

REIMAGINING THE NEW EDUCATOR INDUCTION EXPERIENCE

July 2020 | Leigh Vierstra

Background & Our Design Challenge

WHAT IT TOOK:

From the Forward Design team:

9 participants- 6 central office staff,
3 UW-Madison staff

25 dedicated hours- Over 5
working sessions

From ROCKiT:

1 Innovation Strategist- to plan,
facilitate, and guide the team through
the process

65 hours- over 2 months

Forward Madison is a partnership between Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) and UW-Madison's School of Education that works to craft a strategy to grow, induct, and support new educators in Madison schools with the goal to create a high quality and diverse workforce that will significantly impact student achievement and narrow opportunity gaps.

In 2018 MMSD released their five-year Strategic Framework with the commitment to Invest in People:

We will commit to investing in and fully supporting our staff, with a focus on anti-racist, culturally responsive and inclusive teaching and powerfully aligned hiring, placement, induction, professional growth, coaching and evaluation practices.

We will also continue to strive for a more diverse staff and a talent development model that helps every staff member forge a path to grow professionally and increase their positive impact.

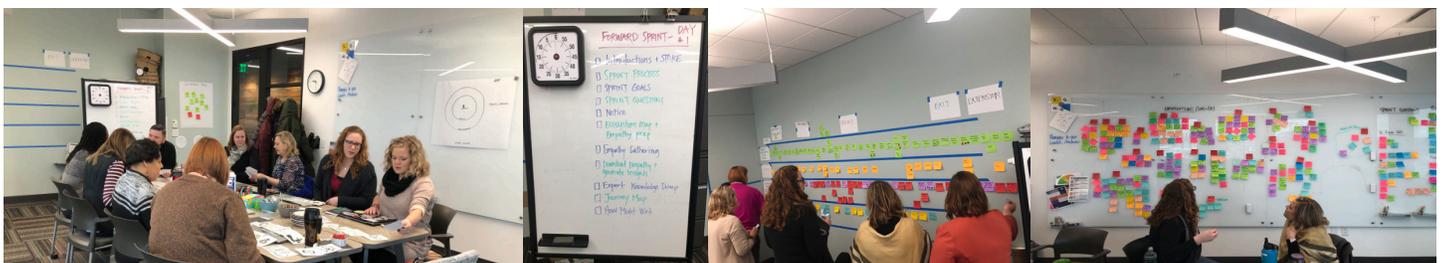
With these goals in mind, FORWARD Madison director, Jen Schoepke, and MMSD's Executive Director of Professional Learning and Leadership Development, Jorge Covarrubias, reached out to ROCKiT in the fall of 2019 for support in rethinking the new educator experience, specifically focusing on new educators of color.

The Design Challenge:

REDESIGN the new educator seminar experience for new educators in MMSD in a world where teachers feel overwhelmed, lack time, and need resources. We aim to create an experience that makes new educators feel supported in their professional growth so that they want to stay teaching in MMSD.

Empathy Inspiration to Insight Generation

To start their design challenge, the team needed to first gain empathy around the new teacher experience, specifically focusing on the experience of teachers of color with MMSD to gain valuable insights and push on their own assumptions. To do this, the design team conducted empathy interviews with seven new educators of color from a variety of levels (elementary, middle and high) and with 1-3 years of teaching experience.



Based on the data collected from the empathy interviews, the team created a journey map of the new educators daily experience and learned many key insights. For example new teachers can feel isolated and overwhelmed with their daily tasks, often working late into the evening. These new teachers desire collaboration, connection to other staff of color, classroom management support, and tools for balancing school/work needs and self care.

“THERE IS SO MUCH GOING ON IN YEAR ONE THAT IT’S HARD TO KNOW WHERE TO START.”

Ideation

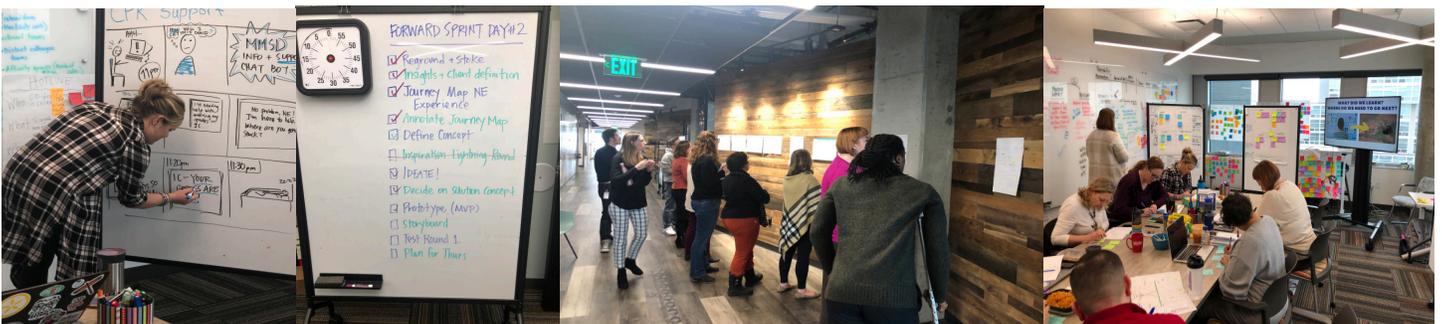
Using the journey map and persona canvas as a guide, the team then defined their concept, anchoring it under the belief that “a supportive and collaborative professional learning experience will make new educators love working in MMSD.” They set out to create an integrated, accessible and responsive system so that new educators can teach and support students and feel impactful.

With this core concept as a guide, the team then spent focused time ideating possible ways to create a responsive and integrated new educator experience. From a long list of ideas that included chatbots and hotlines to an apprenticeship experience, the team landed on a three-pronged approach: an in-house new teacher mentoring model, an individualized professional learning plan, and an online support system.

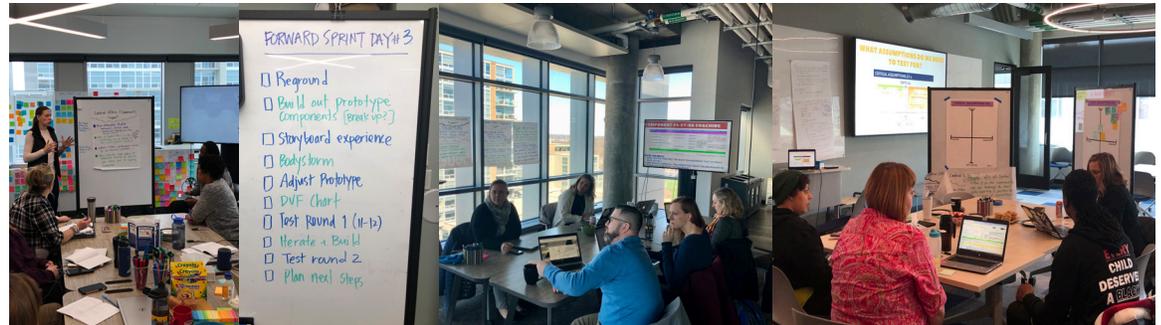
“JUST KNOWING THAT I HAD AN ALLY. I DIDN’T ALWAYS USE [MY NEW EDUCATOR MENTOR], BUT IF I NEEDED SOMEONE, I KNEW THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO HELP!”

Build, Measure, Learn (Prototyping)

In order to gain valuable feedback on the desirability and feasibility of each of their three solution components, the team brought in three new educators from different levels and one principal to critique their work. From these focus sessions, the team gathered important insights on what excited the new educators, what worries or wonderings they had, what more was needed in their design work, and any specific suggestions participants had to improve the design. The team learned that new educators liked the mentor aspect of the prototype, specifically the element where the co-coach would assist and support their lesson planning and classroom management. They also received important critiques of the prototype, including new educators flagging how it could be difficult to schedule time with mentors, given that staff of color are often pulled in so many directions that “urgent” matters trump mentoring connections.



During the next design team work session, the team reflected on the feedback from the new educators and the principal, made adjustments to their prototypes and focused on building and planning out live tests. To start they listed out their most critical assumptions in order to strategically determine which elements of their prototypes they needed to test first. Focusing on the new educator mentor prototype, the team decided that they needed to learn whether new educators would meet with their mentor and whether mentors would dedicate the time to meet and work with the new educator. To gather learnings around these critical assumptions the team built out a rough prototype and identified 2 schools and 4 new educators and cooperating teachers to test the in-house new educator mentor prototype during Quarter 4 of the 2019-20 school year.



Outcome

Due to the global pandemic and spread of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020, the excitement and momentum of this work had to take a pause and pivot to find ways to support new educators in the virtual space. Even though the team did not test out this exact prototype, the learnings that this team generated through this phase of the work has helped MMSD Professional Learning and the UW-Madison Forward partnership shift their work to creating an online, virtual induction and new educator support community. Using the key learnings from this work MMSD Professional Learning and Human Resources created unique spaces for these new educators, such as virtual coffee hours, to help build relationships and create a strong support community for these new educators. Another key outcome of this work is that the ROCKiT process allowed the partners in Forward Madison (UW-Madison School of Education and MMSD) to see how their partnership has evolved over time in this work, and how it can and should pivot to move forward. Through this process, the team was able to better understand how the partnership could refocus its expertise in both organizations to support the needs of teachers of color.



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