Partners in School Innovation

Our Vision

Partners in School Innovation envisions a thriving system of urban public schools that fosters the growth of all its students and works to eliminate the achievement gap by creating vibrant places to teach, learn and grow, with rigorous standards and an unwavering focus on results.

Deliver a Consistent, High-Quality, Research- Based Approach → Build Increased Adult Capacity in Leadership, Instruction and Use of Data → Breakthrough Student Achievement

THEORY OF IMPACT

Transformation Network Model

Monthly **network convenings** include the school transformation team and focus on developing change agent skills while leading school change efforts.

Onsite support includes 1 to 1 coaching for multiple team members as well as support in facilitating team meetings, modelling, observing and providing feedback.

Measuring Success

Three types of outcomes were measured:

1. **Individual Change Agent Skills:** Measured through participant reflection grounded in our Change Agent Framework and a sample of one-to-one participant interviews
2. **Schoolwide Capacity:** Measured through School Transformation Reviews, focused on research-based practices in leadership, systems for professional learning, and instruction
3. **Student Achievement:** Measured through state tests in math and ELA

Outcomes were promising for schools and adults that participated in the Transformation Network. The schools and leaders highlighted in our case studies demonstrated strong outcomes in all three areas.

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Case Study Introduction

Our change agents are powerful leaders, able to challenge the way things are currently done while respecting the history and experience within the system. They rally their communities in ways that lead to powerful and sustainable improvements. They are skillful facilitators, coaches, collaborators, agitators, consultants, and data fanatics.

About the case studies:

In spring 2020, two internal evaluators conducted 17 individual interviews with school staff from 9 schools in two Bay Area school districts who had participated in the Transformation Network over the last two or three years. Interviews were conducted virtually and recorded to generate complete transcripts. Interviewees represented a sample of all participants and held various roles within their schools.

CASE STUDY 1:
Collective Leadership

The principal has worked in the school for 19 years. She recently transitioned to her current role after holding the role of assistant principal.

Focus Areas for Coaching:
- Shared leadership and leading teachers to be leaders
- Having difficult conversations that push adults to shift their mindsets and center equity
- Taking risks to work towards equity and achieve school transformation
- Effective two-way communication with staff

CASE STUDY 2:
Change Management

The principal has worked at the school for six years. She is leading the school through a major period of transition as they are preparing to move to a new school site with a flexible classroom design.

Focus Areas for Coaching:
- Energizing and inspiring others
- Building systems for professional learning
- Communicating with urgency
- Anticipating staff reactions
- Equity conversations

CASE STUDY 3:
Equity Mindsets

Partners in School Innovation has supported this South San Jose elementary school for 7+ years to implement equity-driven school transformation work. At the end of the Transformation Network (TN), we knew the foundation had been laid to continue the work.

Focus Areas for the Partnership:
- Integrating equity into the work of the Instructional Leadership Team and beyond
- Building the capacity of staff
- Gathering feedback from staff
- Galvanizing a commitment to equity across the entire staff

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CASE STUDY 1: COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP
The Starting Point

The principal has worked in the school for 19 years. She recently transitioned to her current role after holding the role of assistant principal. She identified strengths and areas of opportunity connected to our research-based framework.

Strengths:
- Self-reflection
- Listening to staff members
- Inspiring others and modeling leadership
- Being supportive while holding high expectations
- Using data to guide leadership and adult learning

Focus Areas for Coaching:
- Shared leadership and leading teachers to be leaders
- Having difficult conversations that push adults to shift their mindsets and center equity
- Taking risks to work towards equity and achieve school transformation
- Effective two-way communication with staff

"When I came into the position of principal, I was sort of debating, should I take this position. Is this really what I want to do? I was a little bit apprehensive about it because I think that our staff is a mix of veteran teachers as well as teachers who have been here less than 3 years...The culture of the school and the climate of the teachers, it was probably in a low. I think that there was a lot of distrust about administration and distrust about our principal so I really was wondering if I wanted to step into that situation."
- Principal

"I'm one of those people who in my position, I'm just gonna do it, and you take on so much in a role that you are bound to burn out." - Principal

Restructuring Leadership Teams

"We actually made a huge change and took a risk…" to re-make the leadership team.
- Principal

"... if we get more people like teachers on the team then we are gonna be able to make bigger gains and our students are going to benefit from it, that's our ultimate goal. I think that's something that I want to emphasize, and let my staff know, that it's important that we all show up and that we contribute to our leadership teams... it can't just be me saying we need to do this. There needs to be a collective buy in."
- Principal

The strategy that was particularly effective for this partnership was supporting the leader to restructure the leadership teams in the school to build collective responsibility amongst staff.

This was informed by two core principles:
- Designing systems that leverage the existing strengths of leadership team members
- Keeping students at the center of the work

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CASE STUDY 1: COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP
Building Up the Teams

Two teams in particular created space for teachers to step up to leadership:

1. The new climate and culture team focused on connecting with students.
2. The Transformation Team brought activities from the network sessions (such as a personal experience panel) back to share with staff at the school.

> "When the teachers signed up for [a team] they understood that there would be a purpose behind each team. And that they would also be part of the collective as the leadership team and be expected to provide some kind of professional development...So it gave them more of a goal and a focus and a job rather than just reporting nuts and bolts. Those teams were created with the help of our coach." - Principal

> "It was really powerful, because...we never had done a [personal experience] panel before and the teachers that volunteered to be on the panel had never gotten a venue of that sort to be able do that before...and it required a lot of trust." - Principal

The Results

> "The key is...Partners as a transformation team has really helped us to transform our systems and our structures and we want to make sure that the systems exist even without the actual people... I think it's really important that everybody understands that there is a role that they play on the leadership team." - Principal

> "We've put on a couple of staff developments for our teachers, and we've all had to take a role and…[staff] now have more accountability for their parts even the simple, 'I'll bring the coffee.' They've all had to pick up and do something because as a collective the staff is looking at them...I've never seen some of these teachers step up to facilitate and now they are."
> - Principal

How this played out during the pandemic:
In Spring 2020 when the school transitioned to distance learning, the culture and climate team immediately took action to implement new methods to connect with students remotely. Their swift and creative action was possible because the team had been working throughout the year to center student experiences.

Going forward, systems exist to support and perpetuate distributed leadership along with a staff culture of collective buy-in.

The principal has observed a shift in teacher behaviors particularly taking initiative in staff development sessions.

In the first year of partnership, the school increased capacity in Results Oriented Leadership, Systems for Professional Learning, and Core Instructional Program. Increases ranged from 0.5 to 1.1 points on a 6 point scale as measured by the School Transformation Review. Additionally, according to state test scores, more students met or exceeded expectations while fewer students scored in the bottom proficiency in both ELA and math (data from 2019).

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CASE STUDY 2: CHANGE MANAGEMENT
The Starting Point

The principal has worked at the school for six years. She is leading the school through a major period of transition as they are preparing to move to a new school site with a flexible classroom design.

Strengths:
- Self-reflection and awareness
- Maintaining high expectations
- Deep pedagogical knowledge base
- Building relationships with staff and understanding their learning needs

Focus Areas for Coaching:
- Energizing and inspiring others
- Building systems for professional learning
- Communicating with urgency
- Anticipating staff reactions
- Equity conversations

"The new school is very innovative and non-traditional. So this was the year in particular that we started doing a lot of exploration and experimentation around the strategies will be bringing back to the new flex learning site with us. So I think it was a very difficult year in getting people on board or helping them reflect...And It was challenging because there was some push back. And sort of just navigating all the changes that we have already been through and the changes coming up." - Principal

"I think one of my biggest growth areas was with systems because I'm really strong with relationship building and things like that but the systems piece was really missing." - Principal

The Focus

"In reflection with [Partners' staff] and her work with systems team being intentional around observation and feedback, we were able to develop a really clear focus. So I would say that that was most beneficial." - Principal

"Continuing to focus on our mission and vision, one that was collective, one that we created together a couple of years ago, sort of constantly going back to that. And constantly renaming our core values and why we are doing the work that we are doing, I think I was able to strengthen teacher's resolve. Yes, this is what we are doing, we are excited about it. We all want to change. This is good for kids this is going to create a lot of equity." - Principal

A key strategy for this partnership was staying focused on a clear vision grounded in equity for students.

This involved:
- Establishing a systems team that honed the focus through observation and feedback
- Building teacher buy-in for the change process by centering students

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CASE STUDY 2: CHANGE MANAGEMENT
The Coaching Approach

In working with the leader, another key strategy was to strengthen her leadership and change management skills through:

- Reflective conversations in one-to-one coaching once per week
- Thought partnership regarding responding to resistance amongst the staff while communicating a sense of urgency
- The "how-to" of building a mission and vision in a collaborative way
- Making connections between the network learning and its application to her context
- Modeling facilitation of meetings and professional development sessions

"With my Partners coach, there was a lot of reflective conversations around how to continue to build on the relationships that I have with people, but also be able to continue to create the dynamic and sense of urgency to move forward" - Principal

Referring to conversations about equity: "That is something that we have been trying to have become a norm at our school in full staff meetings, in Grade Level meetings, and systems team meeting. I think we have made some progress but it has been slow." - Principal

The Results

"I already know that we are going to form some subcommittees, teachers focusing either on ELA or Math --culture and climate, blended learning, along with distance learning...And just allow every teacher to build some capacity, whether it's strong leadership capacity or becoming an expert in a certain area, but to empower the staff to take more of a role than they would have in past."
 - Principal

"This transition to distance learning was just so incomprehensible that this could even happen and how could we move to a full distance learning in just a couple of days or a couple of weeks. I don't think we would have been able to do it without having the structures we built with Partners and doing all that work in the [Transformation Network]. " - Principal

The leader has clear plans for how to execute the transition to a new school the following year, including:

- Building on the systems that have already been established
- Culture of collaboration, learning, and regard for one another
- Leveraging teachers who have demonstrated gains in confidence and capacity through the Transformation Network

How this played out during the pandemic:
The leadership teams worked with their partner to adapt their plans for a distance learning environment.

Over 4 years of partnership, the school increased capacity in Results Oriented Leadership (ROL), Systems for Professional Learning, and Core Instructional Program. Most notably, the school was approaching the "Transforming" stage in ROL as measured by the School Transformation Review. Additionally, According to state test scores in math and ELA, more students met or exceeded expectations (up by 5%) and fewer students performed in the bottom proficiency (down by 7-9%) as of Spring 2019.

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CASE STUDY 3: EQUITY MINDSETS
The Starting Point

Partners in School Innovation has supported this South San Jose elementary school for 7+ years to implement equity-driven school transformation work. At the end of the Transformation Network (TN), we knew the foundation had been laid to continue the work.

Partnership Strengths:
- Strong results orientation and commitment to excellence
- Desire to strengthen equity mindsets and support staff learning through professional development
- Self-reflective leaders and teachers
- Protected time for learning

Focus Areas for the Partnership:
- Integrating equity into the work of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and beyond
- Building the capacity of staff
- Gathering feedback from staff
- Galvanizing a commitment to equity across the entire staff

"All of the teachers are just head in the books and we're diving in and we never get a chance to get our head out of our bubble and see what's going on in other places" - Teacher

"I think it is important for everyone to engage in conversations about race as we watch our country become increasingly divided. At Edenvale, we serve a population that has had a different experience than me, and I need to work to learn what those lived experiences are so that I can better disrupt the systems put in place to keep people of color down." - Literacy Coach
From: Haven, R. (Feb. 2021). *How to implement an equity series.* Leadership Magazine.
https://leadership.acsa.org/how-to-implement-an-equity-series

The Vision

"I felt like more than a teacher. I know that's not every school where you say your're opinion and you're heard. I think TN was a huge part of that, in making our school more of a team, like we can do this together, rather than one person making all the decisions..." - Teacher

"We learned about the fishbone protocol. And now its a protocol that we brought back to our school. It transformed us in the sense that we all have a similar goal now. It was so liberating to have the teachers input on what we think is a problem at our school or what we think is a challenge... Coming together and saying, 'Wait, we can change this. We can work together and do this'" - Teacher

The strategy that was particularly effective for this partnership was supporting the leader to articulate his vision for how equity work was a throughline in all that was happening at the school AND how to distribute leadership so this work was done collectively. This was achieved through:

- Leadership coaching on developing high-performing teams that prioritize equity
- Placing teachers in leadership roles (ILT and TN team)
- Collectively identifying gaps in order to move the work forward

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CASE STUDY 3: EQUITY MINDSETS
Shifting Mindsets & Practice

With Partners coaching, leader supported shifts in mindsets and practice of teachers by:
- Providing professional learning experiences, e.g. role playing difficult conversations to address inequities
- Developing language to discuss equity
- Being encouraged to speak up during meetings to raise equity concerns
- Developing shared agreements that keep a focus on students and equity
- Offering shared leadership experiences to strengthen relational trust

"I think it's so important to have someone who is always checking to make sure we are being equitable...just having someone always speak up about equity and making sure that all groups are being represented in meetings and now the focus is on the kids. " - Teacher

"It's focused me back on the student and the community, rather than just focused on me and my class." - Teacher

The Results

"TN has made me feel like even though I don't have the final say in anything, it really made me feel like I had agency. I had the tools ready to have those difficult conversations, to have... agency, to have efficacy. TN made me feel like I could actually make a difference at my school and not just my classroom...it has never felt more like I am part of something bigger than myself and my classroom" - Teacher

How this played out during the pandemic:
The pandemic highlighted racial inequities that plagued our society and this heightened the leader's sense of urgency to focus on equity work that started with giving staff time to learn about and explore identities amongst staff members and how teacher identities impact teacher actions. These Equity Professional Development sessions have prompted important conversations amongst staff. One teacher described this collective learning has provided a strong sense of hopefulness that as a community they can work together to "do better".

The leader has a clear vision for how to embed equity work at his school:
- Explicitly protected time and resources for staff to engage in equity learning
- Leverage teachers who have demonstrated gains in confidence and capacity through the Transformation Network to lead efforts

Over 5 years of partnership, the school increased capacity in Results Oriented Leadership, Systems for Professional Learning, and Core Instructional Program, such that the school was approaching the "Transforming" stage in two out of three areas (as measured by the School Transformation Review). Increases ranged from 1.2 to 1.9 points on a 6 point scale. Additionally, according to state tests in ELA and math, more students met or exceeded expectations (up by 7-10%) while fewer students performed in the bottom proficiency (down by 6-10%) from 2016-019.

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