School Systems That Learn
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Why do achievement gaps exist even in well-funded school districts?

- It’s not possible to close them
- The district needs to find “just the right initiatives”
- The district has reached its maximum capacity
Three Strategies that Won’t Work
(to close achievement gaps)

• More rigorous teacher evaluation
• Fire all underperformers
• Hire more outstanding teachers
6 Limitations to School Change and Capacity Building

1. Laws and regulations
2. Mindsets and limiting beliefs
3. Standardization (vs. differentiation)
4. *Isolation (as opposed to collaboration)*
5. A narrow view of professional development
6. Viewing teaching and student learning as separate acts
The Fractal Nature of a Learning School System

- The learning dynamics that a teacher establishes in his/her classroom is similar to the learning dynamics a principal/instructional leader establishes in his/her school, and is similar to what a superintendent does to promote learning within the district leadership team.
FIVE BIG FEARS (students)

- Fear Of Making Mistakes
- Fear Of Looking Like A Fool
- Fear Of Having A Weakness Exposed
- Fear Of Not Being Liked
- Fear Of Failure
SIX BIG FEARS (Educators)

- Fear Of Making Mistakes
- Fear That Errors Will Erase Prior Success
- Fear Of Having A Weakness Exposed
- Fear That Asking For Assistance Will Diminish Respect
- Fear Of Looking Like A Novice
- Fear of Conflict
Fractal Nature of Schools

Strengthening the adult learning culture will benefit students

• When school committee members learn
• When central administrators learn
• When schools and departments learn
• When individual teachers learn
The 4 Effective Drivers of Change

(Will increase professional practice, overcome limitations, and support the diffusion of innovation)

- The Importance of Trust
- Collaboration in All Directions
- Capacity Building for All Educators
- Leaders at All Levels
The Synergy of the 4 Drivers
Synergy

- When all four drivers are present at high levels, the system catalyzes an increase in educator capacity, professional practice, and student performance.
SYNERGY

NONE OF US IS AS SMART AS ALL OF US
Working smarter as a school or school system does not require a larger school budget
Overarching Theory
(instead of just focusing on weak educators…)

When a school system learns, continuous improvement enables educators to close achievement gaps and ensures that all students grow and develop as learners.
**Significant Challenge**

- Moving the majority of our staff from capable to inspired
  - No reward or punishment will get us there
  - People need to want to become inspired
    » What are the drivers?
  - Effective systems and healthy climates will make all of us more effective - *none of us are as smart as all of us*
The Change Process as a Learning Process
Learning/Resistance/Working-Through Stage

- Awareness of opposing ideas
- Resistance by some members of the team
- Recognizing and appreciating other perspectives
- Refining ideas to match current needs
- Converting conflict into broadened perspectives

Simply creating teams does not guarantee that we gain the power and synergy of collaboration
Conflict can Lead to Learning

Conflict among collaborators can feel like a failure, but differences in perspective are a core reason for teamwork in the first place, and resolving them effectively creates opportunities.

-Amy Edmondson
In your setting

How is conflict managed at meetings?
CONFLICT IS OFTEN THE PRECURSOR TO COMMITMENT
Psychological Safety

To gain the power of collaboration and continuous learning psychological safety is needed
Signs of Psychological Safety*

- Educators can disagree with peers and authority figures, ask naïve questions, own up to mistakes, or present a minority view without fear of ridicule or marginalization

*Edmondson
What %

....of the teams that you have observed demonstrate signs of psychological safety?
When Psychological Safety is Present

- People understand that
  - Not knowing
  - Not being right
  - Asking for help
  - Reporting mistakes
  - Failing

are stages of the learning process
Creating team time does not guarantee improvements

Structural change is not cultural change. Simply altering the schedule to provide time to meet does not create conditions for learning....

Lipton, Laura; Wellman, Bruce (2012-02-16). Got Data? Now What?:
Learning To Team
(developing a shared understanding of collaboration)

…people have to learn to team; it doesn’t come naturally in most organizations. Teaming is worth learning, because it is essential for improvement, problem solving, and …requires the interpersonal skills necessary to negotiate disagreements, overcome technical jargon, and revisit ideas or problems until solutions emerge.

The Foundation of Collaborative Learning: Recycling Error into Understanding

“School leaders and teachers need to create schools, staffrooms, and classroom environments in which error is welcomed as a learning opportunity, in which discarding incorrect knowledge and understanding is welcomed, and in which teachers can feel safe to learn, re-learn, and explore knowledge and understanding.”

In Your Learning Environment

- What happens when people
  - Don’t know?
  - Make mistakes?
Limitations of Collaboration*
(concerns that powerfully shape our willingness to speak up)

- Being seen as ignorant
  - Don’t ask questions
- Being seen as incompetent
  - Don’t admit weakness or mistakes
- Being seen as negative
  - Don’t offer ideas
- Being seen as disruptive
  - Don’t critique the status quo

It is no different for kids and classrooms

From the work of Amy Edmondson
Keeping Track of Data

• Something that made me feel safe during this meeting is __________.
• Something I did to make others feel safe is __________.

Wellman and Lipton
What Leaders Can Do To Cultivate Effective Team Work

- Listen, listen, listen
- Be willing to display fallibility
- Invite participation & dissent-value open & honest communication
- Reframe failures as learning opportunities
What would it look like

- If leaders *invited* dissent?
Invite Dissent

“Gentlemen, I take it we are in complete agreement on the decision…Then I propose we postpone further discussion of this matter until our next meeting to give ourselves time to DEVELOP DISAGREEMENT AND PERHAPS GAIN SOME UNDERSTANDING of what the decision is all about.”

-Alfred P. Sloan

(courtesy of Amy Edmondson)
In order to disagree, learn from mistakes, successfully manage conflict, and continually learn, there needs to be

Sufficient:

• Trust
• Capacity building for All educators
• Collaboration in All directions
• Leadership at All levels

How would you informally assess your own learning community?
Which of the drivers

- Is the strongest in your learning environment?
- In need of the most attention?
If you are interested in continuing the dialogue, please contact us at

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