

A DECADE OF GROWTH

In the last decade, Fort Wayne Community Schools has worked to:

- **Develop** strong leaders. With financial support from The Wallace Foundation over nine years, the district put best practices in leadership in place, creating a data-driven decision-making process, new teacher induction, and a quality improvement team at every school.
- **Establish** the district's vision, mission, core values, and goals.
- **Develop** a balanced scorecard data management system that allows the district and individual schools to analyze trends through an array of indicators, including SAT scores, attendance, or student performance on state standardized tests. The balanced scorecard is a strategic planning and management system used extensively in business and industry, government, and nonprofit organizations worldwide to align business activities to an organization's vision and strategy.
- **Hire** at least one instructional coach for every school, creating a systemwide network of support through coaching.
- **Partner** principals with administrator coaches.

CHAMPIONS

DISTRICT LEADERS BUILD SKILLS TO BOOST EDUCATOR PRACTICE

By Kay Psencik,
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At a turnaround high school where staff had experienced four leaders in as many years, a first-year principal brought teachers together to change the way they work. He zeroed in on a few strategic goals and asked teachers to collaborate around those. Then, along with the administrative team, he provided the support they needed.

“When we introduced a writing assessment for all 350 of our sophomores that we administered three times over the year, about 15 administrators, instructional coaches, and guidance coun-



of LEARNING

selors joined with the teachers, and each took a stack of student essays to score,” said John Houser, principal of Wayne High School in Fort Wayne (Indiana) Community Schools. “We spent time together looking at the rubric so that everyone was comfortable scoring. That helped create trust among our staff that leadership supports them.”

Houser created time for professional learning teams to meet and helped teachers understand that a cycle of improvement includes designing a lesson, teaching it, then returning to their learning team with samples of student work to score the work together using a rubric.

“All the work is starting to make a positive difference in teachers’ minds that students can achieve at a higher level,” Houser said. “They have more faith in the leadership, more confidence in themselves, and more confidence in the students. We’ve really changed the culture of the building with our kids and with our staff.”

That culture is emblematic of changes

throughout Fort Wayne Community Schools. Houser learned from the district’s efforts to lead with a focus on professional learning, develop skills, and support educators in making changes that will improve student learning.

Fort Wayne Community Schools continues to increase student learning and meet state and national standards and expectations annually based on several factors that have made a difference for educators within the system: district and principal leadership, learning teams, effective learning designs, and deep commitment to a culture of learning.

LEADERSHIP

Fort Wayne understands that the superintendent’s leadership matters. Superintendent Wendy Robinson and the district’s board of trustees committed themselves to creating a learning culture within the district.

Robinson developed a clear pic-



tool BONUS

Protocol for
establishing
a theory of
change,
pp. 22-24

DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP

Leaders, through disciplined thoughts and actions, create and sustain the conditions that ensure achievement of our moral purpose by:

- Shaping a shared vision and commitment to action for academic and social success for all students;
- Developing systems that support students and adults;
- Modeling and cultivating courageous leadership; and
- Distributing responsibility for people, data, and processes that nurtures a culture of continuous improvement and empowerment.

DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

In Fort Wayne Community Schools, professional learning is a comprehensive, sustained, and strategic approach to increase educator effectiveness and results for all students. Professional learning fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance and:

1. Is aligned with a rigorous academic curriculum and district improvement goals;
2. Occurs in professional learning communities at all levels throughout the district;
3. Is ongoing and facilitated by skilled staff using a variety of researched-based learning designs;
4. Engages established learning communities in a cycle of continuous improvement; and
5. Is monitored and evaluated as to its effectiveness to inform ongoing improvement and results.

Source: Fort Wayne Community Schools.

ture for herself of the superintendent’s responsibilities, built on her deep history in the district as a teacher, principal, and district-level administrator. Robinson’s commitment to being the lead learner is evidenced by her deepening her own understanding and skills needed to lead standards-driven professional learning.

“My role as superintendent is to be the district’s chief learner and to model that,” she said. “As a part of my work with the cabinet, we are developing what professional learning means in the district. ... We talk a lot about the district office being a resource for schools, and how that idea has to be more than just lip service. Our role at the district office is to know our schools well” (Hirsh, Psencik, & Brown, 2014).

Robinson sought out leaders in professional learning to partner in this work and, in conjunction with Learning Forward, began to develop a deeper understanding of professional learning and ways of ensuring

that every teacher in the district experiences effective professional learning every day so that every student achieves.

A LEADERSHIP LEARNING COMMUNITY

Robinson set the tone for learning, beginning with the central office administration. She established a district leadership team whose members would become a learning community that would lead by example.

Leadership team members developed a common language around professional learning. They studied the principles of professional learning, Learning Forward’s Standards for Pro-

fessional Learning, and Learning Forward’s definition of professional learning. They read and discussed *The Learning Educator* (Hirsh & Killion, 2007) to clarify foundational principles and defined their view by creating their own definition of leadership and effective professional learning (see box above).

The district also clarified its vision of what staff would be doing when the district became an effective learning system. (See table on p. 14.)

The district developed a theory of change (see p. 16) to clarify its expectations for reaching improved student outcomes. All of this work guides the change process, and the leadership team infuses professional learning into all aspects of administrators’ work, from curriculum to human resources to the business office.

Next, key members of the district learning community joined the Learning Forward Academy, along with principals from elementary, middle, and high schools. The Learning Forward Academy is a 2½-year extended learning experience that models Learning Forward’s vision for professional learning and teamwork in schools and districts. Academy members work collaboratively to solve significant problems of practice that occur within their school, district, or organization.

This team also became a learning community. As team members focused their problem of practice on strengthening student and staff learning, they strengthened district-level and principal learning communities. The academy group has developed high levels of trust, and members are assuming leadership among peers.

Ingrid Laidroo-Martin, principal of Irwin Elementary School, says, “My involvement in Learning Forward Academy and district leadership team has helped me focus on strategies for

“My role as superintendent is to be the district’s chief learner and to model that,” said Wendy Robinson, Fort Wayne Community Schools superintendent.

KASAB CHART FOR PRINCIPALS AS LEADERS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

A KASAB (knowledge, attitude, skills, aspirations, and behaviors) chart is a process of declaring essential roles and responsibilities in implementing an innovation in a learning system.

KASAB	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING	PERSONALIZATION	PRECISION
Knowledge: Conceptual understanding of information, theories, principles, and research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the Standards for Professional Learning, principles, and definition of professional learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the concepts of personalization as they relate to adult learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the laser-focus strategies to meet unique learning needs of each stakeholder.
Attitude: Beliefs about the value of particular information or strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value professional learning as a key lever for improving leadership and teaching practice at scale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value the importance of differentiating adult learning based on individual learning styles and identified needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold the belief that laser-focused actions will significantly improve stakeholder performance.
Skills: Strategies and processes to apply knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate a cycle of continuous improvement to develop collective responsibility to achieve Fort Wayne Community Schools' moral purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate, differentiate, monitor, and reassess individualized learning plans for adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuously and consistently assess effective strategies for improvement.
Aspirations: Desires, or internal motivation, to engage in a particular practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aspire to increase everyone's effectiveness through professional learning systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide differentiated, targeted professional learning that inspires adult learners to actively participate in their own professional growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instill ownership for increased performance of all stakeholders.
Behaviors: Consistent application of knowledge and skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and strengthen professional learning systems; build relationships (1.1.3 & 1.2.3). Establish collaborative environments; learning community; collective responsibility (1.1.3 & 1.2.3). Support the development of teacher leaders (1.1.4). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribute leadership (1.1.4 & 1.1.5). Be able to take all sources of data and interpret those data to inform action plans to help school reach their goals (2.3.3). Develop emotional intelligence (ability to be self-aware and support emotional needs of others) (2.1.1). Develop a student-centered culture (1.2.1, 1.2.3, 2.2.1, & 2.3.1). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire the best teachers and principals and support them (1.1.1, 1.1.2, & 1.1.3). Recognize and support rigorous instruction (2.3.1 & 2.3.2). Facilitate teams of teachers to build effective units of study around Common Core and design effective assessments.

Numbers in parentheses align with the Indiana State RISE rubric for evaluating administrators.

Source: Fort Wayne Community Schools.

meaningful collaboration with my peers. This has assisted me in my work with the professionals in my own building to engage in standards-driven, job-embedded professional learning.”

Federa Smith, principal of Adams Elementary, agrees. “Through the work we are doing with Learning Forward and the help of my peers, peer collaboration, common planning,

and data analysis have become routine at Adams Elementary,” Smith says. “As I apply what I am learning, teacher effectiveness is increasing, and that effectiveness is positively impacting student achievement.”

Robinson also established a team of district-level administrators and principals to break down barriers between central

and site leaders and build collective responsibility for student learning. Academy members emerged as natural leaders for this group. Academy members helped facilitate the group's understanding of the standards, establish protocols and practices that help in school-level learning, and develop effective learning designs.

Learning Forward facilitators realized early on that if district staff were to internalize the definition of and Standards for Professional Learning, they needed time to apply the concepts and to observe the outcomes so that educators began to think in new ways.

District leadership team members systematically work with school principals and school leadership teams to ensure that site-based staff internalize the work. They observe school leadership team meetings, conduct walk-throughs in buildings, and observe one another facilitating professional learning

for principals. Principals work as communities of learners to achieve the district's goals. Leaders are emerging from all aspects of the organization, and they value what they are learning.

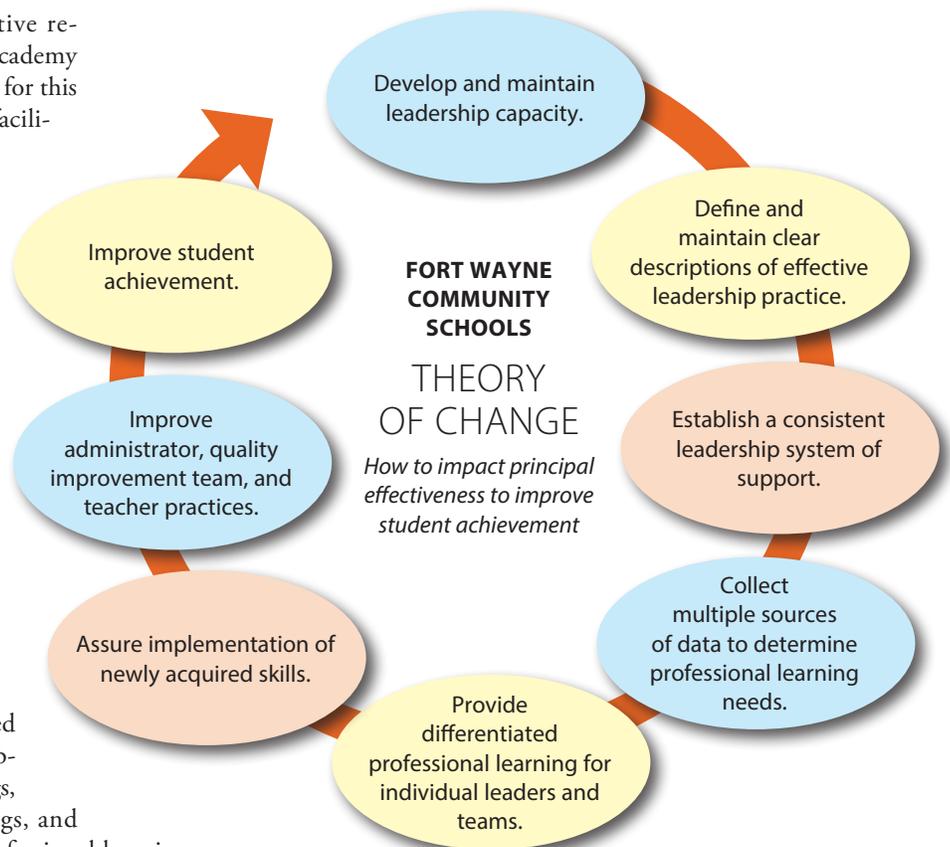
"For so long, we have focused on the learning of students," says Matt Schiebe, principal of Shawnee Middle School. "What I am learning from my peers and our work with Learning Forward is that we need to focus on the learning of adults. I have to say that I have grown more humble as I work with my fellow principals through these efforts to build authentic learning communities in our schools. I have grown to respect the expertise of my fellow administrators and look to them for ideas. They are also

challenging my thinking as a leader.

"Because of our collaboration, I have learned more this year than many years in the past. My learning has had a major impact on the teachers I serve and the students in our school. ... We have a long way to go, but we know now we can do it."

THE LEARNING DESIGN

Facilitators, along with the district superintendent and lead-



"I have grown to respect the expertise of my fellow administrators and look to them for ideas. They are also challenging my thinking as a leader," said Matt Schiebe, principal of Shawnee Middle School.

ership team, established a learning design that is continuously modified based on feedback from the district leadership team and the core of administrators in the district. The design is a combination of on-site and phone conversations over five years:

- Working with Learning Forward over three to five years, the district leadership team engaged in five intensive, results-driven courses based on the Standards for Professional Learning.
- Administrators learned to understand and use the principles established in *The Learning Educator* (Hirsh & Killion, 2007), Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, and Innovation Configuration maps to facilitate professional learning for all administrators and schools' quality improvement teams. Innovation Configuration (IC) maps identify and describe the major components of the standards in operation, helping those in various roles understand the actions they should take as part of systemwide implementation.
- Each course of study is designed to engage learners in the practices and protocols of a learning community and to establish protocols such as board policy on professional learning, a chart identifying changes that occur as a result of learning (see above), a theory of change around principal

learning, and agendas for principal institutes.

- Facilitators designed full-day monthly sessions to reflect on how the new skills were being applied, practice strategies and protocols, design learning experiences, and ensure follow-through.
- District leadership team members engaged in phone conversations and coaching sessions with Learning Forward facilitators to work through issues and test ideas.
- Principals and district leaders in the Learning Forward Academy take the lead in facilitating cabinet members and core leadership team members in designing professional learning for all principals in the district, including the summer institute. They determine the most effective professional learning design to match learners' needs and develop participants' knowledge and skills based on district goals.

OWNING THE LEARNING

As the district leadership team defined leadership and professional learning for themselves, they asked the entire administrative staff to join them, offer feedback, and assist in revising the work so that all owned and understood the definitions.

The district leadership team applied the concepts and protocols of what they were learning to their own work with administrators and designed a yearlong approach to ensure everyone understood Learning Forward's Standards for Professional

Learning and what it really means to be a learning system.

The team challenged all district directors and school principals to commit to applying professional learning standards in work at schools.

Here are some examples:

- The finance department applied the principles and Standards for Professional Learning as they launched the new budget preparation. They designed an approach to learning for school leaders to not only understand the budget issues and development processes but to engage in the work so that the budget is designed collaboratively.
- District leaders responsible for the school improvement plans redesigned the format and development process to ensure that the plans were based on the district's theory of change and all professional learning aligned with the standards. By applying what they were learning and getting participant feedback, district leaders began to shape a cycle of continuous improvement.
- District leadership team members applied the theory of change, sharing their work with principals and helping the principals develop their skills. Most important in their theory of change was developing a strong principal corps with individuals who could lead learning not only at their schools but with one another. Now, principals are taking ownership for leading other principals' learning.



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LEARNING FOR THE LONG HAUL

Remaining focused has been a challenge in the midst of massive state changes, including new teacher and principal evaluation systems, Common Core State Standards that were then replaced with a state curriculum, and new state assessments. In addition, district leaders won a Teacher Incentive Fund grant and must meet that grant's goals.

Fort Wayne Community Schools leaders remain committed, however, to ensuring that each innovation is implemented according to the district's theory of change or is infused with the Standards for Professional Learning. Leaders recognize that change takes time.

Some changes occur more rapidly, such as when a state shifts its approach to curriculum or institutes new assessment procedures, but district leaders understand that improving learning for adults to enable them to make the most thoughtful decisions about students' academic needs over the long term will help raise student achievement.

"All of us have to hold each other accountable for the learning," says Superintendent Robinson. "We have to put processes and systems in place so the work we are doing is sustainable. I know we are just in the middle of this work, and I am impa-

tient, but change is not instant, and we have to stay the course.

"But when I go into a school and observe the processes we have been working on actually happening — even when they were not expecting us to come — I know we are making a difference through this work. Every adult and every child is benefiting."

REFERENCES

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