GREAT CITY SCHOOLS
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLATFORM

Inaugural Courses:

Complex Thinking and Communication Across Content Areas



A program of courses for teachers serving high-needs students to ensure they meet college- and career-readiness standards by engaging in complex forms of communication and thinking



Introduction

Today's college- and career-readiness standards require considerably higher levels of academic language mastery and cognitive functioning across the curriculum than ever before. Teachers across all content areas are expected to deepen their students' understanding of content and develop their mastery of academic language, while also addressing any "unfinished" learning students may bring. For educators in Great City School districts, this challenge is a daily reality. These districts enroll a large share of the nation's English learners and economically disadvantaged students, many of whom are performing below grade level. Few, if any, efforts have focused on helping teachers who serve high-needs students to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to meet these new instructional standards.

To address this gap between instructional expectations and capacity, there is an urgent need for professional development that provides teachers new ways of supporting academic language and literacy development across content areas, particularly for high-needs students. The Council of the Great City Schools, with the generous support of the Leona Helmsley Charitable Trust, has therefore initiated its learning platform and developed a set of courses focused on expanding the capacity of teachers to support high-needs students in their acquisition and use of the complex thinking and communication skills required by college- and career-readiness standards in both English language arts and mathematics.

Unique Course Design Features

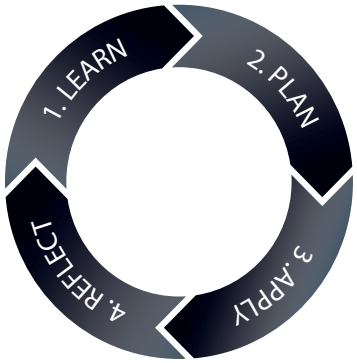
Format and delivery. Large urban districts have substantial professional development needs, and increasingly rely on professional learning communities to provide that development. To support these professional learning communities, and address the limited time and strained budgets many districts face, this professional development resource is designed to provide:

- **Affordable, on-demand, and ongoing access** to nationally-known experts, research, and evidence-based pedagogy, along with high-leverage practices
- **Flexibility** to be delivered either in face-to-face sessions or in professional learning communities with live facilitation
- **Adjustable pacing** to accommodate individual district professional development schedules and opportunities throughout the year
- **Explicit connections** between course content and a district's own tools and resources to maximize relevance for educators

Adult learning cycle. The Council's advisory teams, consisting of nationally-regarded researchers and urban district practitioners, identified three important design features for an effective professional learning experience. To help teachers transform their instructional practices to better support high-needs students in their attainment of rigorous standards—

- Content must show how teachers implement high-leverage instructional moves for high-needs students.
- Courses should provide access to expert research, evidence-based and effective pedagogy, and promising practices relevant to member districts.
- Course and platform design should allow for maximum integration or coordination with other ongoing district professional learning opportunities.

The web-based learning platform, the brief videos, and the overall design of activities allow for courses to be delivered in many ways and at any time during the year. Flexibility is embedded into the system to provide ample time for participants to experience each phase of the learning cycle: ***learn*** new approaches and strategies, ***plan*** to execute these approaches and strategies, ***apply*** them in classrooms, and ***reflect*** upon the implementation



Content and Structure of Inaugural Courses

The courses focus on academic language development in order to accelerate the learning needed to master grade-level content tied to college- and career-readiness standards. The program includes the following:

- **Videos and demonstrations of the "how."** Each of the courses includes video clips of teachers and educators planning and implementing high-leverage strategies, along with video presentations of experts and practitioners describing how to prepare for and execute the instructional moves.
- **Tools and resources.** A range of tools and resources are also provided to aid in the planning and execution processes.
- **Contextualized integration.** Practical and locally-relevant application of new knowledge is built into the course design and the learning cycle. The design assumes a central role for district-based facilitators.

All participants are first required to complete the ***Foundations*** course in order to build a common understanding of the theory of action and the key research behind the professional development courses, as well as to build a common vocabulary. Once educators complete the *Foundations* course, they can select the course sequence in either the ELA pathway or the Mathematics pathway.

- **ELA pathway:** Focuses on building academic language skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, using complex grade-level materials aligned with the college- and career-readiness standards.
- **Mathematics pathway:** Focuses on building academic language skills to address the language demands of mathematics, equipping teachers with the skills necessary to engage students in grade-level reasoning and to build conceptual understanding in math.

Inaugural Program: Ten Courses on Complex Communication and Thinking



For more information, contact:
The Council of the Great City Schools at: PLP@cgcs.org.

Vision of the Council's Professional Learning Platform

We envision a hybrid professional development offering that acknowledges and prioritizes educators as learners, while honoring ELLs, students performing below grade level, and economically disadvantaged students as the ultimate center and focus of the work. Professional development should help build learning communities across districts by accommodating and connecting diverse audiences across roles and content areas (e.g., teachers, instructional coaches, principals, and district administrators), and by providing safe learning environments that support reflection on practice outside of any formal evaluative protocols.



How to sign up for the Program

Contracting for the Council's inaugural courses is best if arranged through a single point of contact, such as the office for English language learners or another office selected by the district.

Contact us at PLP@cgcs.org to request a free consultation to determine the best package for you.

About the Council

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 68 large city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research, technical assistance, and media relations. The organization also provides a network for school districts sharing common problems to exchange information and to collectively address new challenges as they emerge in order to deliver the best possible education for urban youth.

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