

Vignette: Aligning Educator Learning Needs with Student Learning Needs

Collaboratively, the group established, after soliciting Joe's help for space and scheduling, a regular weekly time and place to meet for learning and using the cycle of continuous improvement. This first meeting focused on data review, analysis, and interpretation about what to do to address students' low performance areas as well as identifying student strengths and areas of growth.

One area stood out starkly—the gap in scores between white students and African-American and Hispanic students. The disaggregated results illustrated that this was a historic gap that began in elementary grades and became even wider at middle school. Student learning needs encompassed even the most basic knowledge and skills as well as mathematical practices. Yet functions and algebraic thinking were highlighted as essential needs. The team decided they needed to figure out what strategies they could use to close the gap. The Common Core standards, which the state and district were in process of adopting, included much more rigorous outcomes in middle schools for the “expressions and equations” domain. With Clayton and Mary's support, the team decided they would explore the teaching practices included in this domain for their relevance to their students' needs. They also thought they might need to explore how to deepen the content they focused on during instruction.

Note that another of the six attributes is beginning to show itself—that of shared and supportive leadership; Mary and Clayton do not *tell* the teachers what to do but engage them in group decision making, thus modeling collaborative work and providing opportunities for group sharing of power, authority, and making decisions—leadership actions.

This first step launched their LC's use of data to improve instruction based on students' needs.

They struggled in defining their learning needs using the KASAB format. Learning community members were familiar with identifying student learning needs but not how to identify their own learning needs related to student needs. Initially, they decided that they needed to develop:

- **Knowledge:** Knowledge of the expressions and equations domain and knowledge of instructional strategies that addressed classroom equity, knowledge of how students learn functions, and algebraic thinking
- **Attitudes:** A belief that *all* students would learn more rigorous mathematics when teachers changed their instructional practices
- **Skills:** How to adjust instruction to engage all students in mathematical reasoning; how to adjust instructional materials to support an equitable classroom
- **Aspiration:** The group couldn't identify any aspirations
- **Behaviors:** Consistent use of new instructional materials about functions and algebraic thinking; consistent use of student engagement strategies

The team eventually developed a SMART professional learning goal for themselves. "Seventh and eighth-grade mathematics teachers will learn and consistently implement instructional strategies that improve functions and algebraic thinking so that the achievement gap between White and Hispanic/African-American students is reduced by 8% or better as measured by the district's benchmark assessment and the annual state assessment."