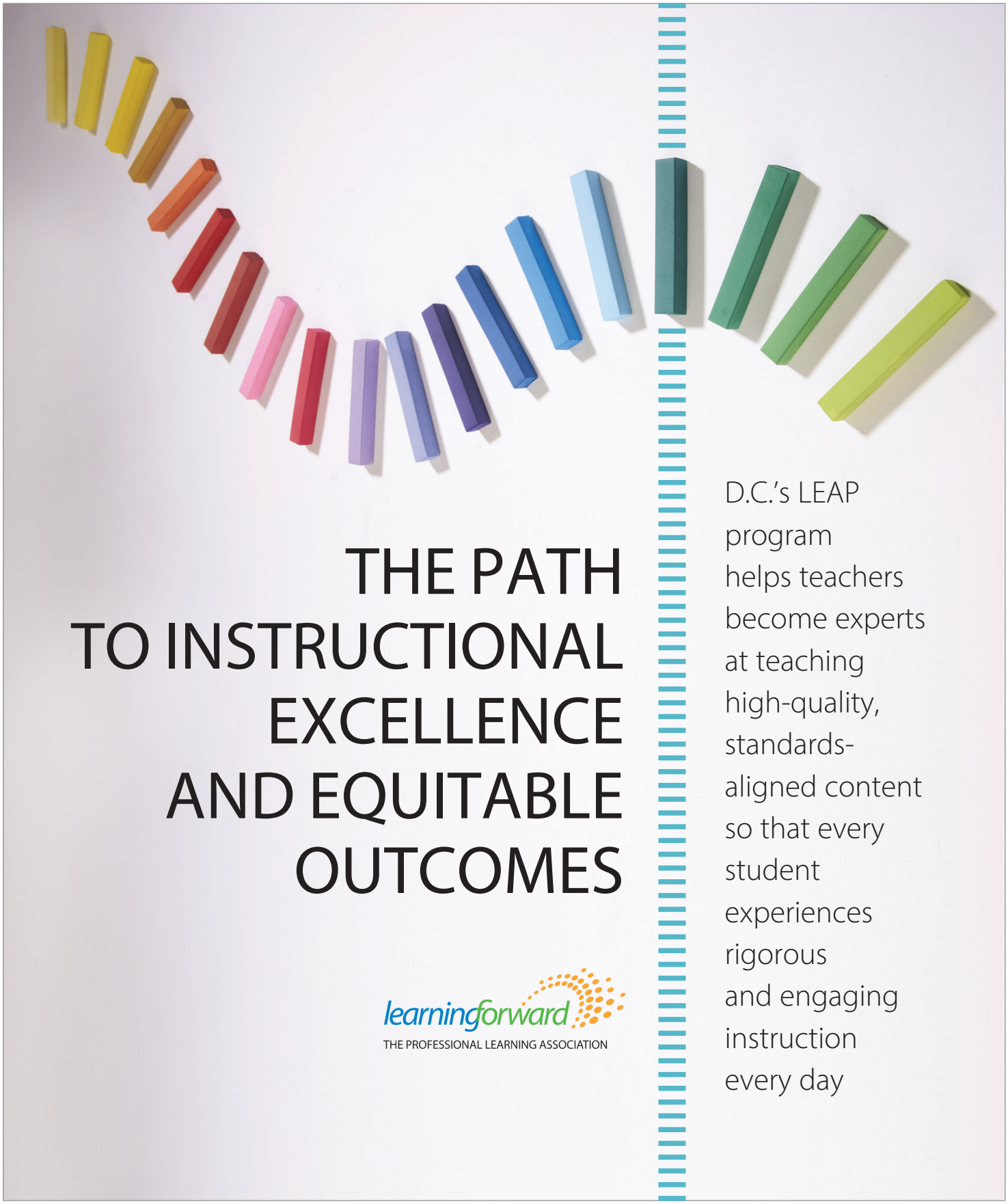


THE PATH TO INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE AND EQUITABLE OUTCOMES

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On a Wednesday afternoon at 2:15 p.m., the 4th- and 5th-grade math teachers at Tubman Elementary School in the District of Columbia gather in a classroom for a weekly seminar designed as dedicated learning and practice time.

They are here to analyze how the Eureka math curriculum approaches key math concepts compared with the district's content standards and assessments. But first, team facilitator Angela Julian warms them up by having them solve some math problems similar to the ones their students must answer.

"Someone want to share how you solved it?" she asks. "OK. What would you do differently, if you were doing this with students?" As teachers jump in, Julian pushes them to use precise math vocabulary and anticipate and address student misconceptions.

After 10 minutes, the teachers form into grade-level teams to unpack what students need to know and be able to do to meet one of the math standards covered in Module 1 of Eureka, which in 4th grade focuses on students' understanding of the patterns in the base 10 system, working with the place value of multidigit whole numbers and decimals, and in 5th grade deepens to a more generalized understanding of the relationships between and among adjacent places on the place value chart, including how to apply these new understandings as students reason about and perform decimal operations.

As they work, teachers frequently page through the teachers' guide to Eureka to make meaning of the standard. Then they spend 15 minutes reviewing items on PARCC, the district's math test, to see how the test assesses the standard compared with how Eureka teaches it.

"Was there something we forgot about in our instruction that this exercise highlights for you?" Julian asks, pushing them to think about what they might have overlooked and need to reteach or review. The teachers spend the final 20 minutes of the meeting completing an abbreviated version of how they will incorporate what they've learned into their next math block.

EQUITABLE OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS

The weekly math team meeting at Tubman is part of the District of Columbia Public Schools' innovative approach to supporting teaching instruction, called Learning Together to Advance our Practice, or LEAP. LEAP was created through a partnership with Leading Educators, a professional learning nonprofit that connects distributed leadership and school-based, curriculum-specific learning to maximize and level teaching quality. After two years of district capacity building and gradual release of design and implementation, the district has expanded the LEAP program to include teachers in all 116 DCPS schools.

At its core, LEAP is about helping teachers become expert at teaching high-quality, standards-aligned content so that every student experiences rich, engaging, and challenging instruction every day. While the expectations for teachers and students have risen markedly over the past decade as a result of the Common Core State Standards, studies have found that what students experience in classrooms varies widely, in part because of teachers' varying understanding of and comfort level with the standards.

Too many students, particularly low-income students and students of color, still are not engaged in grade-appropriate work much of the time (TNTP, 2018). And large majorities of teachers desire more time and collaboration with colleagues to make the changes needed in instruction, rather than working in isolation (Kaufman, Opfer, Bongard, & Pane, 2018).

LEAP prioritizes rigorous content-specific learning for teachers in pursuit of equitable outcomes for students. It's based on the belief that, by establishing a clear vision for instructional excellence across a district grounded in standards-aligned curriculum and giving teachers a safe space in which to learn and collaborate, students will experience less variability in expectations and the quality of instruction from classroom to classroom, grade to grade, and school to school.

The model is based on research that has found the most effective professional learning is school-based and content-specific, grounded in the instructional materials and strategies that teachers will use with their students.

In a synthesis of international research about professional learning that results in improved student outcomes, University of Auckland professor Helen Timperley and her colleagues concluded that teachers must go through an inquiry and knowledge-building cycle, in which they:

- Examine the knowledge and skills their students need, based on curriculum-relevant evidence of their own students' learning;
- Determine what knowledge and skills they need as teachers to address those gaps;
- Engage in practices to deepen their own professional knowledge and refine their skills; and
- Use that new knowledge to engage students in new learning experiences and assess their impact (Timperley, 2010).

Supplementing this collaborative work is individual coaching and expert support to address teachers' individual needs, including built-in time for feedback and reflection (Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull, & Hunter, 2016; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).

LEAP's teacher-centered learning process echoes that described in Learning Forward's book *Becoming a Learning Team,* which describes how teacher teams can engage in intentional, collaborative inquiry based on a five-step inquiry cycle (Hirsh & Crow, 2017).

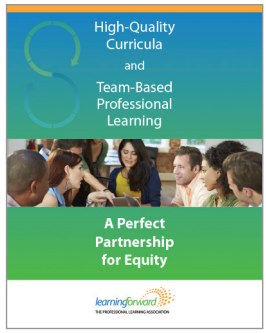
Through five stages that repeat as teachers move through the school year and continue to refine their practice, the cycle of continuous improvement kicks off with data about student learning challenges, continues with goal setting for students and adults, emphasizes an intentional adult learning agenda, sustains learning with implementation supports, and requires assessment of progress.

In cultures that nurture collaborative inquiry, school and system leaders create and protect learning time and provide resources to ensure skillful collaboration and implementation.

Such professional learning contrasts sharply with one-size-fits-all, centrally delivered workshops, and even with many school-based professional learning communities, which often leave teachers to analyze student data without robust content and pedagogy supports.

"LEAP was one of the earliest and most serious efforts to connect professional learning activities with the actual curriculum that teachers are expected to enact in their classrooms with their students," said Ross Wiener, the director of the Aspen Institute's Education & Society Program and co-author of *Practice What You Teach: Connecting Curriculum & Professional Learning in Schools* (Wiener & Pimentel, 2017). "We've seen lots of places where professional development, even on something like

RESEARCH ON CURRICULA AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING



To dig deeper into the recent research on the importance of focusing effective professional learning on the implementation of instructional materials, see Learning Forward's *High-Quality Curricula and Team-Based Professional Learning: A Perfect Partnership for Equity.* Available at **www.learningforward.org/perfectpartnership,** the white paper offers rationale, school-based examples, and action steps for practitioners.

the Common Core, has a generic focus, without regard to any particular content that the teacher is going to teach," he said.

"What LEAP does that's so important is it uses the context of the actual materials teachers are going to use with students to ask: How are these materials related to the standards? What standards are you trying to help students meet? What are the content-knowledge demands on teachers? And what are some of the pedagogical strategies that are going to be most effective in helping students engage with this rigorous content?"

A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP FOR LEARNING

District of Columbia Public Schools, which serves 49,000 students, adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010 and began providing teachers with some subject-specific learning to help meet the new standards. This mainly consisted of large-group sessions held five times a year in central locations, supplemented by support from the districts' network of instructional coaches.

Classroom observations showed this wasn't enough to shift teaching practice in the ways demanded by the standards. The district was focused on accelerating progress to ensure all students had the skills and opportunities they needed to succeed. On the spring 2015 PARCC assessment, aligned with the Common Core, 25% of DCPS students scored at the proficient level in reading and 21% scored at the proficient level in mathematics.

The district started working with Leading Educators in 2012 to design effective roles for teacher leaders as part of a $62 million, five-year federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant. The Teacher Leader Innovation project worked with principals to use teacher leaders' strengths to address the most pressing priorities in their schools.

The project began with seven schools in 2013-14, expanding to 21 schools in 2014-15 and 29 schools in 2015-16. Leading Educators served as a strategic thought partner to the district, helping identify the systemic changes needed to carry out the program and monitor implementation. It helped design and implement teacher leadership professional learning, provided school-based coaching for the teacher leaders, and helped principals share leadership in their buildings.

Based on evaluation data and school feedback, after the first year, both DCPS and Leading Educators found that the most effective teacher leadership roles were those focused on subject-specific pedagogy and content-specific, individualized coaching for teachers.

At the same time, the district did not have a single, rigorous, Common Core-aligned math curriculum, and teachers were eager to implement this change. A few schools had been trying out curriculum from EngageNY, the early version of Eureka Math, developed under an agreement with the New York State Department of Education.

In 2015-16, the district piloted Eureka Math in a subset of schools and supported them with materials and training. Based on positive feedback from teachers and PARCC gains among students in the pilot schools, the district decided to adopt the curriculum systemwide beginning in the 2016-17 school year.

District leaders knew, based on the pilot, that teachers would find it challenging to use the new curriculum without a different type of professional learning for teachers.

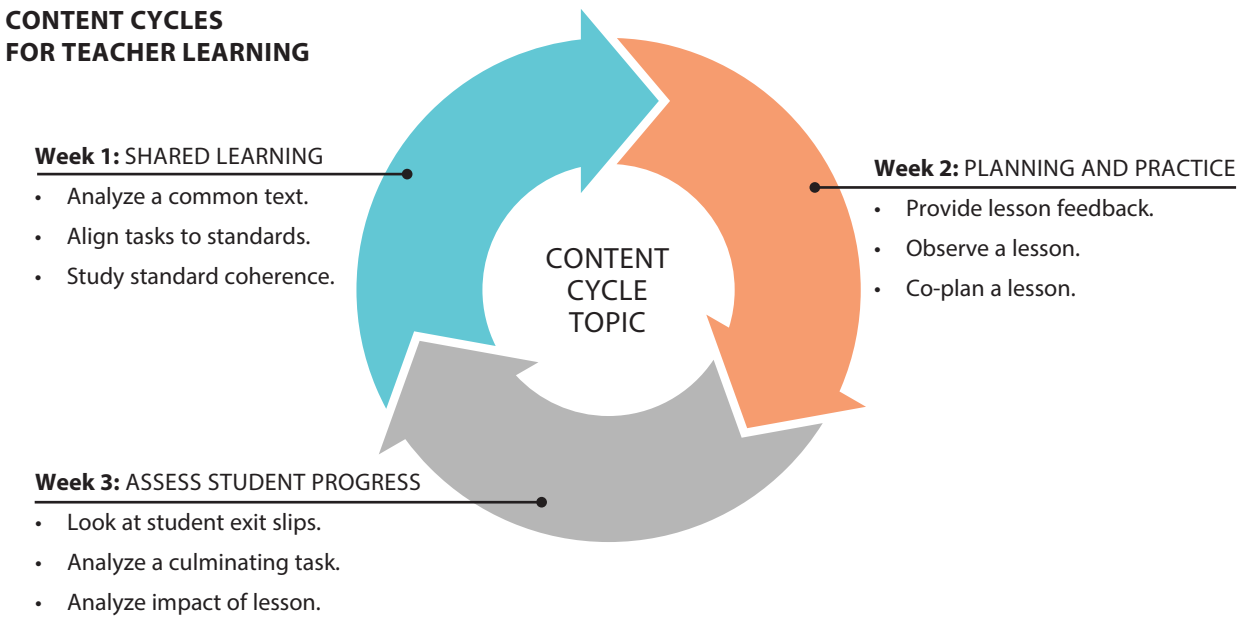
KEY CONDITIONS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- **Distributed instructional leadership:** Involve teachers in instructional improvement.
- **Aligned curriculum:** Ensure teachers have access to and use only high-quality, aligned instructional materials.
- **Master schedule:** Provide adequate time for team-based teacher professional learning and collaborative instructional planning.
- **Diverse instructional leadership team:** Represent all stakeholder voices.
- **Aligned assessment:** Build a student data system with aligned formative, interim, and summative assessments.
- **Limited priorities:** Designate instructional improvement as key among a limited number of school priorities.

Source: Leading Educators.

THE LEAP MODEL

LEAP is based on the principle that teacher effectiveness increases when teachers have frequent access to school-embedded professional learning connected to quality curricular materials. This regular practice and collaboration



Source: Leading Educators.

among content peers is needed to support skillful instruction that deeply engages students in standards-aligned content and drives improvements in teaching and learning across grade levels. It surrounds teachers with layers of support by building the leadership capacity of high-performing teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and assistant principals who are content experts.

These LEAP leaders lead curriculum-focused meetings in their building, typically by grade level or grade span, and they reinforce the learning through coaching to individual teachers between meetings focused on the skills teachers have just learned.

Each teacher on a LEAP team participates in a 90-minute, content-specific LEAP seminar each week, and most receive 30 to 60 minutes of individual observation and coaching to provide differentiated support for individual teachers.

All English language arts and math teachers and all secondary social studies and science teachers participate in LEAP. The approach acknowledges the challenges of implementing a new, standards-aligned curriculum and provides teachers with the support they need to succeed.

You can see that model in action in the library at the Truesdell Education Campus, a pre-K-8 school in northwest D.C. Nine K-2 teachers and their English language arts LEAP leader gathered around the table one fall morning to focus on Common Core State Standard W.1.3: Recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, including some details about what happened, using temporal words to signal event order, and providing some sense of closure.

The teachers have been teaching this standard using a shared text, Jimmy Zangwow's *Out-of-This-World Moon-Pie Adventure*. After reading the book, 1st-grade students had been asked to write a real or made-up adventure of their own. Each of the teachers brought to the meeting a teacher exemplar that met the standard, as well as three pieces of student work the teacher had scored high, medium, and low; and a summary of classroom data, including their analysis of students' most common errors or conceptual misunderstandings.

English language arts LEAP leader Weddy Youn started the meeting by asking teachers to brainstorm the things their students would need to know and be able to do to meet the standard — such as understanding temporal words like first, then, and last; and being able to sequence and describe at least two events.

The group then spent one minute reviewing a teacher's exemplar to see if it aligned with the standard to get clearer on the rigor of the standard and the challenges it might present for students. They spent another minute comparing a student work sample to the teacher exemplar, looking for gaps in student understanding.

Based on the discussion, teachers then worked with

colleagues to plan their upcoming lesson, with two teachers practicing their delivery in front of the group. Mary Ann Stinson, Truesdell's principal, said in 2018-19 the school has emphasized role-playing lesson delivery, or "lesson launches," as part of LEAP seminars to help with quality control across classrooms. "Most of our K-2 teachers have been here five years or less, so seminars are huge for them," she said. "We want to meet them where they are, but also push them."

The summer before LEAP launched in all DCPS schools, Leading Educators worked with the district to provide two weeks of intensive professional learning to school principals and the assistant principals, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and department chairs who would run the LEAP seminars and coaching in the schools.

The summer professional learning focused on why DCPS was shifting to a school-based approach to teacher development, how to create the enabling conditions at the school site (such as common planning time, appropriate leadership structures, and the analysis of student data), facilitate strong inquiry cycles, and support change management; and what content and pedagogy teachers would need to learn.

Great Minds, the nonprofit organization that wrote Eureka Math, led two days of learning about the math curriculum, while DCPS staff led learning about the English language arts curriculum and content.

To ensure that LEAP is implemented with quality across the district, DCPS officials require a small set of nonnegotiables: LEAP leaders must be content experts, screened by the central office for their content knowledge before becoming eligible for the position. LEAP teams must be content-specific and meet 90 minutes weekly. And teachers must receive 30 to 60 minutes of individual coaching weekly or biweekly, depending on their needs.

But within those parameters, principals have flexibility to assign teachers to LEAP teams, which also include special education and English learner teachers. They select LEAP leaders — a teacher leader, instructional coach, department chair, or assistant principal — based on their school's needs, once the individual has passed the central office screening. And principals figure out the master schedule to make room for the weekly, 90-minute LEAP seminars.

In launching LEAP, the district built on its previous efforts to identify, recognize, and deploy effective teachers. Under former Chancellor Michelle Rhee, DCPS had designed one of the most comprehensive teacher evaluation systems in the nation, which used a cadre of master educators and building principals to conduct classroom observations and provide feedback.

The summer before LEAP launched in all DCPS schools, Leading Educators worked with the district to provide two weeks of intensive professional learning to school principals and the assistant principals, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and department chairs who would run the LEAP seminars and coaching in the schools.

Under the Teacher Leader Innovation project, the district and Leading Educators worked with 180 teacher leaders across the district on how to facilitate and lead adult learning, but not necessarily on curriculum. As part of LEAP, the majority of those teacher leaders transitioned into LEAP leadership roles, earning $2,500 stipends on top of their salaries and any bonuses they received from the teacher evaluation system.

To help reallocate resources for LEAP, the district also eliminated the master educator positions, which weren't school-based. The decision signaled an important shift in emphasis from the use of outsiders to evaluate teachers to the use of school-based coaches to provide formative feedback for improvement. Principals subsequently selected many former master educators to serve as LEAP leaders.

OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK

On a recent afternoon, Angela Julian, a LEAP leader, slips into the back of 3rd-grade teacher Joshua Benjamin's class to watch him teach a Eureka lesson. Benjamin is a second-year teacher, and Julian is particularly focused on how he helps students make sense of a problem, rather than just presenting the necessary steps.

One of Eureka's emphases is that students should view math as sense making, not just as series of procedures. "We've spent a lot of time in our LEAP seminars working on that," said Julian. As the students gather on the carpet, Benjamin says, "I think 7 + 2 = 10. That's what I think."

Eager hands shoot up around the room as students beg to differ. Benjamin calls on Angelo, a round-faced boy who's grinning broadly. The answer should be 3, he says. "How did you know that?" Benjamin asks. "Prove it to me." One young girl solves the problem by counting up from 7.

LEAP LEADERSHIP COACHING SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAM COMPONENTS

COACHING VISITS



Participants: LEAP leader and leadership coach.

Purpose: To provide personalized development for LEAP leaders on targeted areas.

Frequency: 4-6 times per academic term.

Examples:
- Co-observing in classrooms to select an action step.
- Co-planning seminars to strengthen facilitation.

PRINCIPAL MEETINGS



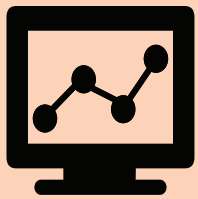
Participants: Principal and leadership coaches.

Purpose: To support leadership of LEAP implementation through coaching.

Frequency: Monthly.

Examples:
- Co-observations of LEAP leaders.
- Co-observations in classrooms to align on LEAP module look-fors.
- Collaboration to align on LEAP leader support.

QUARTERLY DATA REVIEWS



Participants: Principal, LEAP leaders, and leadership coaches.

Purpose: To strengthen capacity to analyze data, particularly teacher practice data; set student, teacher, and leader goals; and monitor progress in a theory of action.

Frequency: Quarterly, after each academic term.

Examples:
- Analyzing student achievement data and teacher practice.
- Planning for the next module.

PRINCIPAL NOTES



Recipients: Principals and instructional superintendents.

Purpose: To support ongoing communication and alignment on priorities for LEAP leadership coaching.

Frequency: Monthly.

Examples:
- Coaching visit updates.
- Event reminders.
- Principal meeting next steps and follow-up.

Source: District of Columbia Public Schools and Leading Educators.

Benjamin then asks if somebody can switch this around to a subtraction problem. He quickly transitions the class to harder, multiple digit numbers, being careful to engage as many students as possible to present different approaches and explain their reasoning to each other.

At the beginning of the year, Benjamin's goal was to engage all students of varying levels in each component of the math block by incorporating more discourse and questioning. More recently, he's been having the students provide written responses and critique those as a class. Today, Julian is looking to see if Benjamin gives students opportunities to respond to each other during discussions.

After one young boy solves a problem, for example, he asks the other students: "Who can explain that? Who can sum up Anderson's strategy?" At another point, he asks students to turn to a partner to explain their thinking. He then works with students to chunk a multistep word problem into smaller pieces, first asking them, "If you had to guess, what kind of math do you think this word problem is going to be about?"

When one student says fractions, Benjamin asks: "How did you know?" As Julian records her observations,

she notes, "We were able to see some of those discussion points. … I wish we would have seen a little more application."

Following the observation, Julian will upload her observation notes into Whetstone, a DCPS portal designed to give teachers immediate written feedback. The portal also allows principals and central office staff to monitor the quality and consistency of LEAP implementation.

Julian was a new LEAP leader last year, but she got lots of help. LEAP seminar content comes from an adult learning curriculum the district developed for LEAP leaders, with Leading Educators partnering on design of LEAP math seminars. The curriculum for adults complements the curriculum for students, with explicit pedagogical and content strategies highlighted within an overall scope and sequence of content to help teachers implement the student materials effectively.

In English language arts, for example, the district designed a two-year scope and sequence for teachers in grades K-2, 3-5, and 6-12 to provide them with the content-specific strategies needed to be a highly effective English language arts teacher.

Within that scope and sequence, the district wrote LEAP modules for the 2017-18 school year — each lasting three weeks — that consisted of at least one seminar of learning new content (such as how to teach academic vocabulary), a seminar to help teachers plan and practice teaching that content to students, and a seminar focused on analyzing student work from lessons in which teachers have implemented the new content.

Based on school-level feedback, the district adjusted this approach for the 2018-19 school year to allow LEAP leaders to choose from a content library of seminars and build their own scope and sequence. This learning-and-inquiry cycle, repeated continuously throughout the year, is similar to the cycle described in Learning Forward's *Becoming a Learning Team* (Hirsh & Crow, 2017).

LEAP leaders have flexibility to select from the library of seminar topics and materials — which include instructional practice guides, videos, resource lists, and teacher action steps — based on the needs of their team and their students' data.

In addition to the adult learning curriculum, LEAP leaders engage in professional learning on curriculum content and adult learning and facilitation for one week every summer and quarterly during the school year. LEAP coaches are available for support as well.

In the program's first year, Leading Educators, which worked directly with 40 high-needs schools, provided and trained those coaches. As the district has built more capacity, it has slowly assumed responsibility for coaching LEAP leaders.

"They were able to give me feedback on my presentations, how I was facilitating adult learning. They came out during debriefs to look at how I was providing feedback, making sure teachers walk away with something tangible. "

— Marian Wilkins, math LEAP leader, Kelly Miller Middle School

The experience of having one-on-one coaching "was amazing," said Marian Wilkins, a math LEAP leader at Kelly Miller Middle School, a 500-student school in northeast D.C. "They were able to give me feedback on my presentations, how I was facilitating adult learning. They came out during debriefs to look at how I was providing feedback, making sure teachers walk away with something tangible. It was also great when they came out to co-observe with me. I really loved having that one-on-one support because it was customized for me."

Last year, when Julian was a new LEAP leader, her Leading Educators coach, Matt Radigan, helped get things off to a good start. "For me, being new, thinking about the whole year and how to pace everything out not just in seminars but also for coaching was challenging, and Matt really helped me with that," she said. "The first year we implemented Eureka was the most challenging because we didn't have LEAP, and Eureka takes some familiarity."

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 2.0

Implementing a new curriculum is not easy, particularly one as focused on conceptual understanding as Eureka. According to Wilkins, at Kelly Miller Middle School, "there was a lot of resistance to Eureka because it was changing the way you teach. It was very conceptual. It takes a lot of time to plan. We spent a lot of time doing math and watching videos." Teachers struggled to cover all of the Eureka modules, and math scores dropped from the previous year.

This year, the math team is working together to fine-tune the planning process, especially since half of the team is new to the district and the curriculum. As a result, said Wilkins, the pacing of Eureka modules has improved, which is starting to show up on interim assessments.

Teacher content knowledge is a major part of the struggle, she said.

"You know your content but you don't know why the math works the way it works. It's a struggle for an adult to say, 'I don't know this. I have to study to learn this.' Because we weren't taught conceptually, we're going to have to learn conceptually, and then we have to teach it. I'm really trying to work with the team on the teacher moves part. … Having the ability to plan LEAP based on our teacher needs has been really powerful this year."

TEACHERS DRAW ON EACH OTHER'S SKILLS

Before LEAP, Wilkins coached teachers across all content areas, from math to physical education to Spanish. LEAP allowed her to focus, and the teachers on the math LEAP team draw on each other's skills. Previously, teachers had met as grade-level teams but not in their content area.

"They are able to sit in this room and build off each other," she said. "It's like we're becoming the best version of a math teacher possible because we're able to leverage the expertise of the 11 other math teachers in the building.

"What makes it special is that it occurs weekly," she said. "LEAP is really professional development 2.0. It's drilling down to: What are the needs of the teacher? How can I grow this teacher professionally at this school, with this clientele of students, in order to make a change in student achievement? That's the thing that I love the most. I'm progress monitoring teachers every week, and I'm adjusting and adapting based on the needs of my teachers and the students that we serve in my building."

Libby Sanchez, a teacher leader at Marie Reed Elementary School, said, "Prior to LEAP, in my experience, teachers who received in-house coaching were teachers who were struggling. And there was this idea that teachers who were really strong or who were really doing well in the classroom didn't need the support. So, one thing I appreciate now is …. there's this recognition that all teachers deserve an opportunity to grow and they need and deserve an opportunity to get better in their practice.

"The fact that people are being observed more frequently and getting more frequent feedback, I feel, it's making people more comfortable with the learning process and allowing people to feel more comfortable taking risks in the classroom because we've created these safe spaces," she said. "I'm not somebody coming in from outside. I work here. I've worked here for a while. And I know the kids. I know the classrooms. Having the support come from in-house makes it a more collaborative experience.

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— Libby Sanchez, teacher leader at Marie Reed Elementary School

"I think the structure that LEAP puts in place — the observations and the seminars — gives us a nice opportunity to deepen our own content knowledge."

CREATING COHERENCE AND BUILDING CAPACITY

But for that to happen requires creating coherence: coherence across a school district's standards, curriculum, and assessments, so that teachers don't feel pushed in conflicting directions; and coherence across leaders at all levels of the system, so that the vision for excellent teaching, teachers' professional learning, instructional supervision, and accountability all align.

Leading Educators partnered with the district to provide customized strategic planning and support for such systemwide alignment across layers of leadership — from the central office to instructional superintendents, to principals, to LEAP leaders themselves. It met with the central office LEAP team weekly and provided ongoing counsel and technical assistance between meetings.

"When you're working in a system, it's so fast-paced that you often don't have the luxury of time to do the research when you put things into practice," said Liz McCarthy, former senior deputy chief for LEAP in the central office. "Leading Educators really provided that research lens. Because we were partners on the teacher leadership initiative, we were very comfortable pushing one another and challenging ideas."

"One of the really important parts of the partnership between Leading Educators and DCPS is the very intentional focus on capacity building," said Maggie Slye, who leads the partnership for Leading Educators and was an assistant principal, central office manager, and instructional coach in the district.

That has involved a gradual release model in which the central office has taken on more and more responsibility

for the program over time. As the program expanded, the Leading Educators team became smaller and more focused, while the DCPS team got larger and began to provide more direct coaching to schools.

The first year, LEAP leaders participated in quarterly professional learning led by Leading Educators and DCPS staff to support the development of their content expertise and leadership skills, building a cohort of content leaders across the district. The LEAP team in central office focused on writing the adult learning curriculum, partnering with Leading Educators to write LEAP math modules.

In the 40 schools where Leading Educators coached LEAP leaders directly, it also met monthly with principals to support their own content knowledge development and strengthen their feedback to LEAP leaders. Leading Educators and LEAP members from the central office also met with clusters of principals to lead them on learning walks through the schools, similar to the professional learning for LEAP leaders, so they would know what to look for in standards-aligned instruction.

By the second year of the program, DCPS staff began coaching LEAP leaders in a subset of schools. And by year three, the district provided all coaching support for LEAP leaders.

After the first year of LEAP implementation, both senior district administrators and Leading Educators realized the importance of having a stronger relationship with the district's instructional superintendents, each of whom oversees about 12 schools within his or her cluster and supervises building principals.

So, in summer 2017, the LEAP team and Leading Educators met with the instructional superintendents to identify three to five schools in need of the most intensive support. The LEAP team provided each instructional superintendent with a LEAP leadership coach for math and a LEAP leadership coach for English language arts to work with these schools.

"That shift in 2017 helped to establish the instructional superintendents as the leaders of LEAP, rather than the central office," said Slye. There also are monthly or bimonthly opportunities for LEAP coaches and instructional superintendents to meet and do a status check on school implementation.

The district also has worked to provide tighter coordination in the central office. Initially, the LEAP team was in the Office of Instructional Practice, which focused on adult learning and the development of teacher leaders, while the Office of Teaching and Learning focused on the student curriculum, and the Office of Human Capital focused on teacher talent. That led to coordination and



ownership issues about who set professional learning priorities for schools.

"We spent lots of time in meetings to come up with collaborative priorities," said Scott Thompson, who helped design LEAP as deputy chief in the Office of Instructional Practice.

Now, LEAP sits in the Office of Teaching and Learning to promote better alignment with curriculum and assessments. The district also holds monthly roundtables that include the instructional superintendents, their content leads, the leads for social and emotional learning, and area specialists to assess how LEAP implementation is going and dive deeply into practice at one school.

Kathryn Larkin, former principal of H.D. Cooke Elementary School, is now the instructional superintendent for Cluster 1 in the district. "Up until LEAP, within DCPS and in my school, we really focused more on pedagogy than we did content," she said.

"It was the *how* of teaching — how to teach enrichment, how to teach guided reading — as opposed to the real content within the curriculum," she said. "So, you had people who had great strategies for teaching, but that doesn't mean they were curriculum experts."

In contrast, LEAP leaders take centrally managed content assessments to qualify for their role and participate in ongoing content and leadership development throughout the school year.

As a principal, Larkin helped coach LEAP leaders, many of whom had just been teachers themselves. "It's very interesting and challenging for people to build authority when they don't have formal authority," she said. "So, it was about how to do this work with informal authority and get buy-in.

"I took four people from teacher to LEAP leader, and

it was just such a powerful experience to see them take on more responsibility, take on this role of coach, and get a much different perspective when you're trying to coach teachers," she said. "As a school leader, it was unbelievably powerful for me to have that group of academic leaders on my team."

Now, as an instructional superintendent, her focus is on finding the right talent at both the district and school levels to become LEAP leaders and coaches of LEAP leaders, and to make sure principals put in place the enabling conditions: Does their master schedule and their budget really support LEAP? Are they communicating LEAP as a priority? "If it's not a priority for them," she said, "then it's not a priority for the teachers."

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

One of the most challenging aspects of LEAP is finding the time for weekly team meetings and observation cycles at the school site. To help, the district provided schools with a comprehensive design guide of ways to adjust their master schedules but allowed principals to decide.

At Kelly Miller Middle School, for example, the 12 math teachers, including the school's special education teachers, have common planning time during seventh period, which replaced grade-level team meetings. Ahead of each unit, the school also pays teachers to meet on a Saturday or after school for collaborative planning.

H.D. Cooke Elementary School scheduled 45-minute music and art classes back to back so that core content teachers could meet in their LEAP teams. Implementation has proven more successful in schools where principals have ensured LEAP team time and time for classroom observations and debriefs.

"The challenge at a smaller school is definitely around scheduling," said Corinne Colgan, interim chief of the Office of Teaching and Learning. "Now that we're in the third year of doing LEAP districtwide, we're allowing schools a lot more flexibility to do it in a way that makes sense for them."

Pacing also has evolved. In year one, teachers were expected to learn a new instructional strategy each week, which proved unrealistic. The amount of content to cover meant the time for lesson planning and practice during the 90-minute seminars often was cut short. And each LEAP leader was expected to follow the same pathway of adult learning modules.

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In year two, the district shifted to prioritize just three or four new instructional practices each quarter. It designed three-week cycles that provided a week to learn a new skill, a week to plan and practice using that skill, and a week to look at student work and the impact of that practice on student outcomes. And LEAP leaders could choose from among several sequences of adult learning modules based on school needs.

"We got a lot of positive feedback in year two," said McCarthy. "People really appreciated the slowing down, but we also had people saying they wanted to slow it down even further." Now, more time is built in for teacher learning, lesson planning and role playing new pedagogical strategies, and analyzing student work. And LEAP leaders have increasing flexibility to pull from the library of topic seminars as needed, rather than follow a prescribed sequence.

That has presented its own challenges, said Katie Burke, the director of LEAP design and LEAP leader development for the district. "By giving so much flexibility, it means leaders who have less expertise, or schools that are still establishing the conditions to support LEAP, just don't have time to sequence the learning out for their teachers and really intentionally plan. And that means the time during seminars may not be as applicable for teachers."

The district is now building out more content to help LEAP leaders understand the potential sequences of adult learning that could be used to support their teachers.

Even with all the support, helping teachers understand and effectively use new Common Core-aligned curricula has been challenging. Eureka emphasizes grade-level instruction, yet some students in the district start the school year well below grade level in math and reading.

"Teachers ... have a difficult time teaching what Eureka is asking them to do for that grade level," said Kortni Stafford, principal of Kelly Miller Middle School. It's tempting to level down for students who are struggling, she said, "but then, you're missing the actual standard students should be learning."

English language arts is complicated because there are so many components to the curriculum — from writing

to close reading of texts to guided reading — that there's more variability at the school site. Teacher turnover is also a problem, as schools need to train new teachers on the curriculum as veteran teachers leave. This year, Kelly Miller collaborated with several other schools to pay for additional professional development about Eureka for teachers new to the district.

THE IMPACT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Yet while progress has been slow, said Stafford, she's seeing more accountable talk in math classrooms, more students showing their work and using multiple ways to solve math problems, and richer math vocabulary, writing, and discussion.

Wilkins, the math coach at Kelly Miller, said the ability for math teachers to analyze student data on a weekly basis has enabled them to address problems in the moment. "Without LEAP, we wouldn't have that platform to have those conversations and to move our students now," she said, "so reteaching has become very intentional and purposeful for the math department."

By grounding professional learning in a common curriculum that is used across grade levels and classrooms, teachers are able to focus on what they are teaching, how they are teaching it, and how they will know if students learned it using a common vocabulary and set of expectations.

At H.D. Cooke, said Larkin, "we saw more alignment across grade levels because grades K-2 were all learning the same thing. What's nice about the vertical alignment was the teachers got to know the other grade levels as well, which really built a rich discussion about rigor and what was happening in the quality of assignments across grade levels.

"You also developed a culture of learning amongst the staff," she said. "They became more comfortable with having peer observations, with having their instruction filmed and then debriefing it with the entire group. There was a level of trust amongst the LEAP teams that supported a deeper level of work."

Researchers from the University of Virginia and Stanford are studying the implementation of LEAP and its impact. In year one, 96% of principals and LEAP leaders found LEAP to be a valuable use of time and an improvement over previous professional development. And 73% of teachers in schools that implemented LEAP with high fidelity said LEAP improved their teaching (Toch, 2018).



But implementation of LEAP remains variable — not surprising given the scope of the initiative. In year one, DCPS reported only about one-third of schools implemented LEAP with high fidelity, meaning holding weekly LEAP seminars, using the DCPS-provided adult learning curriculum, and providing teachers with weekly observation and feedback. Only 71% of teams met weekly as expected, and only three-quarters of teachers reported being observed at least twice a month (Toch, 2018).

"We see big variability in the impact and the perceived experience based on how skilled and expert the coach is," said Thompson of DCPS, "and there are certainly not enough of those people. There's no greater determinant on whether LEAP is having an impact on practice than the quality of the LEAP leader."

Implementation matters. In schools that implemented LEAP with high fidelity, the percentage of students scoring proficient in reading on the city's standardized test increased four times more from 2016 to 2017 than in schools where LEAP was implemented with low fidelity. The gap was even greater in math, suggesting the potential power of the program (Toch, 2018).

In 2017-18, schools that implemented LEAP with high fidelity grew 2.62% in reading, compared with growth of 0.84% in low-implementation schools. In math, schools that implemented LEAP with high fidelity grew 2.25%, while schools with low fidelity saw their scores decline 0.59%. To stress the program's importance, fidelity of implementation is now part of principals' evaluation and bonuses.

At Tubman, math PARCC scores went up significantly last year. Teacher retention also went up, with all math

teachers returning for the following school year. "We're in year three now, and teachers are seeing it makes a difference," said Julian.

Lulla Abraham, an intervention specialist at Tubman, said, "We wouldn't have had the same results if we hadn't had LEAP to learn the curriculum and the Tubman expectations. It's been a time for teachers to be together, work together. I think it's unique to have it built into the day and to be structured and run by someone you're familiar with."

The researchers are expected to complete year two of their study this summer, including an in-depth analysis of six elementary schools, to understand the implementation issues more deeply.

ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

In schools where implementation is strong, teachers perceive LEAP leaders as generally well-prepared and knowledgeable. Based on survey responses, teachers who feel they are learning and growing as a result of LEAP rate their LEAP leaders highly in terms of both content expertise and effective facilitation and coaching.

The support of the school principal also is a critical factor, with highly effective administrators actively involving LEAP leaders in team decision-making and removing barriers to implementation, such as finding supplemental planning time.

In addition to the central role that LEAP leaders play in implementation, Leading Educators has identified the following factors, all of which align with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

Provide rigorous content for teacher learning.

The nation's focus on student test scores as a means to evaluate school leaders and teachers can lead teachers' collaborative learning time to be overtaken with content-agnostic student data protocols. While looking at student work is an essential part of LEAP's cycle of improvement, teachers also need to deepen content knowledge and curriculum expertise — learning, planning, and practicing together.

"I think the mistake that sometimes is made with teacher professional development at the school level is it becomes this cycle of sitting together and planning reteach lessons every week, and teachers don't necessarily learn something new," said McCarthy. "So teachers look at student work again and again, without knowing what to do as a result of students falling behind. We felt it was really important to push the new learning embedded in each module."

Intentional planning also builds school-based capacity over time, cultivates evidence of effectiveness, and creates space to plan for resistance and change management.

Select leaders with intentionality.

The knowledge and skills of these leaders is critical. They must possess instructional leadership skills, strong facilitation skills, content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, and the ability to lead. This requires clear criteria for selecting, training, and continuing to support these leaders.

Align resources.

For a model like LEAP to be fully owned by schools within two to three years, the central office must ensure that schools have what they need (materials, people, time, systems, and money) to make LEAP work, while gradually building school capacity to nurture those conditions without central office.

The district also designated a 10-member team to work with each instructional superintendent to help schools submit their LEAP implementation plans, review those plans, and then ensure school budgets actually reflected those commitments.

"Those sorts of things are really important, or at least give you a shot at implementing a program with any kind of fidelity and making principals take it more seriously," said Thompson.

Plan for intentional scaling.

DCPS created a multiyear strategy to launch LEAP that included a pilot. Scaling over time, a multilevel program evaluation strategy (e.g. stakeholder satisfaction, implementation fidelity, teacher practice change, student outcomes), and a commitment to continuous improvement allowed DCPS central office to respond to data and feedback from the field and make the necessary adjustments to LEAP.

This intentional planning also builds school-based capacity over time, cultivates evidence of effectiveness,

and creates space to plan for resistance and change management.

Measuring conditions, such as the amount of time teachers have to collaborate and whether they're receiving high-level feedback, helps understand what's working and what's not. Without multiple measures for districtwide initiatives, it's hard to figure out which lever to pull to help the model get better and benefit more students.

Protect time for teacher learning.

A commitment to school-embedded, curriculum-focused professional learning means that schools remove previous priorities that consumed teachers' time and focus teacher collaborative time on deepening content knowledge, instructional planning, and looking at student work to measure the impact of teachers' new learning on student learning.

SHIFTING TEACHERS' MINDSETS

What remains central to LEAP is placing high-quality instructional materials at the center of teachers' professional learning, making that learning relevant and actionable for teachers, and accelerating their ability to apply new pedagogical content knowledge and skills.

By requiring teachers to engage in the curriculum work that students are expected to do, and analyzing student work closely, LEAP shifts teachers' mindsets about what it's possible for students to achieve as well as what productive struggle looks like. This is more important than ever, given new RAND Corporation research suggesting that, over time, instruction nationally has become less, rather than more, aligned to the standards.

RAND used data from the American Teacher Panel surveys to look at Common Core instruction nationally from 2015 to 2017. It found English language arts teachers were less likely to regard the use of complex, grade-level texts as aligned with their standards in 2017 than in 2016.

While researchers observed no changes in mathematics teachers' practices overall, mathematics teachers of low-vulnerability students reported that their students engaged less in some standards-aligned student practices in 2017 than in 2016 (Kauffman et al., 2018).

"LEAP has shifted the locus of improvement in DCPS from the individual teacher to the school," writes Thomas Toch, the director of FutureEd, a think tank at Georgetown University. "By moving teacher professional development inside schools and making it part of daily life, LEAP places a bet on empowering schools to be learning organizations for adults as well as for students" (Toch, 2018).

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