

## THE PARTNERSHIP FOR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### THEORY OF ACTION

The Partnership for Instructional Leadership is a promising program led by BPI with Chicago Public Schools Area 4. Now in its second year, the Partnership provides differentiated support for seven Area 4 elementary schools, with the goal of significantly advancing student learning by building schools' capacity for rigorous professional collaboration. It recognizes that meaningful professional collaboration across grades and programs to improve teacher practice and student learning is challenging—whether the school is adopting new instructional practices, vertically aligning curriculum to ensure that students receive a progressively challenging experience, or thoughtfully grappling with what *is* and *is not* working for the school's unique set of students.

The Partnership seeks to unlock and build teacher talent and school capacity by utilizing a powerful tested “Framework” developed by Targeted Leadership Consulting, Inc. Linking proven school improvement strategies in a well-paced, user-friendly school-wide effort, TLC's program provides sufficient structure, intensity, and support to increase student learning in every classroom—with students, parents, and the community also playing important roles.

#### THE TLC FRAMEWORK

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Targeted Leadership Consulting achieves powerful results by helping schools to:

1. Develop shared leadership to build a culture of collaboration
2. Target an area of the instructional program to improve learning for all students
3. Examine student work and data to guide instructional practices and professional learning
4. Build instructional expertise through targeted professional learning in the use of effective, research-based practices
5. Align resources to support instructional practices and improve learning for all students
6. Partner with families and community to sustain learning for all students

#### OUR THEORY OF ACTION

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- **IF** a school establishes a representative Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) to lead a school-wide implementation of the framework components for a three-year phased process to build teacher capacity, and
- **IF** the ILT and principal receive the supporting curriculum, training, and coaching,
- **THEN** significant increases in student learning will result.

## WHY BPI CHOSE TLC'S FRAMEWORK

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- TLC developed this framework based on the extensive research on effective schools, the experience of highly successful practitioners, and the Boston Public Schools model. It has been used successfully in large urban schools and districts similar to CPS.
- The Network for College Success and the USI Network (both based at the University of Chicago) also utilize the TLC framework and consultants, and spoke powerfully to how this process works “on the ground”.
- BPI and Area 4 staff recognized how the framework was consistent with the articulated needs of the participating Area 4 schools. It also aligned well with the Consortium on Chicago School Reform’s well-regarded work on the link between the five essential supports for school improvement” and increased student achievement.<sup>1</sup>

## THE PROGRAM

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Here is a brief summary of key terms used in the discussion that follows:

**Instructional Leadership Team (ILT):** Representative instructional leadership group for the school, including teachers from every grade level/department (including Pre-K), the principal or other key administrator, and special education and bilingual staff.

**Targeted Instructional Area (TIA):** A high-leverage area of instructional focus that can be richly and deeply addressed at every grade level (including Pre-K) and across content areas for a sustained period (e.g., 1-2 years). TIA examples: reading comprehension, writing, higher order thinking.

**Powerful Practice (PP):** A practice that addresses the TIA, selected by the school as the focus for a cycle of learning. Powerful practices are research-proven student learning strategies, e.g. summarizing, inferencing (for a reading comprehension focus) and related instructional delivery models (e.g. guided reading, writer’s workshop, mini-lessons.)

**Cycle of Professional Learning:** Cycles are organized around the schools’ chosen TIA and one Powerful Practice. In each cycle, all professional learning and teacher collaboration focus on helping students and teachers achieve mastery of the selected powerful practice across all grade levels and content areas for a 4-8 week period (4 cycles per school year). Each cycle includes:

- Input/Training re: strategies/structures to support the Powerful Practice
- Teacher/Student Practice
- Related Professional Reading
- Observation/Coaching/Feedback
- Assessment and Looking at Student Work
- Targeted Learning Walk, which examines the evidence in every classroom around the implementation of the Powerful Practice for the Cycle.

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<sup>1</sup> The five supports are: Leadership, Parent Involvement, Professional Capacity, Student-Oriented Learning Climate, and Ambitious Instruction. (*The Essential Supports for School Improvement. CCSR, September, 2006*)

**Anchor Text/Instructional Framework:** ILTs often select an anchor text and/or instructional framework for professional study and to guide Cycle planning,, e.g. *Strategies that Work* (Harvey & Goudvis); *Writer’s Workshop* Units of Study (Calkins); *Guided Reading* (Fountas & Pinnell); *Questioning the Author* (Beck &McKeon).

## **UNDERLYING BELIEFS, LEARNING, AND ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY**

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### **1. Every student can learn and achieve at high levels.**

Once a controversial idea, the assertion that all children can learn (and learn at high levels) is now widely accepted—at least in the mainstream dialogue. Skepticism persists, however, within school buildings, and too often the generalized belief is not translated into concrete action to bring about high levels of learning for all students. The Partnership is predicated on the belief that it is the responsibility of teachers, individually and collectively, to ensure that every student learns at high levels—a conviction that is supported in the following ways:

- **Success is measured by student outcomes:** The BPI/TLC framework measures a school’s success by evaluating student growth. The principal, ILT members, Coaches and the highly structured Cycle of Professional Learning maintain a **constant focus on student learning**, rather than devolving into a system that looks only at teacher practices or implementation of particular lesson plans.
- **SMARTe goals:** At Partnership schools, the ILT leads the school through a formal, whole-school process to establish real, yet ambitious, SMARTe goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely, and applicable to every student) related to the school’s Targeted Instructional Area. This forces schools out of the typical model in which administrators set goals that often apply only to subsets of the student population, (e.g., ELLs).
- **Interim assessments/Examination of student work:** During each Cycle, Partnership schools conduct interim assessments and examine student work to measure progress against their SMARTe goals.
- **Inquiry-based:** Partnership schools are encouraged to do research and visit other schools that have had success with students like theirs, to challenge the (sometimes hidden) belief that substantial learning for all students is not possible or cannot be achieved with “kids like ours”.

### **2. Meaningful, deliberate repetition that promotes student mastery.**

The Partnership is predicated on the research-proven premise that when students go “deep” instead of broad, they learn better, retain and internalize much more of what they’ve learned, and are better able to utilize this learning in other contexts.

Partnership schools focus intensely on a single powerful practice for an entire cycle of learning. **Students are expected to engage in the powerful practice in every classroom, in every subject, every day.** (Teachers create opportunities for students to practice, often modeling strategies for them.) This sustained, deliberate, frequent practice allows students to do more than just learn superficially how to do something—they become expert and the practice becomes an integrated habit of thought.

**This process is cumulative:** Once students have mastered a powerful practice from one cycle, that habit (learning strategy) stays with them, and they continue to use and practice it as they move on to the next powerful practice. Over time, students build a powerful arsenal of internalized tools to help them be stronger readers and writers who regularly engage in the kind of higher-order thinking that allows this learning to translate to other contexts.

This focus on repetition is not accidental. Research indicates that it takes thousands of hours to achieve full mastery (at least 10,000 to achieve “genius-level” mastery, according to Malcolm Gladwell in *Outliers*). Too often, in their push for broad coverage, schools proceed far too quickly through too many things, lucky to achieve even bare student retention of what they’ve learned, much less mastery.

### 3. Moving from a “compliance culture” to an “inquiry and accountability” culture

“Classrooms, schools, and districts are nested learning communities whose cultures are closely linked. Teachers who operate in a compliance mode with their principals are unlikely to create anything other than a compliance environment for their students. And as a former principal ... put it, ‘Principals cannot lead collaborative learning if they have not experienced it.’ Students are not likely to take risks, collaborate, learn together, and experience higher order tasks unless their teachers are. Recognizing these nested relationships helps leaders in a variety of roles take responsibility for leading learning.”

--Dr. Richard Elmore, Harvard University, from **Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning**

ILTs and principals often *want* to move away from a strict compliance and checklist mentality, but they don’t know how to achieve this, especially if they have no direct experience with high-functioning collaborative teams. They also want internal accountability so that they can be assured that their hard work and results are part of a team effort, but are uncertain how to create such a culture. This is an area where the “outside eyes” provided by Partnership Coaches are especially important.

TLC training, and even more importantly, the Partnership’s coaching of the ILT and the principal, provide specific skills and problem-solving around building ILT ownership and an inquiry culture. Coaching strategies and actions include helping ILTs establish and live out “norms” and meeting agendas that support inquiry and mutual accountability; coaching ILT members on how to frame and lead discussions with faculty; asking questions that flush out underlying assumptions or unpleasant truths that may be hindering the work; and coaching the principal about how to support and utilize the ILT.

Given the urgency presented by low student performance, increasing real-world demands for student achievement, and the immediate effort of CPS’ new emphasis on performance management, it is imperative that schools themselves master inquiry thinking and have the internal strength to meet these external demands.

### 4. Teachers can learn, change, and grow.

It is not a universally agreed-upon belief that practicing teachers can learn, change, and grow dramatically enough to bring about significant student achievement. Professional development is often viewed as ineffective, and for good reason: Schools are often stuck in an ineffective paradigm of one-time, off-site professional development workshops. And, even where efforts are made to forge stronger connections between professional development and a school, they too are rarely of sufficient intensity or inclusive of all teachers.

The Partnership supports a new paradigm of teacher professional learning in much the same way as it supports student learning and mastery. These are some important features that distinguish it from other professional development programs:

- **Intensity and Duration:** Partnership schools create multiple, interconnected opportunities for teachers to receive new input, practice, learning, and reflection in each of the four Cycles conducted during a school year. This is consistent with recent research, which has found that teachers need at least 49 hours of

engagement around a specific topic or teaching strategy before significant gains on student achievement are shown.

- **Collaborative Learning:** Cycles incorporate regular opportunities for teacher collaboration around instructional work and inquiry, with particular emphasis on designing high-quality assignments and looking at student work during grade level meetings.
- **Building Expertise:** Schools do not move on to a new powerful practice until they have evidence that all teachers in the school have achieved mastery of instructing students in the current practice (as measured by the quality of student work/student outcomes).
- **Sustainability:**
  - Job-Embedded: Partnership Coaches help schools identify creative ways to schedule Cycle activities during the regular working hours of teachers so that professional learning is considered “part of the job” and not the purview only of the “gung-ho” or those looking for overtime pay.
  - Resource Alignment: Partnership Coaches help schools creatively realign existing resources (such as time and staffing) to support student and teacher learning.

The critical importance of each of these key features (as well as the general dismal state of professional development in the U.S.) is strongly echoed in the findings of the National Staff Development Council in its February 2009 report, *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the U.S. and Abroad*.

## CONCLUSION

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BPI selected Targeted Leadership Consulting and its effective framework because we believe that building teacher expertise and a culture of shared accountability is essential for meaningful school improvement. Our experience has demonstrated that schools truly need this support and organized, deliberate approach for a sustainable professional culture to really take root. BPI and the Partnership schools are pleased with the results we've seen after one year, and are deeply engaged in our 2009 – 2010 school year work.

*May, 2010*