professional learning for teachers pursuing National Board Certification.
- Provide advanced training on the science of learning specific to individual disciplines.
- Provide instruction and school-based services using racial equity and cultural competency principles and best practices.
- Select and implement evidence-based instructional practices for students with disabilities and multilingual learners.
- Implement restorative practices and trauma-informed responses.
- Implement high-quality instructional materials at the classroom level.

40 education systems at work in the Learning Forward Academy

The Learning Forward Academy kicked off the class of 2026's first in-person convening in July in Columbus, Ohio. Cohort members represent 40 education systems, including participants from the U.S. Department of Defense Education Activities.

Coaches Shannon Bogle and Ayesha Farag led sessions on understanding education systems and how to plan and prioritize action for change efforts. Academy members began to dig into data analysis and root cause analysis to determine the problem of practice they want to tackle during the program's 2½-year duration.

"What a joy to be with this group of thoughtful and enthusiastic educators from around the country — and always inspiring to spend time with educators committed to creating schools where all students thrive," Farag said.

Three academy classes will converge this December in Colorado at the Learning Forward Annual Conference. The class of 2024 will graduate and posters of the group's change effort work will be on display at the event. Joellen Killion will work with both cohorts from 2025 and 2026 on assessing impact.

The class of 2026 will continue its work by focusing on topics such as creating goals, planning for how to engage stakeholders, and beginning to create their logic models.

The next cohort will begin accepting applications on Sept. 1. For information about the Learning Forward Academy, visit **learningforward.org/academy/**

LEARNING FORWARD SPEAKS OUT ON IMPORTANCE OF TITLE II FUNDS

Melinda George, Learning Forward's chief policy officer, was featured in a recent *Education Week* article on how districts plan to use Title II funding.

The article focused on new data from an *Education Week* survey showing that schools are spending a significant portion of their federally awarded Title II funds on elementary school teachers, particularly on those teaching reading and math. 53% of the 239 survey respondents said their district or school plans to use Title II money for the professional development of elementary teachers. 39% said funds would support math teacher professional learning. In the article, George noted educators' interest in professional learning for math and literacy content.

George pointed out that Title II funds are versatile and can be spent across all schools in a district, not just those that qualify for Title I. The funds can also be used to support leadership development to counter attrition of principals and superintendents. "This is an area where we have huge attrition right now," George said.

George also noted some promising ways to allocate the funding. "Instructional coaches are one of the best values of the Title II dollars," George said. 22% of school and district leaders indicated the funds would go to instructional coaches during the next two years. 22% also said the money would go toward secondary reading and science teachers.

You can read the full article here: **bit.ly/4fuD7Q8**

ANNUAL CONFERENCE DOUBLES THE NUMBER OF TABLE TALKS

Our past conference-goers gave feedback and we listened. At Learning Forward's Annual Conference in December, we are offering even more opportunities to network, connect, and have meaningful conversations with colleagues. Roundtable sessions, called table talks, are a popular topic-specific small-group discussion format that always fills to capacity.

These sessions are excellent for giving and receiving feedback, engaging in discussion, and meeting colleagues with similar interests. Due to the popularity of the table talks, we've doubled the number of these offerings to allow conference attendees more chances to connect and gain ideas on context-specific problems of practice.

Our focus on making the conference experience meaningful to your professional learning work is a big part of why our event stands out.

As past conference attendees know, all sessions, except for the keynote speaking events, are ticketed. That means you must register in advance for each session, including the roundtable conversations. Having a ticket to each event guarantees you a seat, and that means there's no need to leave a session early just so you can save a chair at your next one.

If your professional learning needs change between when you register and when you arrive at the conference, there is a ticket exchange on site so you can adjust your sessions accordingly, based on where there is still space available. The conference is Dec. 8-11 at the Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center in Colorado. For more information about the conference, visit **conference.learningforward.org/**

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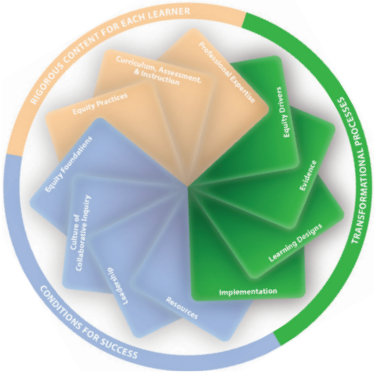
THROUGH THE LENS

OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The Standards for Professional Learning describe the content, processes, and conditions of high-quality learning that make a difference for students and educators. Understanding each of the 11 standards can help you design and build professional learning that has a positive impact. This tool provides reflection questions to help you deepen your understanding and view this issue's articles through the lens of the standards.

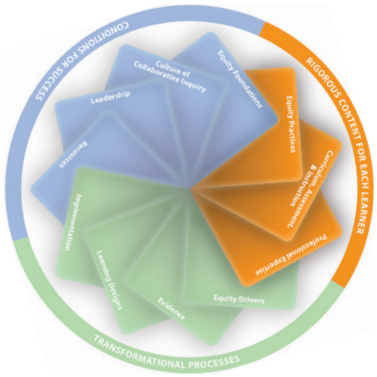
HOW EDUCATORS CAN APPLY THE STANDARDS WHEN MAKING INSTRUCTIONAL PIVOTS



Transformational Processes

How do coaches support the successful implementation of change management strategies in a statewide shift to structured literacy instruction?

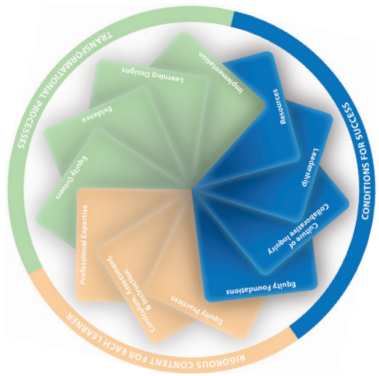
In one example, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce uses an instructional coaching model to support professional learning in the science of reading. The coaches provide sustained guidance and constructive feedback for teachers. (p. 44)



Rigorous Content for Each Learner

What is a starting point for developing educators' expertise in Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction aligned to the science of reading?

An assessment is essential for determining if the materials in use are high quality. Does the curriculum support evidence-based practices? If not, it's time to select something new that involves initial and ongoing learning and collaboration opportunities for the teachers implementing it. (p. 38)



Conditions for Success

How can professional learning help educators rethink and eliminate barriers to equitable learning, according to the Equity Foundations standard?

Jason Okonofua's research shows that most strategies to reduce racial bias lack impact. However, educators who developed empathy for their students led to a reduction in student-teacher conflict and decreased racial disparities in discipline — a 50% decrease in the likelihood of student suspensions. (p. 28)

Learn more about Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning at **standards.learningforward.org**

AT A GLANCE

Number of states with literacy policies:[1]

Science of reading training beginning with K-4 teachers and elementary school administrators	34
Literacy coaching for ongoing, job-embedded support	26
Educator preparation program alignment with science of reading	42

Professional learning to improve reading instruction: State policies

States across the U.S. are pushing for improved literacy instruction grounded in scientific research on how children learn to read. Professional learning is key for these efforts to succeed and for students to improve.

As of summer 2024, more than half of states have statutes and regulations about literacy professional learning — a notable improvement from 10 years ago, but far from universal. The depth and breadth of those policies varies.

Current trends in literacy professional learning:[2]

- **Majority of states** focus on research on how children learn to read.
- **Fewer states** focus on curriculum-based professional learning.

Who should be involved in literacy-focused professional learning?

- TEACHERS
- INTERVENTIONISTS
- COACHES
- CURRICULUM SPECIALISTS
- PARAPROFESSIONALS
- PRINCIPALS
- PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS

[1] tinyurl.com/4en3xbj6 [2] tinyurl.com/4bfsssmm

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The 2024 conference takes reimagined possibilities and leverages them with evidence-based practices to achieve our ultimate goal to **Reach New Heights for Students**.

Join colleagues from similar positions around the world as we learn together about what works for changing educator practice and student results.

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