HARNESSING TEACHER KNOWLEDGE

A Guide to Developing School-Based Systems for Professional Learning and Planning

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Stephen E. Abbott and Pamela D. Fisher
Great Schools Partnership

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Great Schools Partnership
482 Congress Street, Suite 500
Portland, ME 04101
p: 207.773.0505
f: 1.877.849.7052

greatschoolspartnership.org

ABOUT THIS TOOL

Why We Created this Tool

A consensus is emerging from the research on effective schools: collaborative, job-embedded, teacher-driven professional learning and planning is the most effective and sustainable professional development option available to schools. Just as no two good schools need to look alike, professional planning time can focus on a range of goals, take place in diverse settings, and include different configurations of educators. That said, studies conducted on common planning time and teacher collaboration over the past few decades have isolated a variety of essential features and strategies that appear to have the greatest impact on instructional quality and student achievement. *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge* is designed to help school administrators, project directors, and teacher-leaders engage in a thoughtful process of self-reflection as they work toward creating a high-functioning professional learning culture in their school.

Defining Professional Planning Time

Harnessing Teacher Knowledge describes the elements and conditions that are essential for effective professional inquiry, self-reflection, collaboration, and planning focused on school and instructional improvement. For the purposes of simplicity and consistency, the term professional planning time is used throughout the tool to encompass a variety of common terms, including *critical friends groups*, *common planning time*, *collaborative planning time*, *professional development*, *professional learning communities*, etc. This tool does not promote any specific model or program, but rather it extracts from research and experience a variety of strategies and characteristics that will help schools efficiently and effectively build a high-performing, teacher-driven professional development program.

Who Should Use this Tool

While *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge* will be useful to any educator involved in building a culture of collaborative inquiry and professional growth, it was specifically created for school leaders charged with implementing and supporting professional learning communities and common planning time programs—in most cases, this responsibility will fall to the principal and leadership team, usually with support from superintendents and grant administrators and project directors. Teachers will also find a wealth of information in this tool that will help them design and lead high-impact professional learning and planning teams.

ABOUT THIS TOOL

How to Use this Tool

Harnessing Teacher Knowledge is organized into five dimensions—the broad focus areas critical to developing and sustaining high-quality, job-embedded professional learning and planning in a school or district:

- School Leadership
- Faculty Culture
- Professional Development
- Instruction + Achievement
- Policies + Resources

Each of the five dimensions includes:

- A series of three descriptions—*Initiating, Developing,* and *Performing*—that summarize the major features of a professional learning culture at various stages of development.

- A selected list of research-based strategies and practices that schools have used to build, support, and sustain faculty collaboration and professional growth.

- A section in which schools record what they are doing to address the dimension under discussion—for example, the leadership strategies that are in place to support professional learning groups.

- A scoring scale (1–5) that schools use to record their relative performance in one of the five dimensions, typically following a group discussion about the three performance levels, the list of research-based strategies, and the related actions the school has already taken.

The tool also includes two planning worksheets that will help schools prioritize needs, set goals, and design an effective professional learning action plan.

INSTRUCTIONS

Before You Begin: Choose Your Approach

While schools are encouraged to work through all five dimensions in this tool, it is not necessary to tackle the entire process all at once. Schools can start with one or two dimensions that are particularly relevant to their work, they can address each dimension over the course of several meetings, or they can divide the faculty into different groups and have each team work through a single dimension. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to use this tool. *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge* is primarily designed for use in large or small groups, although individuals can certainly benefit from reading the performance descriptions and strategies. Before you begin, decide how your school will engage with the tool, and appoint an experienced facilitator to oversee the process. For more guidance, refer to the *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge Facilitator Guide*.

1 **Read and Discuss the Three Performance Levels.** Read the performance descriptions—*Initiating, Developing,* and *Performing*—in each of the five dimensions. Keep in mind that these descriptions are merely concise, illustrative profiles based on a synthesis of research and practice. They are designed to help schools to reflect on their current stage of development and on the work that still needs to be done. Your school may closely resemble one of the performance descriptions, or it may not, and you might be implementing different elements of all three levels. The purpose of this step is not to force-fit your school into any one category, but to provoke thoughtful, self-reflective faculty discussions about how collaborative professional learning and planning takes place in your school.

2 **Read and Discuss Actions for School Leaders**. Read through the selected list of research-base actions. In some cases, your school will be implementing one or more of these sample actions; in other cases, none of the actions will apply. The list is intended to give schools a sense of specific strategies that have worked in other schools—in other words, strategies your school may want to consider.

3 **Record Your Actions.** After reviewing the performance levels and sample actions, schools should begin to map out their own school strategies related to the dimension—that is, the organizational, instructional, or leadership practices your school is employing as part of a formal or informal improvement process. During this step, make sure to only record strategies that are currently in place or in practice, not strategies that your school is considering or planning to implement.

4 **Score Your School.** After completing the first three steps in a large or small group, return to the previous page and determine a "score" for your school that reflects the group's consensus resulting from an open, honest discussion. Keep in mind that this numerical score is not a judgment about your school and its work, but a helpful framing device when determining priorities.

5 **Prioritizing and Planning.** The final step in the process is to begin translating your reflections, discussions, and self-assessment work into actionable strategies aligned with your systemic school-improvement plan. The two worksheets included with the tool can be photocopied and used during a group work session. For more detailed guidance on how to use the planning worksheets, refer to the *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge Facilitator Guide*.

ABOUT THIS TOOL

A Few Things to Keep in Mind

- The self-assessment process outlined in *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge* is not a perfect measure of school performance, but simply a useful planning framework for educators engaged in the complex and challenging process of school improvement.

- The five dimensions, which are designed to guide in-depth investigations into a selection of important focus areas, give school leaders a logical structure and process to follow—but they are not the only important features to consider when developing effective professional and planning program. Real schools are not neatly organized into clear-cut categories, education research cannot take every factor into account, and systemic school improvement rarely unfolds according to a perfectly charted step-by-step process. Schools are complex, interdependent learning environments with unique qualities and characteristics, which means that no tool or process—no matter how well devised—will be able to anticipate or address every need.

- The three performance levels—*Initiating, Developing,* and *Performing*—provide three general profiles of schools at various stages of development. These descriptions are merely concise, representative illustrations (not must-do checklists), and schools may recognize elements of their organization or culture in all three levels. The *Initiating* level describes a school that is significantly underperforming in critical areas, while the *Performing* level describes a school that is excelling in those same areas. When creating an improvement continuum, it is necessary to describe relative extremes. In most cases, schools will be performing well above the *Initiating* level in some areas and well below the *Performing* level in others. **Schools should not try to perfectly match their school to a specific performance level—they should engage in the kind of frank, constructive, forward-looking discussions that move them from where they are to where they want to be.**

DIMENSION 1 : SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

1. INITIATING

School leaders have not articulated a strong, compelling vision for instructional improvement and professional growth. The governance structure is predominantly hierarchical, with content-area department heads reporting to the principal and collaborative work limited to departmental meetings focused largely on teaching assignments, budget issues, and student problems. The administrative team tends to be absorbed in managerial concerns, disciplinary issues, and crises, which leaves little time for instructional leadership—observing classrooms, analyzing student-performance data, modeling effective teaching, refining curricula, and providing needed professional development. The school has been unable to move toward a shared-leadership model and more collaborative practices due to insufficient political will, resistance to change, internal tensions, contractual constraints, or the belief that the teachers do not have sufficient expertise to lead their own professional growth. Faculty memos are one-way presentations of information from the principal, and administrators determine staff-meeting agendas with little input from the faculty. Supervision and evaluation is a top-down process, and the principal or department heads evaluate teachers annually using instruments that are largely uninformed by research on best practices. School leaders may encourage teachers to enhance their own professional learning, but it is not an explicit expectation or priority, and administrators do not model ongoing, proactive professional development.

3. DEVELOPING

The principal and leadership team have articulated a strong vision for instructional improvement, but these goals are loosely connected to the school's action plan. Some shared-leadership structures are in place, but the decision-making process remains unclear and teacher-leaders do not feel that they have authority or influence on critical decisions, including those related to curriculum, instruction, and professional development. Teachers are required to participate in professional learning groups, but this collaborative time is sporadically offered and not focused on achieving shared goals or executing the strategies outlined in the action plan. A few staff members have been trained in the facilitation strategies required to lead effective professional learning groups, but some teachers continue to resist peer leadership and decline to share their work with colleagues. School leaders have established high expectations for collaboration and individual practice, but they do not model these practices themselves and only occasionally participate in professional learning groups. Ongoing contractual issues continue to pose obstacles to greater faculty collaboration. School leaders consistently voice the value of collaborative professional learning, but a disconnect remains between this expressed value and the organizational structures and resource commitments needed to implement effective professional learning groups. The principal rarely takes time away from administrative duties to develop his or her own leadership skills.

5. PERFORMING

Job-embedded professional learning and ongoing instructional improvement are the foundations of the school's action plan and academic program—and this bold vision has been consistently and persuasively communicated to parents, school board members, policy makers, business leaders, local media, and the community. The principal and leadership team embrace the belief that every student can learn and succeed, and that the collective wisdom, knowledge, and expertise of the faculty are the cornerstones of the school's success. The school's governance model, organizational structure, master schedule, and resource allocations prioritize instructional improvement and ongoing professional learning. The principal actively supports teacher collaboration by providing the faculty with adequate professional development resources and authentic leadership roles. Professional learning and planning teams meet regularly during the school day—at least twice every month—and every meeting is well facilitated by a trained teacher-leader and intensively focused on the improvement and refinement of instructional practice. School leaders encourage risk-taking and innovation, and active participation in professional learning groups keeps administrators informed about professional development needs, while helping to ensure that teachers are using research-based practices in their classrooms. Contractual negotiations are characterized by trust and mutual respect, and district and school administrators have established productive working relationships with union leaders. Administrators model effective practices and the ongoing development of leadership skills is a priority.

1	2	3	4	5
INITIATING		DEVELOPING		PERFORMING

ACTIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS	OUR ACTIONS
- Change the way the principal role is viewed inside and outside the school—become a vision-keeper, instructional leader, and consensus builder, not just a building manager, authority figure, and disciplinarian. - Establish a school leadership team that distributes responsibilities across the school and empowers teachers to lead the design and implementation of professional learning and planning teams or other school-improvement initiatives. Give a significant percentage of teachers the opportunity to facilitate and lead meetings, committees, programs, and teams. - Develop a communication plan that clearly and persuasively describes the rationale for professional learning and planning, the research that supports it, and how it is directly and integrally aligned with district, school, and grant goals. Ideally, use diagrams, charts, images, or other visual aids in materials and presentations to help communicate the major features of and arguments for professional learning and planning time. - Employ a variety of thoughtful, concrete leadership strategies—every day and in every interaction—that are focused on developing and encouraging a more collaborative professional culture: teach at least one semester-long course a year; model effective instructional practices for beginning teachers; be visibly present in classrooms, team meetings, and professional learning meetings; consistently acknowledge the value of faculty contributions; encourage teachers to express appreciation and praise to one another; and hold all staff accountable for behaviors that could undermine a culture of trust, respect, and collaboration. - Encourage the professional aspirations and leadership ambitions of teachers by delegating responsibility, distributing decision-making authority, recognizing good ideas, providing leadership-development training, and creating new opportunities for professional advancement. - Be strategic when building teacher capacity to lead professional learning and planning activities. Some teachers may immediately step up to lead or be willing to assume the risks entailed in peer facilitation. As a culture of trust takes hold and higher functioning professional learning teams begin to show results, leadership roles can be expanded to more teachers. While participation, collegiality, and a willingness to learn must be established as mandatory professional expectations, leadership and facilitation roles should remain voluntary.	

DIMENSION 2 : FACULTY CULTURE

1. INITIATING

The faculty culture is generally characterized by low morale, distrust, and interpersonal tensions that often go unaddressed or unresolved for long periods of time; consequently, greater faculty collaboration—whether in the form of professional learning groups, common planning, or interdisciplinary team teaching—is rarely considered. Teachers work largely in isolation, which has given rise to divergent beliefs about student potential and about how the academic program should be structured. Teachers typically use planning time to work independently, discuss student behavior, or engage in administrative tasks that are not focused on professional growth or instructional improvement. Although teachers are expected to improve student performance, support and resource allocations for professional development are minimal, which has fostered resentment among some members of the faculty. Administrators and colleagues often frown upon innovation and risk-taking in the classroom, and tradition, habit, and complacency tend to drive curricular and instructional decisions, not research-based best practices, collaborative professional inquiry, or pedagogical creativity. A few dominant, reactionary voices frequently derail staff conversations, which tends to obscure underlying issues and impede efforts to redesign school programs or address persistent student underperformance in some areas. Negative comments about students or colleagues by faculty are both tolerated and common, even in public areas where students, parents, or community members might overhear them.

3. DEVELOPING

The faculty culture is characterized by energy and collegiality, and teachers are increasingly motivated to exchange new ideas and strengthen their expertise. A growing sense of trust among the faculty has led to greater collaboration and more open conversations about practice, but this dialogue remains somewhat cautious, unstructured, and unfocused. A series of constructive conversations, led by the principal and leadership team, has fostered consensus on the need to improve achievement, maintain high expectations for all students, and strengthen school-wide instructional quality. Teachers recognize the value of sharing practices, co-designing curricula, and developing common assessments, but insufficient buy-in and a lingering attachment to old habits has led to uneven implementation of these practices across the school. With encouragement from school leaders, teachers are more willing to embrace new ideas, and several teachers are leading by example and incorporating high-impact instructional techniques into their daily practice. The faculty has accepted responsibility for improving teaching quality and student outcomes, and complaints about student behavior or colleagues are increasingly rare. If a staff member voices negative opinions about a student or expresses the belief that some students are incapable of learning, other staff members openly—but respectfully and constructively—challenge their views.

5. PERFORMING

The faculty culture is characterized by trust, positivity, and strong working relationships that are based on mutual appreciation and respect. A presiding belief in the transformative power of knowledge sharing and collective wisdom drives the school's action plan and improvement strategies. Professional collaboration has become the foundation of the school's academic and professional-development programs, and teachers frequently observe one another's classrooms, exchange constructive feedback, and share effective practices both inside and outside of structured professional learning groups. Teachers are energized and motivated to improve their skills and expertise, and they frequently take initiative when it comes to their own professional growth. A shared belief that all students can succeed guides the design of curricula, instruction, and professional development, which are based on a coherent action plan and clearly articulated goals for student achievement. Facilitators use a repertoire of protocols and facilitation strategies to ensure that professional learning and planning time remains collegial, productive, and solution-focused. District and school leaders consistently recognize the contributions of teachers, celebrate success, and encourage professional creativity. Defeatist attitudes, disrespectful behavior, and unfounded, unconstructive criticisms of colleagues or students are not tolerated, which has resulted in a more positive, can-do approach to problems when they arise.

STEP 4 SCORE YOUR SCHOOL: Place an **X** on the scale below to indicate your school's performance in this dimension.

1	2	3	4	5
INITIATING		DEVELOPING		PERFORMING

ACTIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS	OUR ACTIONS
▪ Express boldly and publicly your vision for the future of the school and lead the development of a shared vision statement that puts equity, high-quality instruction, and professional collaboration at the forefront of school's mission, goals, and action plan.	
▪ Foster a culture of trust, respect, and transparency—the foundation of all effective collaborative learning—by listening to concerns and constructive criticism, prohibiting excessive complaints and any negative comments about students, encouraging experimentation and intellectual curiosity, and rewarding and recognizing professional accomplishment, among other effective leadership strategies.	
▪ Establish school-wide "norms" for professional behavior that outline the expectations that will govern all faculty collaboration—for example, respect different perspectives and opinions; maintain confidentiality; give everyone a chance to be heard; follow the agenda; show up on time; or phrase criticism thoughtfully, constructively, and respectfully.	
▪ Look for and praise small victories: examples of strong practice shared with the group; a student who succeeded as a direct result of innovative pedagogy; a teacher becoming more open to sharing and willing to work as a team; or a particularly creative and effective lesson that was collectively developed.	
▪ Team or group teachers with a purpose—don't make assignments arbitrarily or let teachers self-select groups based on personal friendships. Professional learning and planning teams, in themselves, will not foster a more collaborative professional culture—it requires sustained professional development, common student-achievement goals, and an unwavering focus on instructional quality.	
▪ Give teachers more autonomy and creative license in their work, train them to lead collaborative groups, and give them a voice in school decision making as general strategies for improving morale, job satisfaction, buy-in, and professional engagement.	
▪ Host a faculty celebration of professional work, including presentations of innovative programs and practices, interventions that were effective with high-need students, exemplars of high-quality student work, and examples of practices that seemed promising but ultimately didn't work.	

DIMENSION 3 : PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. INITIATING

While the school community recognizes the need to strengthen instructional quality, improve student achievement, and increase graduation and college-going rates, there is no coherent, feasible plan in place to achieve these goals. Teachers tend to view professional development in terms of recertification and job security, not as an opportunity for personal and professional growth. District and school leaders are skeptical that greater professional collaboration will lead to improvements in instructional quality, job satisfaction, or test scores. The school's professional development plan is developed by administrators or central-office coordinators and revised annually with little input from the faculty; consequently, it is often disconnected from actual teacher or student learning needs. Professional development opportunities consist mainly of prepackaged, one-day events that are not followed up with sustained support throughout the year or connected to district, school, and action-plan goals. When collaborative learning and planning opportunities are made available to the faculty, a lack of facilitation skills or explicit learning goals leads to digressive, unfocused conversations and an inefficient use of time. The school does not allocate resources or time during the school day to support professional learning, which has inadvertently given rise to the perception that it is not a priority. Student achievement data are not used to guide professional development decisions or programming.

3. DEVELOPING

School leaders recognize that teachers have the desire, capacity, and expertise required to improve instructional quality and student performance, but there is no coherent, systemic plan in place to harness and focus these human resources. Professional development has increased in frequency and quality, but these opportunities remain primarily one-day events that are not followed up with sustained support or clear expectations for implementation. Staff, team, and departmental meetings are increasingly focused on instructional issues, but they have not yet evolved into productive, efficiently run professional learning and planning teams. A few faculty members have received training in facilitation strategies, but many teachers remain reticent about adding to their workloads or taking on new responsibilities. More funding and resources are being allocated to support professional development, but teachers are still largely working in isolation and have few opportunities for structured professional collaboration and self-reflection during the school day. Administrators are introducing new learning to the faculty—in the form of consultants, conferences, courses, or school visits, for example—but teachers remain hesitant about sharing their ideas, lessons, and techniques internally. While school leaders, teachers, and support staff—such as the intervention coordinator, project director, or school coach—have collaboratively determined the school's professional development priorities, these objectives have not been informed by student-performance data.

5. PERFORMING

The school's professional development program has evolved beyond a reliance on external contractors and events—teachers are now assuming responsibility for their own professional growth and building skills internally using professional literature, instructional modeling, peer observation, constructive feedback, and focused, well-facilitated professional learning and planning time. Administrators use professional development funding strategically by, for example, shifting funds that would have historically paid for conference attendance and expensive consultants to support more sustainable options: group-facilitator training, data-analysis resources, school visits (to observe effective strategies in action), and selected use of outside experts who can equip teachers with targeted strategies to address specific needs. The school's action plan—which is explicitly aligned with district or grant goals—includes a set of clearly articulated and achievable strategies focused on improving school-wide instructional quality and developing intensive, personalized, classroom-embedded interventions. Most teachers have assumed active leadership roles in the school's professional development program, and they are continually gaining confidence in their expertise as educators. All professional development is guided by identified teacher needs, the school action plan, and short- and long-term goals for student achievement. The ongoing analysis of disaggregated student-achievement data lead to responsive, in-process adjustments to the professional development program and the strategic reallocation of resources to address emerging concerns and needs.

1	2	3	4	5
INITIATING		DEVELOPING		PERFORMING

ACTIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS	OUR ACTIONS
- Make sure that the school's professional development program (1) coheres and aligns with the action plan and other school or district initiatives; (2) is intensive, in-depth, and ongoing throughout the school year; (3) focuses primarily on high-impact instructional strategies and strengthening content knowledge; and (4) builds strong, respectful, and productive working relationships among teachers and support staff—the four critical aspects of high-quality professional development that have been identified by research. - Organize professional development opportunities and professional planning time to mirror the structure of the academic program and address the learning needs of teachers and students—for example, when teachers share students, professional planning time can support interdisciplinary curriculum work and the development of appropriate interventions that personalize support for specific students across courses. Mixing more experienced teachers with less-experience teachers or bringing together teachers with complementary skills and expertise are also useful strategies. - Train a core team of teachers in effective group-facilitation strategies—for example, how to plan for and design productive meetings, set long- and short-term goals for group work, use protocols effectively to maximize meeting time and ensure productivity, and analyze student-achievement data to inform the activities of professional learning groups. - Provide professional development that is focused on improving classroom-management skills, effectively using new learning technologies, and teaching students with special needs—the top three professional development priorities identified by national surveys of teachers. - Recognize and publicly affirm that quality is more important than quantity when it comes to effective instruction—in many of the world's highest performing educational systems, teachers spend less time in the classroom and more time on professional development than teachers in the United States. - Provide teachers with at least fifty hours of practice-specific, content-based professional development in their academic discipline—the minimum amount of time required to transform practice, as demonstrated by research on high-impact professional development.	

DIMENSION 4 : INSTRUCTION + ACHIEVEMENT

1. INITIATING

Despite a mission statement that publicly proclaims the school's commitment to equity, actual academic expectations are uneven across grades, courses, and curricula, which has given rise to achievement gaps—from academic performance to college matriculation—that largely fall along socioeconomic, gender, racial, and cultural lines. Responsibility for persistent low-performance is often shifted to students, parents, demographics, or inadequate funding. The school uses summative tests, course credits, and a number-averaged grades that do not provide teachers with the detailed formative feedback they need to identify student learning needs and responsively modify instruction and interventions. While school leaders and teachers recognize the need to address persistent underperformance, no efforts have been made to diagnose programmatic weaknesses by connecting achievement data to specific programs, grouping practices, curricula, or instruction. When students fail a course, interventions tend to be online credit-recovery programs or course repetition in which the same curriculum is re-taught using the same general instructional approaches that were previously unsuccessful. Staff or departmental meetings are rarely focused on instructional issues and infrequently lead to new curricula, teaching practices, or intervention strategies. The faculty is generally content with the status quo, and school leaders encounter resistance when practices such as collaborative planning, team teaching, or course-embedded interventions are proposed.

3. DEVELOPING

The mission statement has been collaboratively developed by the faculty and explicitly announces the school's commitment to equity and instructional excellence. Academic expectations across courses and grade levels increasingly reflect the school's public commitment to equity, and courses and curricula are regularly reviewed to ensure that students are receiving a rigorous, college-preparatory education. The use of performance assessments and formative-feedback strategies throughout the school year has equipped teachers with disaggregated student data they can use to isolate and address individual learning needs. While achievement gaps are decreasing on standardized tests, the school has not yet implemented a system of intensive, classroom-embedded, just-in-time academic interventions for low-performing students. Teachers meet at least once a month for ninety minutes in their professional learning groups, and the faculty has developed a common language for sharing work and offering constructive professional feedback. While teachers are becoming more adept in group facilitation and the use of protocols, some continue to struggle when integrating new practices in the classroom. Some outdated courses, programs, and practices persist out of habit and convenience despite offering comparatively little educational value to students. Faculty members are beginning to use surveys, artifacts, and data analysis to assess the impact of professional learning and teacher collaboration on student achievement.

5. PERFORMING

The school's public commitment to equity is played out in every classroom, every day. The entire faculty embraces and acts upon the belief that they are individually and collectively responsible for the academic success, personal growth, and well-being of every student; as a result, achievement gaps have become minor or nonexistent. School leaders recognize that harnessing the collective wisdom of teachers is the surest and most sustainable way to improve student aspirations, achievement, and attainment. Professional planning time is intensively focused on instructional improvement, and teachers are continually using research and professional literature to inform their practice. Curricula are regularly examined, critiqued, and revised in collaborative groups, which has resulted in the creation of a library of successful courses, projects, lessons, assessments, and rubrics that is updated frequently and archived online. When developing curricula and assessments, teachers are guided by common high expectations, and all students are required to meet standards in order to pass a course, progress to the next grade, and graduate. Teachers regularly analyze student achievement data and use it to personalize instruction and shape course-embedded interventions. Progress toward student-achievement goals is continually monitored in an environment of shared responsibility and accountability, and intervention and professional development adjustments are made throughout the school year in response to emerging needs.

STEP 4 SCORE YOUR SCHOOL: Place an **X** on the scale below to indicate your school's performance in this dimension.

1	2	3	4	5
INITIATING		DEVELOPING		PERFORMING

ACTIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS	OUR ACTIONS
- Establish universally high standards for performance in all courses, move toward a common definition of high-quality student work, and make sure professional planning time is used to calibrate common rubrics and formative assessments. - Examine a variety of work samples and select exemplars that can be archived online and used in association with rubrics to more accurately determine, through comparison, whether students have demonstrated mastery of standards. - Focus on improving student achievement by auditing instructional strategies in use across courses, content areas, and grade levels. Review and deconstruct lesson elements, pedagogy, and interventions, particularly for courses and lessons that are having less impact on the performance of historically low-achieving students. - Make sure professional planning teams remain explicitly focused on student achievement and instructional improvement through, for example, regular participation, individual teacher check-ins, faculty surveys, data analysis, and the review of meeting notes and curriculum materials. - Employ strategies that will help to maintain momentum between meetings: set short-term goals for practice, observe one another's lessons and provide constructive feedback, collect new data that illuminate a specific area of practice, and prepare presentations or samples of new work for upcoming meetings. These activities help build a sense of responsibility to a professional planning team and foster a collective experience of success over time. - Develop, in collaboration with teachers, a selection of non-negotiable focus areas for professional planning time. For example: 1 Using protocols to structure conversations 2 Fine-tuning instruction and classroom-management practices 3 Learning and integrating new research-based practices 4 Critically examining student and teacher work 5 Analyzing formative assessment data to inform interventions 6 Developing common learning standards for student performance 7 Setting specific goals for improving practice and student performance in a specific content area, team, or course 8 Developing interdisciplinary or team-taught courses, projects, assessments, rubrics, units, or lessons 9 Aligning curricula and assessments with state standards	

DIMENSION 5 : POLICIES + RESOURCES

1. INITIATING

Time for collaborative professional learning and planning has not been built into the school day, and the complexity of faculty schedules, assignments, and workloads absorbs time that might otherwise have been used for professional collaboration. Teachers spend more time attending staff meetings, managing student behavioral issues, and fulfilling burdensome non-instructional obligations than they spend working together, learning new teaching techniques, and refining and improving practice. School policies and traditions persist despite the fact that some are clearly outdated, counterproductive, consume limited resources, or are detrimental to faculty morale. School administrators monitor teacher practice annually and all teachers receive "satisfactory" evaluations with brief written feedback. Professional development is primarily measured in terms of accumulated contact hours and graduate credits, not in terms of progress made toward achieving school objectives, enhancing instructional efficacy, or improving student outcomes. School policies do not provide sufficient flexibility in curriculum, instruction, assessment, or reporting, which inadvertently stifles creativity, risk-taking, and professional growth. Teachers are responsible for funding the majority of their professional development. Administrative turnover is high, and there are no district or school policies in place to sustain effective programs or practices; consequently, a lot of good work and hard-won progress is undone when a superintendent or principal leaves.

3. DEVELOPING

The school gives teachers time to meet and work collaboratively, but this time is sporadically offered, usually after normal working hours or during late-start and early-release days. Administrators select topics for professional learning and planning, and the teachers within professional learning groups do not share students or courses, which has created some confusion about the purpose and goals of the strategy. School administrators have been able to increase support and funding for professional development, but there are still no coherent policies or processes in place to focus these resources on achieving common district and school goals for improving instruction and student achievement. District leadership has not embraced the idea that professional learning and planning time can transform a school culture and dramatically improve student learning and achievement; consequently, school leaders and teachers encounter resistance when proposing changes in policy, practice, and budgets that would support greater faculty collaboration. The school funds a significant percentage of the professional development teachers receive each year. District and school policies generally support—or at least do not undermine—faculty collaboration and job-embedded professional learning, but these policies do specifically address the sustainability of programs in the event of administrative turnover or budgetary shortfalls.

5. PERFORMING

The school schedule has been reconfigured to prioritize collaborative professional learning, and teachers are given several hours of common planning time during the school day every month. Professional planning teams meet every week and agendas are developed by teachers in response to identified instructional or student-learning needs; administrators regularly participate in these meetings to model instructional leadership, stay informed about instructional practices in use across the school, and determine professional development resources that may be needed. The principal and leadership team have strategically built greater understanding of and more support for professional learning and planning among district personnel, school board members, and parents. In addition to a library of literature on effective strategies for professional learning and planning time, the school has equipped teachers with tools and online resources that help facilitate effective teacher collaboration. Varied funding sources are strategically and coherently invested in activities that are aligned with common district and school goals. School leaders have secured grants and identified all available state and district funding for professional development; as a result, teachers receive at least fifty hours of paid professional development each year. Thoughtful policies have been adopted at the district and school levels to sustain shared leadership, teacher collaboration, and effective programs in the event that turnover occurs in the administrative ranks.

STEP 4 SCORE YOUR SCHOOL: Place an **X** on the scale below to indicate your school's performance in this dimension.

1	2	3	4	5
INITIATING		DEVELOPING		PERFORMING

ACTIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS	OUR ACTIONS

ACTIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

- Eliminate roadblocks to job-embedded professional learning and collaboration occurring during the school day—for example, restructure the school schedule, equip teachers with the data they need to analyze student achievement, or provide sufficient professional development time and funding.

- Use available funds strategically. For example, group-facilitator training—effectively a train-the-trainer model for professional development—is a comparatively inexpensive and highly sustainable professional development investment.

- Provide teachers with illustrative models of effective, high-quality professional collaboration, including literature, protocols, online resources, facilitator training, and site visits to schools employing effective practices.

- Be cautious and thoughtful when using dedicated professional development and grant funding to pay teachers to meet after school hours or on weekends—this practice is less sustainable and encourages the perception that professional development is an "add-on," not a school-supported expectation. A truly collaborative professional learning and planning culture requires that the work be integrated into the school day and perceived as a vital extension of daily practice.

- Identify any potential contractual or financial obstacles early on. Negotiate agreements with the district or teachers union as needed to ensure that teachers are provided with a sufficient amount of common-planning time during the school day. Provide authentic leadership roles to the union representatives and other influential voices whose support is needed to move the work forward.

- Identify policies that either support or inhibit collaborative, job-embedded professional learning and planning. Work with the district leaders to develop supportive policies that will sustain effective structures and programs over the long term.

- Invest strategically in technological applications and solutions that can increase professional efficiency and effectiveness such as data-analysis tools, interactive whiteboards, or a secure online workspace where teachers can archive lesson plans and share protocols, agendas, meeting notes, and articles.

OUR ACTIONS

PLANNING WORKSHEETS

ABOUT THE PLANNING WORKSHEETS

A Starting Point for Coherent Action Planning

The *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge Planning Worksheets* on the following pages will help school leaders and teachers translate their reflections, discussions, and self-assessment work into actionable school-improvement strategies that are responsive to a school's unique needs and feasible given existing capacity and resources. The two blank worksheets can be photocopied and used during a facilitated group planning session. For more detailed guidance, school leaders should refer to the *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge Facilitator Guide*.

It is important to note, however, that the *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge* self-assessment process and planning worksheets are not designed to replace a comprehensive school action plan. The planning worksheets should be used to help prioritize and structure professional learning and planning work—in other words, they are a starting point. Action plans are vital for ensuring coherence of programs and the alignment of improvement work in a school, and they include staff assignments and accountability measures that fall outside the purview of the planning worksheets. School leaders should always make sure that their professional learning and planning strategies are integrated into their action plan and aligned with short- and long-term goals for student aspirations, achievement, and attainment.

Exemplar Worksheets

The exemplar planning worksheets are intended to show, rather than merely describe, a high-impact planning process. Two representative planning situations are presented: a school leadership team and a ninth-grade English language arts team. The completed leadership team exemplar approaches the process from a systemic, school-wide standpoint, while the faculty team exemplar focuses on the implementation of professional learning and planning time from a content-area and grade-level perspective. We hope you find these illustrative examples useful.

PLANNING WORKSHEET 1   DATE:

PLANNING TEAM	

SCORING OVERVIEW	1	2	3	4	5
School Leadership					
Faculty Culture					
Professional Development					
Instruction + Achievement					
Policies + Resources					

OUR PRIORITIES (based on the scores above)

ASSETS

OBSTACLES

PLANNING WORKSHEET 2

STUDENT PERFORMANCE GOALS	PRIORITY ACTIONS

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1–2 MONTHS	3–5 MONTHS	6–12 MONTHS

PLANNING TEAM	Rose, Aesha, Dwight, Carlos, Dejuan, John, principal Garcia, assistant principal Matthews, and project director Kim

SCORING OVERVIEW	1	2	3	4	5
School Leadership			X		
Faculty Culture				X	
Professional Development		X			
Instruction + Achievement		X			
Resources + Policies				X	

OUR PRIORITIES (based on the scores above)

- Intensively focus PPT work on three goals: (1) ensuring every student graduates college ready, (2) closing achievement gaps, particularly for our Hispanic population, and (3) increasing college enrollment and attainment rates.

- Increase professional development resources devoted to PPT, including the reallocation of funding.

- Train at least 25% of staff in PPT facilitation—need to identify an experienced organization to conduct training (Dejuan will take responsibility for this).

- Make sure all administrators are actively and regularly participating in PPT meetings.

- Improve data collection and analysis; make sure teachers have access to timely, disaggregated data.

- Ensure coherence of PPT program, grant goals, professional development, and curriculum.

ASSETS

- Grant funding will support PPT training for all staff, including stipends or subs if needed.

- The faculty is largely supportive of more PPT, and faculty relationships are strong.

- Steady improvement in test scores over the past two years has energized and galvanized faculty.

- Bimonthly late-start days can easily be incorporated into new PPT program.

- District policies support new direction—particularly the focus on a college-preparatory core curriculum, standards-based learning.

OBSTACLES

- While average scores have been improving, the achievement gap for Hispanic students has been widening.

- Professional development program needs to be completely reconfigured and refocused.

- Intervention program is not strong; teachers are not highly skilled in classroom-embedded formative assessment and interventions.

- Administrators have not historically played a strong role in instructional improvement or curriculum design.

- Administrative and faculty turnover has been high.

EXEMPLAR PLANNING WORKSHEET 1: LEADERSHIP TEAM   DATE: AUGUST 8, 2011

STUDENT PERFORMANCE GOALS

- Dramatically reduce achievement gaps. Current Hispanic student achievement: 32% meeting/exceeding in 11th grade; 45% graduation rate; college enrollment unknown (need to disaggregate National Student Clearinghouse data). New goals: 55% meeting/exceeding, 65% graduating, and 45% enrolling in college within two years.

- Increasing college-going rate by at least 5% annually. 2009-2010 rate: 60% (NSC).

- All students will be performing at or above grade level by the end of 10th grade.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

- Establish PPT program and train a core group of facilitators.

- Modify school schedule and policies to support PPT.

- Determine vision, goals, and objectives for PPT work, and communicate to faculty, district office, school board, and parents/community—use school website, email newsletter, and PowerPoint presentations.

- Develop new data collection and tracking system; focus on timely disaggregation.

- Provide professional development in formative assessment and intervention strategies to all faculty.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1-2 MONTHS	3-5 MONTHS	6-12 MONTHS
Determine PPT groupings and program structure/schedule by October 1.	Use Moodle to create a common online faculty archive/exchange for PPT work, curricula, and interventions, and give everyone access.	Develop monitoring system for accountability.
Train at least one facilitator per group by November 1. Target: two per group.	New data collection and tracking system fully operational by January 1; share findings with faculty and school board by Feb 1.	Establish policy on classroom observations.
Vision, goals, and objectives for PPT work finalized by November 1: intensive focus on college readiness, achievement gap, and interventions.	Identify professional development providers for seminars on formative assessment.	Ensure coherence of resources and goals across district; detail in the action plan.
		Finish Year 2 action plan for grant.
		Formative assessment and intervention work begins.

PLANNING TEAM	Shawna, Hillary, Ramone, Elliot, Samir, and Veronica—9th grade English department

SCORING OVERVIEW	1	2	3	4	5
School Leadership			X		
Faculty Culture	X				
Professional Development				X	
Instruction + Achievement			X		
Resources + Policies				X	

OUR PRIORITIES (based on the scores above)

- Strengthen teacher collaboration within and across disciplines and teams.

- Address persistent cultural and interpersonal issues that impede collaboration.

- Share data on common students.

- Address the course-failure problem—9th grade failure rates have gone up the past two years.

- Incorporate more formative assessments and classroom-based intervention strategies.

- Implement more team teaching and develop at least two new interdisciplinary units for each 9th grade English course.

- Improve literacy strategies across the curriculum—reading and writing scores in 11th grade have been flat and too low.

ASSETS

- The school schedule supports the adoption of more professional learning and planning time—with minor adjustments, teachers could be given up to 60–90 minutes a week.

- Grant funds are available for facilitator training.

- Two 9th grade teachers are already trained group facilitators.

- Superintendent has voiced strong support for more teacher collaboration and for professional learning communities.

OBSTACLES

- Support for professional planning time is not strong among the faculty—some teachers have expressed resistance.

- Very little history of faculty collaboration or interdisciplinary teaching.

- Teachers have rarely shared work or observed one another's classrooms.

- Tensions among some faculty members may pose an obstacle if left unaddressed.

- While the administration supports PPT, many faculty do not understand the rationale for or purpose of this work.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE GOALS

- Dramatically decrease student failure rates in 9th grade. Currently, 23% of students fail at least one course. Goal for this year: reduce to 15% or lower.

- English failure rate: 15%. Goal: 10% or lower.

- Improve literacy performance on 11th grade assessment.

- Improve NWEA scores and make sure that at least 85% of students are performing at grade level by the end of 9th grade—and that 95% are by the end of 10th grade.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

- Train at least 10 staff members to be group facilitators by January 1.

- Implement a content-area professional planning time program in 9th grade and have it functioning well by the spring semester.

- Make sure all meeting agendas are focused on (1) improving literacy strategies, (2) assessing reading and writing skills, and (3) sharing and discussing course work or interventions.

- Increase reading opportunities for students during the school day.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1-2 MONTHS	3-5 MONTHS	6-12 MONTHS
Train at least one facilitator for each professional planning team.	PPT teams and schedule are finalized.	Plan for increase PPT developed for next year.
Work with scheduling team to build in at least one hour of PPT every other week.	Teams are meeting at least twice a month for at least one hour.	The number of trained facilitators is doubled.
Determine how grant funding will support PPT.	By the end of five months, all PPT teachers will have shared and "tuned" at least one unit or lesson.	Long-term PPT plan is finalized by principal and leadership team.
Communications plan developed to make a compelling case for PPT.	Leadership team extends PPT communications plan to school board.	Teachers begin working on common formative assessments.
Teachers practice the use of protocols.	All faculty engage in a day-long professional-development session: admin team shares data findings and teachers share best practices.	
"Culture of Trust" plan begins; leadership team takes responsibility for oversight.		

About the Smaller Learning Communities Program

The U.S. Department of Education Smaller Learning Communities Program awards discretionary grants for up to 60 months to local educational agencies to support the implementation of smaller learning communities and activities designed to improve student academic achievement in large public high schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more students. Smaller learning communities include structures such as freshman academies, multi-grade academies organized around career interests or themes, "houses" in which small groups of students remain together throughout high school, autonomous schools-within-a-school, and personalization strategies such as student advisories, family advocate systems, and mentoring programs.

In May 2007, the U.S. Department of Education established a new absolute priority for the program that focuses grant assistance on projects that are part of a larger, comprehensive effort to prepare all students to succeed in postsecondary education and careers without the need for remediation.

The Smaller Learning Communities program is authorized under Title V, Part D, Subpart 4 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) (20 U.S.C. 7249), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

For more information

ed.gov/programs/slcp