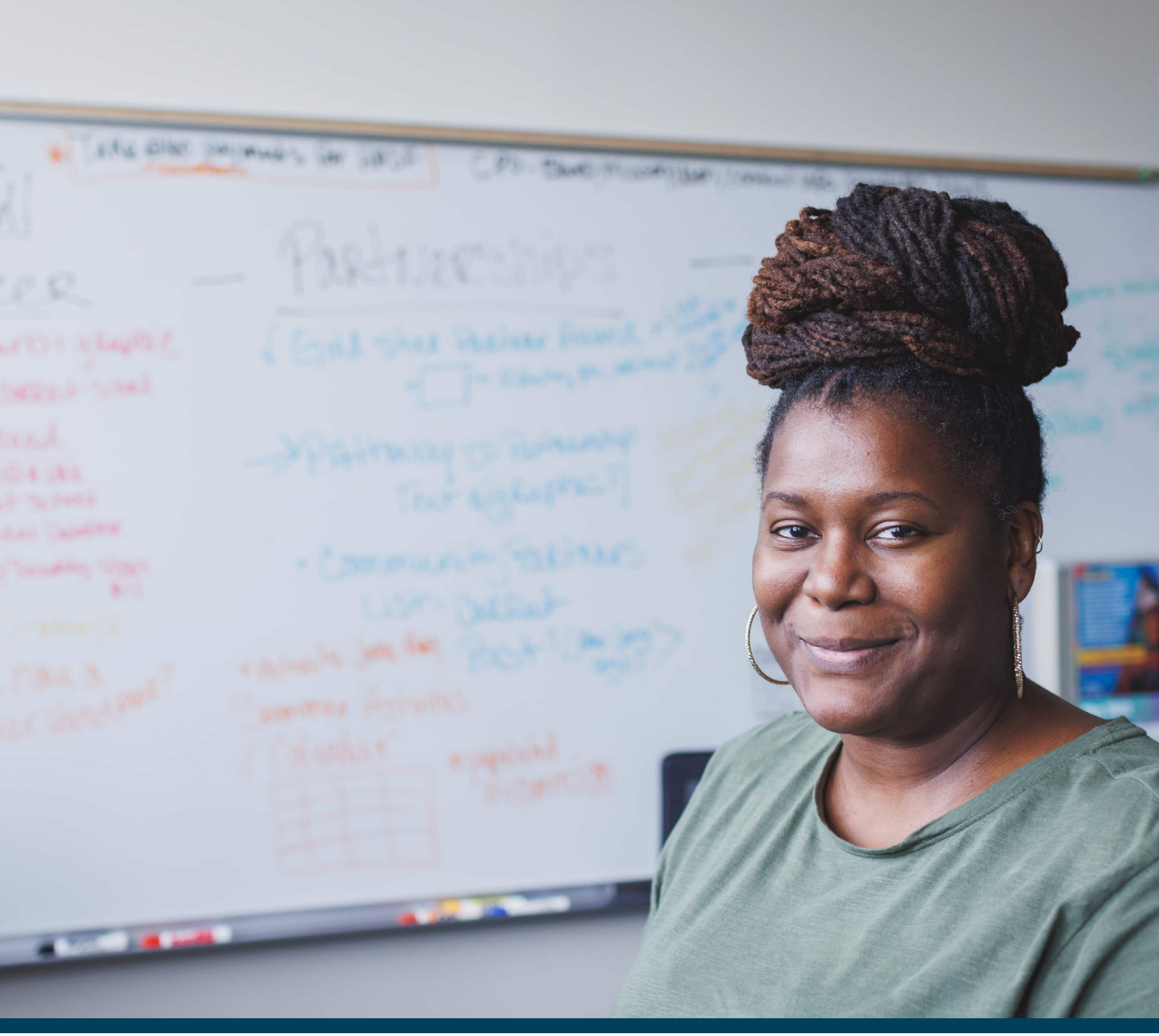

Teach.
Learn.
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the education blog

School improvement basics for leaders

nwea

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School improvement is challenging, and you don't have to go it alone. This best of *Teach. Learn. Grow.* eBook can help you wrap your head around looking at the work holistically, getting buy-in from your entire community, and approaching professional learning in ways that work.

Partnering to help all kids learn®.

Examining school improvement through a holistic lens

Richard Jeffrey Rhodes

In my three decades in education—in both public and private schools, at the classroom level as well as in district administration—I've witnessed and been part of many efforts to improve the way we educate our kids. Every school is different, of course, and you can see that in the wide variety of strategies and tactics they bring to school improvement. In general, though, they all approach the work with the same good intentions and the shared goal of making their buildings better places to teach and learn.

At its best, school improvement strengthens a school's culture, raises the quality of instruction, and improves academic outcomes for all students. But school improvement initiatives often fall short of these desired outcomes, for various reasons. In my experience, schools can set themselves up for disappointment if they focus on individual problems they want to solve without looking at the bigger picture—the context in which those problems arise.

And the schools that succeed in their improvement efforts? They understand that school improvement isn't just about making instruction better. It's about creating a healthy and change-oriented culture, building effective systems, and getting as much stakeholder engagement as possible at all levels of the organization. Truly successful schools also consider the whole student, which means they focus not only on children's academic achievement, but also on their social and emotional growth, their personal learning needs, and all the things that make them who they are.

When these considerations come together—the whole student as well as the whole system—we can say we have a holistic approach to school improvement. It's an approach that says, let's do more than push for better outcomes. Let's create sustainable conditions that will naturally result in those outcomes, conditions in which the system is equitable and responsive to the child's needs instead of the other way around.

At its best, school improvement strengthens a school's culture, raises the quality of instruction, and improves academic outcomes for all students.

It's not easy work, but I can't imagine more important work. And I've found that when schools begin to experience some of the benefits of school improvement, and when long-standing barriers to progress begin to fall, they find it to be well worth the effort. Let's take a closer look at some of these benefits and barriers—and why it all matters, now more than ever.

Creating sustainable systems, processes, protocols, and practices

When school improvement is done in a comprehensive, systemic way, schools create durable best practices that can be passed down to new leaders and staff. That's important because we often see initiatives that are tied to individual leaders, for better or worse. If an initiative doesn't succeed, then the departure of a school leader may be a welcome opportunity to try something new. But on the other hand, even a successful initiative might wither on the vine if a departed leader doesn't leave behind a clear plan for continuing the work.

To create a legacy of change that stands the test of time, schools need to focus on four connected elements—systems, processes, protocols, and practices—that work together to make school improvement a guiding principle that is truly ingrained in a school's culture. Briefly, here's how these elements work (in reverse order) in the context of school improvement, using classroom observation as an example.

- **Practices** are the individual activities that schools carry out in their day-to-day work. For example, a school's practice could be to observe classroom instruction for the purpose of providing feedback to teachers.
- **Protocols** describe how a practice is implemented in the real-world setting. For example, how are classroom observations done, and by whom? A well-defined protocol helps ensure that practices are carried out consistently, producing useful data.
- **Processes** are how schools make sure that their own practices and protocols actually take place and are done right. To ensure the effectiveness of classroom observation, for example, a school might assign certain grade-level teachers to watch each other's classes, creating a healthy feedback loop in which best practices can be shared.
- **Systems** describe how all of these components work together and inform a school's ethos. A school that builds a system around classroom observation is setting the expectation that this practice is integral to how it operates and must be done consistently. The school has shaped its identity, in part, around the role that classroom observation plays in its overall system for teaching and learning.

It takes time to establish coordinated and well-oiled systems, processes, protocols, and practices, but the benefits can endure long after the leaders who created them have moved on.

Consistency gets results—and creates a stronger culture

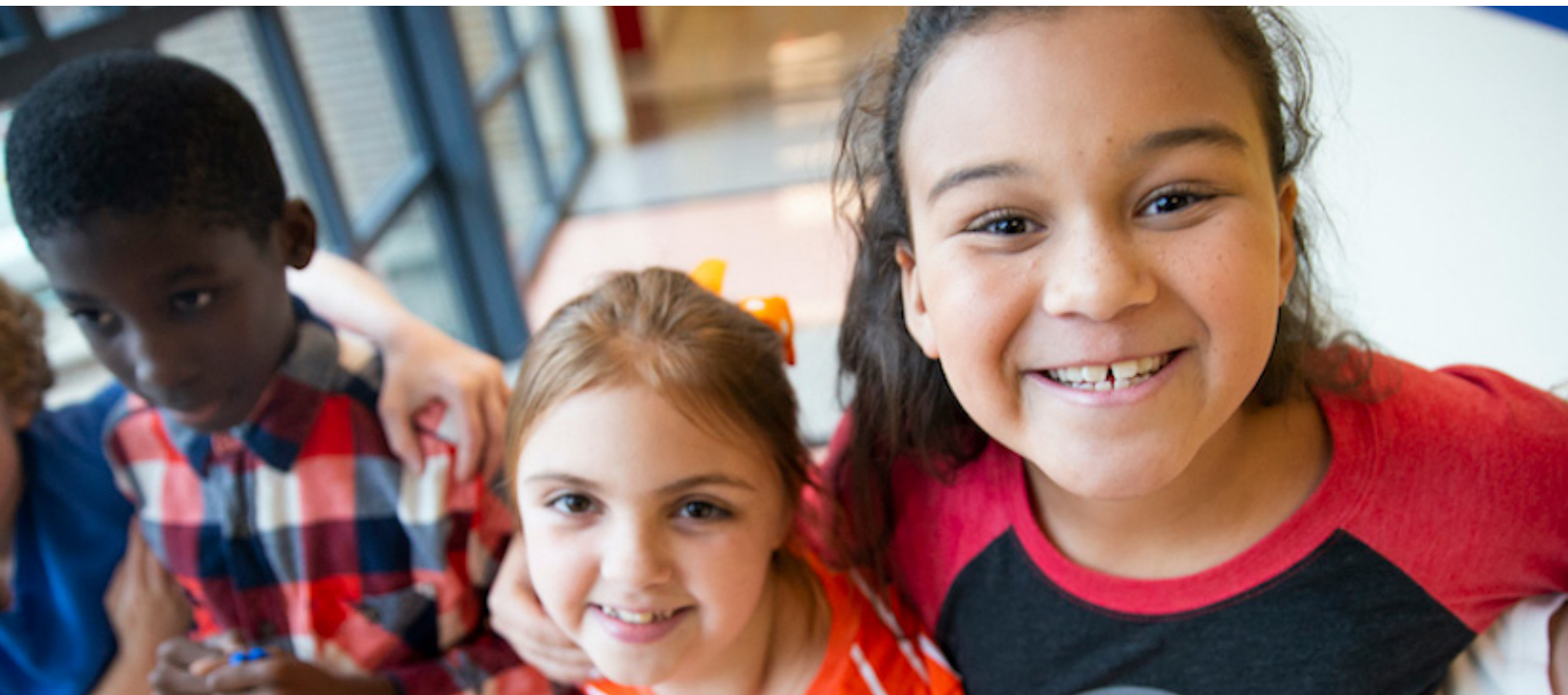
Each step of the four-part framework depends on the others. You might observe what appears to be an effective classroom practice, only to later learn that three different teachers in the same school approach the practice in different ways. In this case, the absence of a documented process means the school as a whole gets uneven results from the practice and misses out on the opportunity to continually refine it through the sharing of best practices.

To a large degree, holistic school improvement is about making sure each part of the framework is present and optimized, and that all four parts are working together and are used consistently on a day-to-day basis. When this happens, a lot of positive things become possible. For example, you'll probably find you're able to gather much more reliable data, allowing you to accurately measure the extent to which practices are improving instruction and student outcomes. And you'll probably see an increase in morale as leaders, teachers, and even students have the sense of rallying around a shared purpose.

Holistic school improvement is about making sure each part of the framework is present and optimized.

Consistency is more than a way of doing business; it can make a huge difference for kids. A school that has a well-defined set of systems, processes, protocols, and practices is a more proactive and less reactive organization, allowing them to focus on students' needs in a way that's a lot harder when you don't have all your ducks in a row. That means a greater awareness and appreciation of the different experiences, assets, and strengths that kids bring with them into the classroom—as well as their learning challenges and opportunity gaps.

When a school orients itself around the specific needs and circumstances of its students, it fosters a much more equitable environment in which all kids can thrive.



Shifting mindset, seeking partnership

Transformational changes to a school's culture and systems don't come easily. Not only are educators already working through numerous challenges and competing demands, but it can be difficult to accept the need for change. That's why I tell educators and school leaders that the first thing they must do in order to bring about real school improvement is examine their mindset and be open to changing it. Once they've done that, they can start asking the right questions and seek out partners and coaches who can help them implement change.

Changing one's mindset is no small matter. Education is a deeply personal field that calls upon our hearts as well as our minds, and every educator I know is trying to do what they think is best. If we're asked to question whether we're meeting our kids' needs as well as we can, it can be a painful and vulnerable feeling.

But mindset is truly where change begins. It's where schools find the courage to assess whether they have the right systems, processes, protocols, and practices in place. And with an open and flexible mindset, schools can ask themselves all kinds of productive questions: When was the last time we had an objective voice assess the efficacy of our practices? Are we meeting our improvement goals? Are our students hitting their learning targets? Are families engaged? Even before these questions are answered, the very fact that they're being asked can be a paradigm shift for schools.

Every educator I know is trying to do what they think is best. If we're asked to question whether we're meeting our kids' needs as well as we could, it can be a painful and vulnerable feeling.

In addition to keeping an open mind, new conversations and new partnerships are key drivers of improvement. School leaders and educators don't need to have all the answers themselves; they just need to be receptive to working with experts and coaches who have experience helping schools and districts develop improvement strategies that meet their unique needs. A good coach brings an impartial perspective to a school's systems, processes, protocols, and practices and is able to show exactly where these fundamentals are either missing or not working together as holistically as they could.

Seizing the moment

We're living through an unusual time in which schools, ready or not, have been forced to make radical changes to the way they deliver instruction. They've had to figure out how to teach during a pandemic and adapt to an increasingly virtual world. They've also had to take a fresh look at the inequities in education, which the pandemic has revealed in new ways. These are big challenges for an already stressed system, but they also create an opening for new approaches to school improvement that could lead to positive and lasting change.

As we look to the near future and the likelihood that some form of remote learning is here to stay, are school leaders thinking strategically about what that's going to look like? How many are using this time to establish systems, processes, protocols, and practices that will help ensure the success of these new instructional models?

Granted, it's not easy for leaders to take the long view when they already have their hands full dealing with attendance, engagement, and all the other day-to-day challenges of teaching kids in the current environment. That's why partnership is so important. The right coach can help school leaders collect and analyze good data, evaluate the effectiveness of their current system, and identify areas for improvement.

One final thought: The critical work of school improvement isn't about turning bad practices into good ones, or correcting things that are wrong. It's simply about finding opportunities to do better. And one thing I know for sure is that all educators want the very best for our kids. At a time when schools are navigating their way out of a pandemic and giving renewed attention to equity concerns, school improvement work is a crucial step toward actualizing our ideals.

How to democratize your school improvement planning process

Carrie Phillips & Elliot Ransom

It's insufficient to rely solely on student outcome data like grades, graduation rates, and test scores to inform school improvement. Focusing too narrowly on outcome data often leads to technical solutions, such as new textbooks or curriculum overhauls, that don't necessarily get to the heart of the matter. To address the root causes and underlying factors that impact student outcomes, a deeper approach is needed. School leaders need access to holistic data that represents not only quantitative outcomes, but also insights into the school's learning conditions, such as the relationship between teachers and students.

This need for a holistic data set is the basis of UChicago Impact's 5Essentials®. The 5Essentials model is grounded in decades of research that shows a link between the learning conditions in a school and student performance. Specifically, the 5Essentials model is structured to help schools make meaningful improvements in the five key areas that, according to research, matter most: effective leaders, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, and ambitious instruction. In our previous post, we emphasized that just having data is not enough. It is what you do with the data and how you apply it to improvement planning that matters.

That brings us to one of the most critical aspects of improvement planning and data collection: diversity of voice. To create a school improvement plan that is equitable and more likely to deliver on its promises, school leaders must reach beyond their own perceptions of their schools' strengths and challenges. They need to bring more voices to the table and ensure that their improvement plans reflect the authentic needs of their school community. Leaders can do this by listening to the very people that school improvement plans aim to serve: teachers, students, and families.

Much more than checking a box

There's no shortage of school improvement plans out there, mainly because many schools are required by their districts or states to submit them. These plans, usually based on student outcome data, can be useful documents. But too often, good intentions to craft meaningful plans buckle under the weight of compliance. A school leader's time is always stretched too thin, and their list of responsibilities seems to grow daily. It's easy to see how the pressure to comply leads to plans that aren't treated as living documents that can be continually returned to for reflection, iteration, and learning.

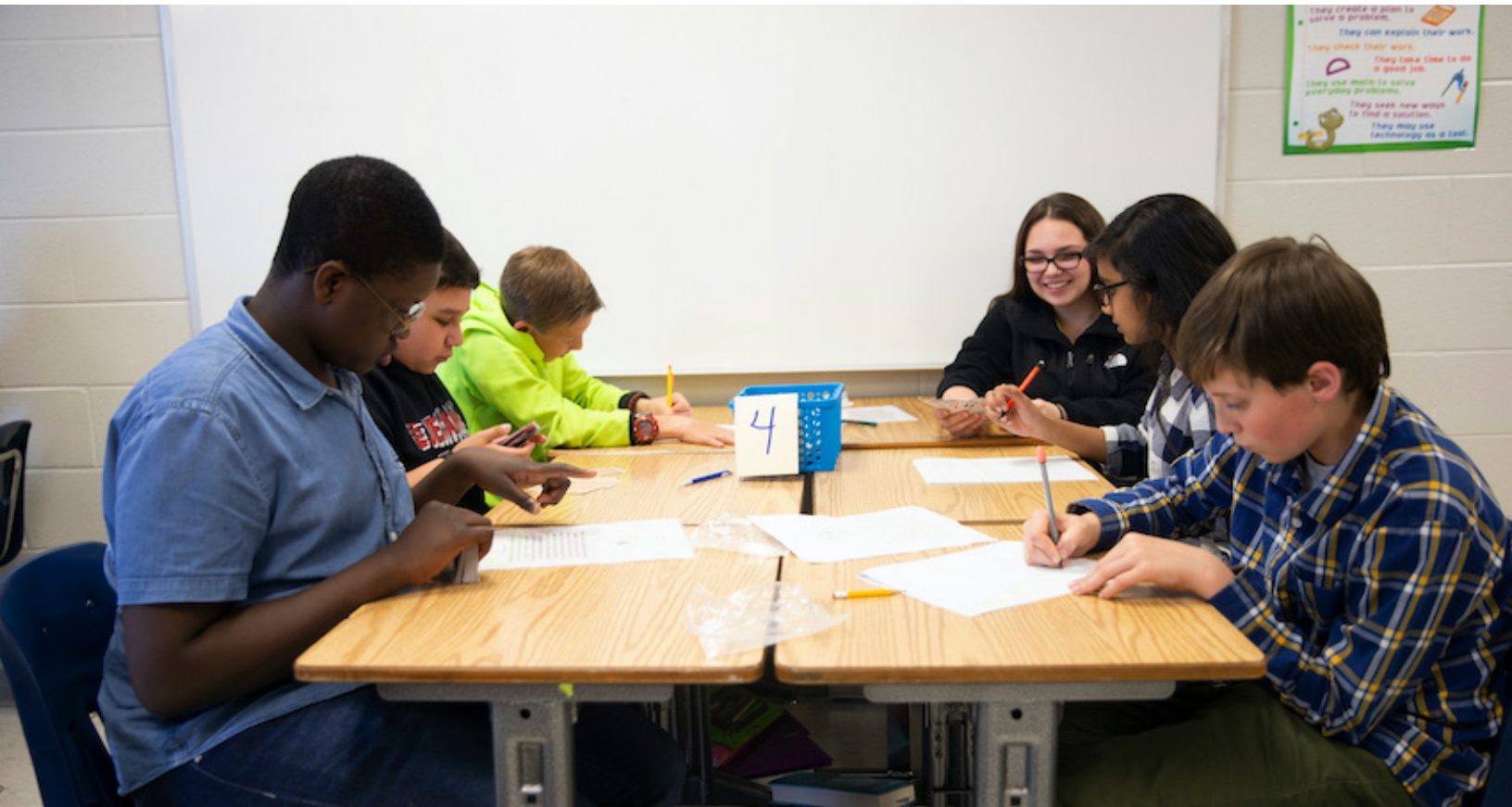
To create a school improvement plan that is equitable and more likely to deliver on its promises, school leaders must reach beyond their own perceptions of their schools' strengths and challenges.

Rarely do schools have the necessary systems in place to both meet fast-approaching deadlines and engage in continuous, intentional, and collaborative improvement planning. As a result, schools may have checked the “improvement plan” box without using an inclusive process to craft their plans. When this happens, improvement plans often fail to deliver real value to the people who need it most.

Furthermore, school leaders who develop their improvement plans in isolation, without hearing from a diverse group of voices, run the risk of creating frustration and incoherence in their systems. If the adults in a school aren’t on the same page with respect to where the school is struggling and where it’s strong, and if these divergent opinions aren’t reconciled, then any improvement plan is likely going to be based on siloed assumptions.

It’s natural for principals, teachers, students, and families to have different perspectives. The objective shouldn’t be to decide who's right; rather, it's to have honest conversations aimed at building consensus around what’s going well at school and what may need to change. That’s the path to true progress.

While it can be challenging to integrate diverse opinions and perspectives, it is worth the effort. When you dig into the root causes of a school’s challenges and make a point of hearing from numerous voices in crafting your improvement plan, you ensure widespread buy-in and equity that allow you to move forward in new and authentic ways. The teacher experience is fundamentally different from an administrator’s, and in a democratic improvement process, both voices are worthy and valid.



Diverse feedback = deeper insights

So how exactly can leaders democratize the improvement process? While a school leader may say they welcome feedback and advertise an open-door policy, relying on others to come forward isn't the same as proactively engaging them. Leaders need to initiate the process. Not only do they need to model receptivity to feedback, but they also need to implement systems that give stakeholders the opportunity to be heard and share their experiences.

Too often, good intentions to craft meaningful plans buckle under the weight of compliance.

Schools often turn to surveys as a way to gather feedback as part of their improvement planning process. Surveys can certainly be convenient tools, but not all surveys are up to the task of directly capturing teacher, student, and family experiences and producing data that's immediately actionable. In our experience, schools that choose a survey that's designed to meet these objectives—like the diagnostic survey at the heart of 5Essentials—end up with better data, deeper insights into the diversity of perceptions throughout the school community, and a clearer path to sustainable improvement.

To make the feedback-gathering process as inclusive and productive as possible, keep these best practices in mind:

- ***Don't mistake silence for approval.*** Just because you aren't receiving unsolicited feedback doesn't mean there aren't concerns. As mentioned above, leaders shouldn't depend on stakeholders to approach them. There are plenty of reasons why someone might not initiate that conversation, but rarely is it because they don't have any feedback to share.
- ***Ask personally relevant questions.*** People want to tell their stories. Give them a chance to do so by speaking directly to their situations and drawing them in with specifics. For example, instead of asking a student, "Do you like your teacher?" try asking questions like, "What do you like or not like about your class? Do you feel challenged in class? Do the grownups listen to you?"
- ***Meet people where they are—literally.*** For example, if your school is working through some issues around student behavior and you need more family involvement, be creative as you seek to engage parents and other caregivers. This could include reaching out to community organizations that might not typically be looped into a school improvement planning process. The same goes for students: find the places where they gather—after-school clubs, for example—and engage them there.
- ***Follow up and follow through.*** It's worth repeating that it's not enough to have the data. It's what you do with the data that matters. In the same vein, it's not enough to just ask for feedback. Inclusivity shouldn't end with the ask; that's just the beginning. That brings us to a critical part of the improvement process: showing participants how their feedback helped shape the school's improvement plan or, at the very least, how it contributed to the discussion.

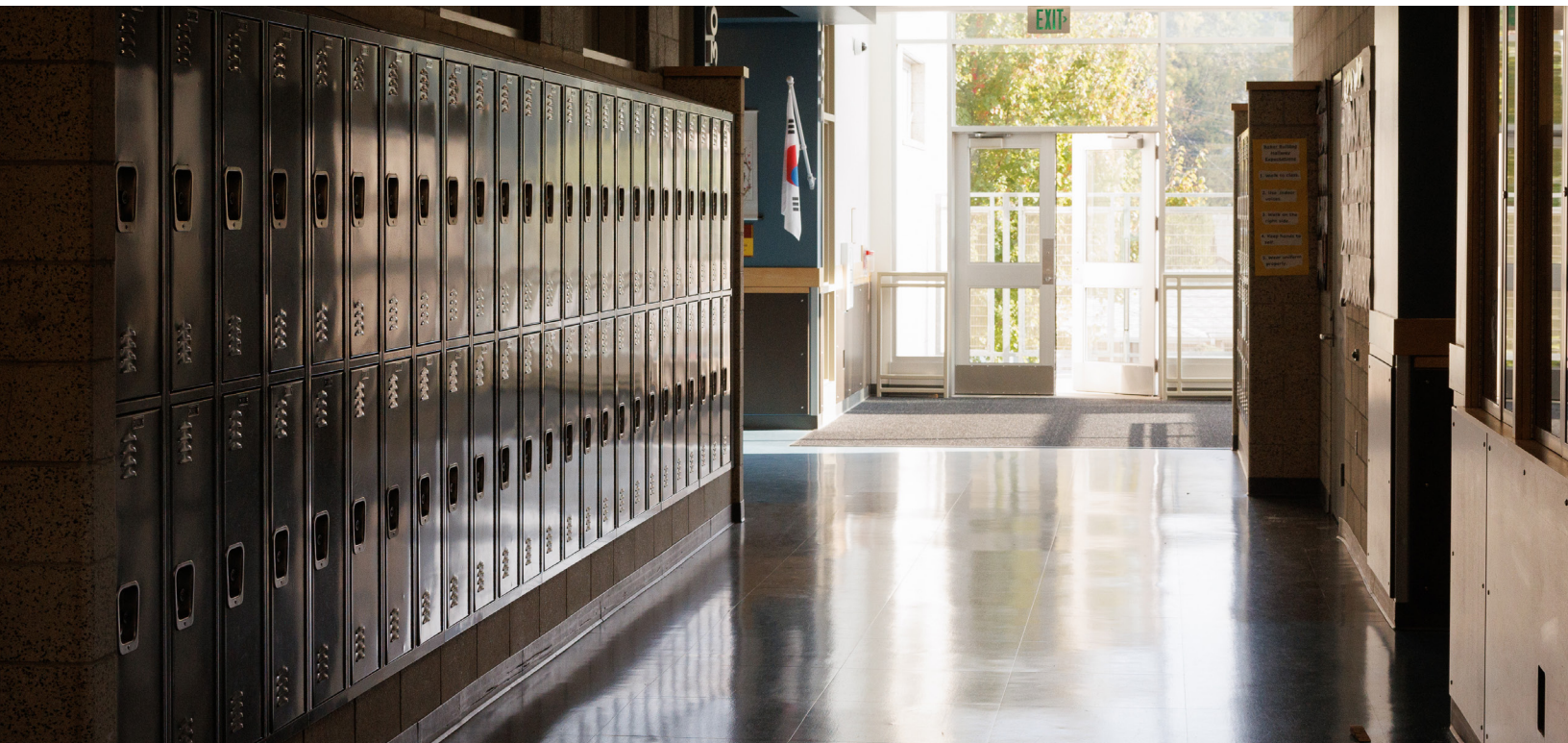
Clear, shared, and focused: How to envision successful professional learning initiatives

Steve Underwood

If you're a state or district leader looking at the data on how kids are doing across your system, chances are you're longing to see some improvements. Whether your main concern is literacy, math, science, equity, or any other critical area, you know that teachers and staff are counting on you to help them move the needle on student outcomes and create the best possible environment for learning. And as a leader, you know the importance of great professional learning to empower your people and bring these goals to fruition.

And yet, even if you've risen to the position of a chief state school officer, superintendent, or leader of a particular office or program within a state education agency (SEA), you may not have been trained in the design and implementation of large-scale professional learning initiatives. The experiences you've had in your career and the skills you've developed have carried you a long way! But even the most talented leaders need their own learning and support to bring about significant and lasting change.

In this article, I'll discuss the unique position in which many education leaders find themselves as they shoulder the responsibility of driving improvement across their systems. And I'll offer some guidance on how to get started on the task of bringing well-designed, well-implemented professional learning opportunities to the people you lead.



I wasn't trained for this!

I've had the privilege of working at many levels in education. I was an elementary school teacher and instructional literacy coach before I jumped to a state-level role helping schools across Idaho improve their literacy practices. Over time, I transitioned into a leadership position and oversaw several statewide programs that supported teachers and leaders. The thing was, I wasn't trained for this type of work. There was a lot of on-the-job learning and trial by fire. If you're a state leader who's anything like me, you might not have been specifically trained for your role, either.

Begin by defining the nature of the challenge that you're trying to solve.

Indeed, many SEA leaders enter positions of significant statewide influence directly from the classroom. Others have had leadership experience as school or district administrators. Typical teacher preparation programs get us ready for teaching and learning, while administrator programs cover things like education law, school leadership, and district governance. While these are illuminating experiences that produce many transferable skills, I'm guessing that most readers of this eBook never took a course in topics such as:

- Designing and implementing a large-scale professional learning initiative
- Navigating the political landscape of a state and influencing schools within local-control context
- Writing and winning competitive federal grants
- Creating and managing a state or federal budget for your program

Develop a clear, shared, and focused vision

When thinking about improving outcomes across a state or large education system, it's helpful to begin by defining the nature of the challenge that you're trying to solve and being really clear about your vision and purpose.

We've all seen what happens when an initiative is launched without careful consideration or planning. A well-meaning team or program director may feel strongly enough about an idea for professional learning that they tell themselves, "Everyone will improve if I provide (fill in the blank) training." They pay a vendor and direct their staff to spend valuable time and effort creating and delivering the training, only to realize in a year or two that it didn't have the desired impact. While training conceived in this manner can still provide some benefits, it isn't done with the end in mind. Rather, it's done with certain activities in mind—and with the hope that these activities will produce lasting results.

There's a better way. It involves developing a clear vision that is both shared and focused across all relevant programs and offices within the SEA.

Strive for clarity

To effectively plan a large-scale professional learning initiative, leaders in states or large districts need to be able to clearly articulate how the future should be different than the present. This is what forms the basis for planning with the end in mind. A state leader who wants to improve reading outcomes, for example, would not only need a clear understanding of what effective, evidence-based literacy instruction is, but also be able to articulate what success would look like at the classroom and student level.

Getting everyone on the same page is key to the success of any large-scale initiative.

A clear vision for how the different parts of a new initiative ought to work together—teaching, learning, assessment, evidence-based practices, leadership, and systems—forms a strong foundation for the rest of that initiative. Without such a vision, each project team, vendor, teacher, or staff member who's working toward the goal will be guided by their own interpretations, which could mean different or conflicting visions from different groups. This, in turn, could lead to confusion for teachers and schools and additional work and effort as stakeholders figure out how to navigate different messages and support systems.

Share your vision

Getting everyone on the same page is key to the success of any large-scale initiative. However, that doesn't mean stripping autonomy and agency from the talented folks you're relying on to carry out your initiative. For example, if you have a vision for more effective literacy instruction across your state or district, you don't need every teacher to adhere to exactly the same curriculum or lesson plans. What you do need is the assurance that every K–3 classroom is guided by the same basic set of core principles that underlie your vision.

To continue our example, teachers united around a shared vision for literacy instruction would all have access to high-quality materials that help them effectively translate the science of reading into practice on a day-to-day basis. Schools and districts would implement similar practices and protocols so that teachers are not left to forge their own path through what is one of the most complicated subject areas for teachers and students alike.

Stay focused

School leaders are understandably focused on growth and improvement, so you sometimes find them pushing teachers to improve literacy, math, and science all at the same time. On top of that, they might also encourage teachers to implement new social-emotional strategies and make sure they're meeting the latest requirements for positive behavioral interventions and supports. But the human brain is simply not designed to focus on so many different things at once. To ask teachers to focus on multiple things simultaneously is really to ask them to focus on nothing at all.

Effective school leaders know this. When they work to improve their schools, effective leaders choose one priority and go all in. As Stephen Covey wrote in his classic book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, "the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." The best leaders prioritize the most important thing they want to accomplish and then make sure it takes precedence over everything else. In the case of literacy work at the school level, for example, that means all the leaders' and teachers' energy will go into improving literacy, while everything else runs on business-as-usual strategies.

This mindset is incredibly important for state leaders. Too often, SEAs have fragmented and competing priorities. District and school leaders get bogged down trying to determine which state office most needs their attention. Should they be focusing on the Title I office? The school improvement office? What's coming out of the Special Education Services team? Or perhaps the Content Standards group? Countless district and school leaders will tell you that they regularly hear competing visions from each of these different offices within an SEA, even though each office is under the same umbrella of the chief state school officer.

What all of this means is that it's the SEA's role to articulate a clear vision for its intended outcomes, focus most of its efforts on an aligned implementation strategy, and ensure that the vision and strategy are collectively and collaboratively shared by all the offices that interact with schools and districts.

Ask the right questions

A few crucial questions to ask when creating a clear, shared, and focused vision are:

- **What's the focus?** What is the one main thing our SEA wants to accomplish over the next couple of years to improve student outcomes?
- **What are the conditions?** Is our SEA creating the conditions to encourage districts, schools, and teachers to focus on one main thing?
- **What needs alignment?** What is our SEA doing that might be causing educators at the local level to fragment their attention and struggle to improve? Are all the offices, projects, and initiatives in our SEA focused on our shared vision? If not, what will we do about it? Do the professional learning initiatives and support programs we offer work together in a complementary fashion, or are they fragmented with little to no coherence and coordination?

Why administrators need professional learning communities, too

Candi Fowler

In many of our school systems, being the administrator means you are a team of one. You may have trusted colleagues you supervise and can count on to take a leadership role, but in reality, they don't understand the pressures that come with being an administrator. Even our families and friends don't really get how tough it is in all schools right now, public, private, and charter.

Like many others, you may be considering early retirement or leaving the profession for another one. Before you give in to temptations to quit, try this: create a professional learning community with other administrators in your position. I promise you that just being able to talk with others who inherently understand your role will be very uplifting.

A reminder about professional learning communities

Educator professional learning communities, or PLCs for short, are not new. In the article "Creating effective professional learning communities," educator Andrew Miller explains that "PLCs—which harness 'an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve'—are a common and proven practice to promote teacher collaboration that increases student achievement." For administrators, a PLC with colleagues can similarly promote collaboration on problem solving, including for increased teacher retention; provide a safe place to de-stress and get much needed emotional support; and help the people we're doing all this for: our students.

Before you give in to temptations to quit, try this: create a professional learning community with other administrators in your position.

Just like teachers do, leaders should put aside guaranteed time to meet with their PLC teammates. School contracts and union agreements typically outline prep time and professional learning time, protecting these important educator meetings from distractions. Administrators also need to be reminded that without their professional learning time, they will begin to feel isolated and, in some cases, uncared for and unsupported.

Do you make time at least twice a month to connect with another administrator? Do you value your own learning time by blocking out (and protecting) at least two hours a month to learn something new? Sadly, I believe the answer to these questions is "No" for most of us.

How to start your own administrator PLC

This is my twentieth year in administration and my first year making time to be in a PLC and focus on my own learning. Don't wait that long to make this happen for you. In just the few meetings we have had this year in our principals PLC, I have already felt better just being able to hear what others are dealing with and knowing that I am indeed not the only one struggling with teacher retention, substitute teachers, and political unrest in our area.

Emotionally supporting each other is the first and most important part.

How can you start a PLC in your area? Well, it can be as simple as staying in touch with just one other administrator, either virtually or in person. Do you have an old friend who worked up to a leadership position? You can also reach out to a neighboring district counterpart, an elementary, middle, or high school leader, and make a connection over a common question. If you want to make this important work happen, it is going to take you making the first move. It may feel uncomfortable or awkward, but I encourage you to do this for yourself. While you're at it, you will make another leader feel supported and take the first step in yet another way to work toward everyone's common goal of serving our students well.

Once you've established contact with at least one person (starting small is A-OK!), I encourage you to have a running agenda everyone can access, so they can add to it as things come up between meetings. If your team has someone who can't attend in person on a particular day, Zoom them in for the parts of the meeting they can attend. Even consider starting with virtual meetings, which can make recruiting members easier during COVID-19 and allow you to open up your community to neighboring districts.

I promise you that just being able to talk with others who inherently understand your role will be very uplifting.

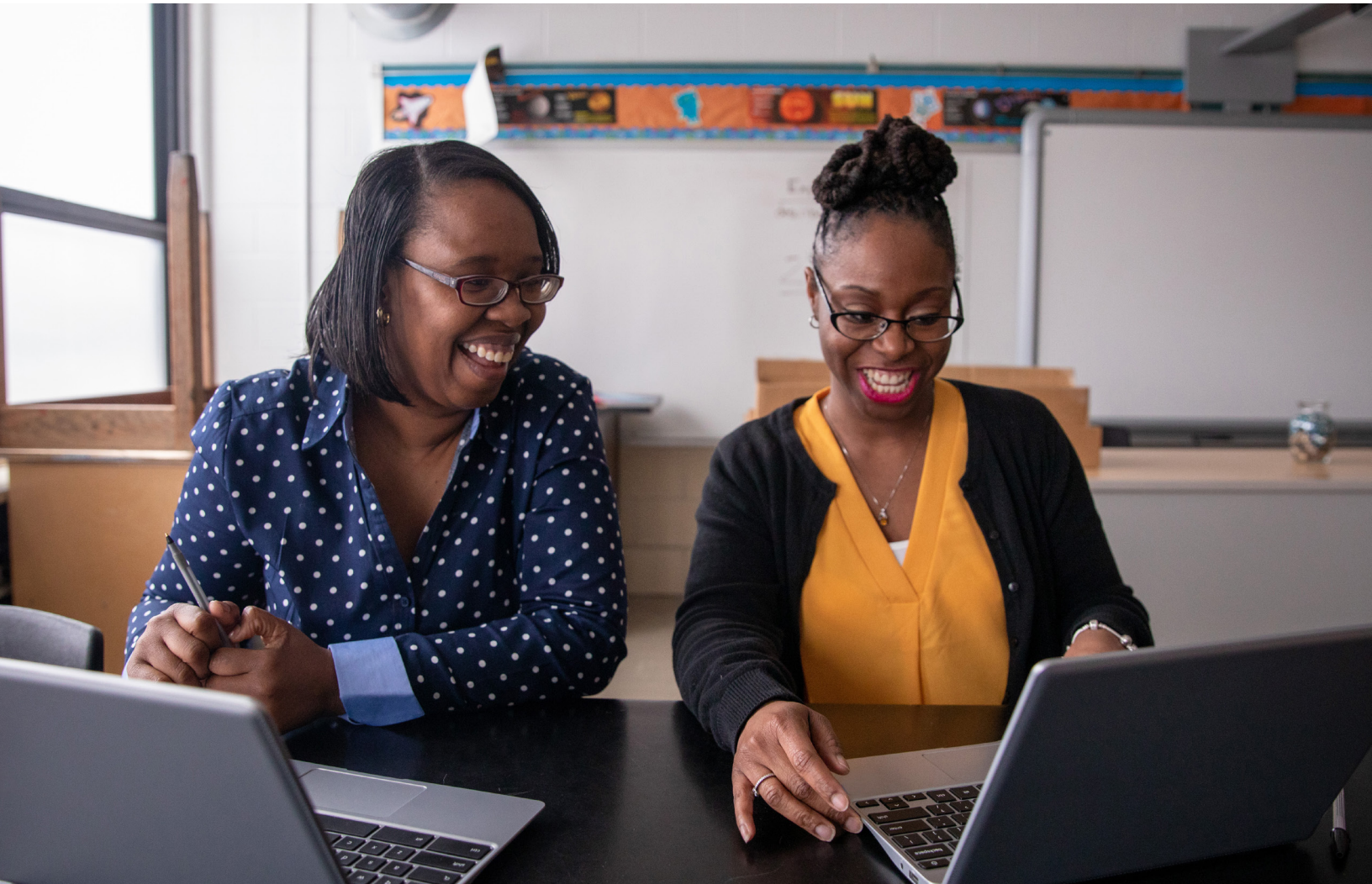
There's no official playbook for a principals PLC, so make the collaboration work for those on your team. Often, conversations at our PLC lead to other topics, and we add those to future agendas. Many times, our meetings also have a check-in that's at least 15 minutes so we can all decompress about current frustrations and situations that are causing stress and strain on our building. Ease into your agenda topics with the understanding that emotionally supporting each other is the first and most important part of the meeting.

As the team builds trust, it will be easier and easier to lean in and help each other. Keep with it, encourage each other to make time for the PLC, and try to begin your meetings with that de-stress check-in. Leave each meeting with an optimistic closure, too. I love this bit from CASEL's *SEL: 3 Signature Practices Playbook*: "Optimistic closures may be reflective about the learning, help identify next steps, or make connections to one's own work. Since our learning and our work are always a part of an on-going journey, these experiences bring a moment of pause, of collection, of reflection, to help anchor learning and build anticipation for the efforts to come."

You're worth it

My 30 years in education have not seen tougher times than these right now. I encourage you to find your inner joy and connect with your passion. What keeps you walking through the front doors each day? Also think about how a PLC can help you be a better, more grounded leader for your school.

Once you've had a chance to reflect, plan a next step. It can be something as simple as telling yourself "I'll find some opportunities for professional learning in 2022" or "I will not send that heated email response." I recommend something really concrete that requires reaching out to a fellow leader. Forward them this article. Or break the ice with an email asking about their winter break, then ask if they'd be up for regular email exchanges, monthly virtual meetings, or something more this new year. You won't regret the time you put aside for your learning and your mental health.



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Richard Jeffrey Rhodes

Richard Jeffrey Rhodes is an experienced pre-K–12 educator who has served as a teacher, school administrator, and district-level leader. Before joining NWEA, Jeff worked as both a school and executive-level leader for almost twenty years in both traditional public and charter schools where he utilized MAP® Growth™ and other meaningful data to facilitate the examination, development, and/or refinement of systems, processes, protocols, and practices to create the conditions for continuous improvement of student learning outcomes. An equity advocate, Jeff strives to continually promote learning for all students in environments that are safe and supportive. He holds a bachelor's degree in English from Wesleyan University, a master's degree in English education from Teachers College, Columbia University, and a doctorate degree in educational leadership from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Some of his research interests are school improvement, systems thinking, organizational learning, change leadership, and the power of story as a relational tool to build community in schools and beyond.

Steve Underwood

Steve Underwood joined NWEA in January 2020 and is the director of the State Professional Learning and Consulting Services team. He's an experienced educational leader with extensive experience working in schools, districts, state education agencies, and non-profits. Steve specializes in the design and implementation of evidence-based professional learning and in facilitating systemic improvement to improve teaching, learning, and leading. He earned a doctor of education in curriculum and instruction from Boise State University, with an emphasis in school improvement, and he holds undergraduate and master's degrees from Biola University. He enjoys equipping educators to successfully meet the needs of all learners.

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