

R&D ALERT

A systems approach to improving leadership

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timely knowledge for education and human development





BRIEFLY

- » Building systems of support for school transformation is the focus of a unique leadership development program at the University of Virginia.
- » The School Turnaround Specialist Program develops more than individual leaders; it helps districts build systemic capacity for improvement.
- » WestEd's Southwest Comprehensive Center (SWCC) is working with the program to spread the leadership practices throughout SWCC's region.

Leadership Development

A Systems Approach



What kind of leader does it take to turn around a persistently low-performing school?

In spite of being asked with increasing urgency in education policy circles, the question itself may suggest the wrong focus: An individual leader can *start* the transformation process, but it takes a system to ensure that necessary changes are *sustainable*.

“Turnaround isn’t about one charismatic leader who comes in and saves the school,” says Marie Mancuso, Associate Director of the Southwest Comprehensive Center (SWCC) at WestEd. “The district has to be wholly engaged and has to take ownership of its struggling schools.”

Building systems of support for school transformation is the focus of a unique leadership development program at the University of Virginia, which is expanding its mission in partnership with WestEd’s SWCC. Combining the talents and resources of the university’s respected Curry School of Education and the Darden School of Business, the program enlists state, district, and school leaders in the kind of executive education that traditionally has prepared business leaders to manage large corporations.

The School Turnaround Specialist Program places educators in boot-camp intensive sessions where the mind, rather than the body, gets conditioned. Participants analyze and apply case studies and work with school and school district teams to design 90-day action plans targeting urgent problems. After experts visit their schools, they revise their strategies and engage in follow-up training.



RIPE FOR INNOVATION

“We see school turnaround as an area ripe for innovation,” says LeAnn Buntrock, Executive Director of the School Turnaround Specialist Program. “Underperforming schools and districts have a mandate to get better. It can’t be about tweaking or manipulating the status quo. We tell people: ‘You’ve got a real chance to do something different. Grab that opportunity and leverage it.’”

After helping more than 95 schools in eight states since 2004, the School Turnaround Specialist Program seems to have found a formula for success. On average, schools completing two-plus years of the program have shown gains of 36 percent in reading proficiency and 46 percent in math proficiency after their leaders complete the program.

Now, through a partnership with WestEd, the program is poised to extend its influence. Working for the first time with a multistate collaborative, the university program aims to develop the capacity of schools, school districts, and states to sustain improvements in leadership and student achievement.

“It’s a mutual benefit to both of us,” Buntrock says of the partnership with WestEd. “We’re learning, too, because



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they have a lot of experience with professional development and working with state leaders."

With funding from the U.S. Department of Education, WestEd's SWCC was established in 2005 to help state education agencies in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah implement the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In 2011, when schools at the bottom of the performance scale were required to make drastic changes in staffing, curriculum, and leadership, state leaders asked the SWCC for help preparing principals for the new roles.

"The state chiefs said, 'We don't have a pipeline of people to do this,'" says Paul Koehler, Director of the SWCC. "This is a specialty and not for the faint of heart."

While working with state leaders to identify needs of school transformation principals, Koehler kept hearing about the University of Virginia program and discovered that it addressed the group's goals. Originally set up to assist principals in Virginia, the School Turnaround Specialist Program received a \$3-million grant from Microsoft to extend the training to people outside the state. From the SWCC, 26 principals, 19 district administrators, and 8 state-level leaders started training in the summer of 2011. Another group of 32 principals, 22 district administrators, and 10 state-level leaders started in the summer of 2012.

"State leaders want the program expanded. They want more slots," Koehler says. "The participants have told us they'd never been involved in leadership training as good as this one."

KEY ELEMENTS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS

Several factors distinguish the program from other school leadership development models. First, the University of Virginia program focuses on systemic change. It does this by building understanding of turnaround work at all levels, including state, district, and school; by having state leaders participate in trainings alongside district and school leaders; and by requiring districts to commit to establishing the infrastructure, support, and accountability measures necessary for implementing bold and sustainable turnaround initiatives. District representatives must go through an individualized program to find out what's working and what's not; and they participate in all aspects of the program with principals and school leaders.

Second, a district-readiness assessment is conducted to determine whether this is the right program for interested districts (i.e., do they have the willingness and capacity to initiate and support bold change). Once district leaders and the Darden/Curry Partnership mutually agree to work together, potential turnaround principals participate in a competency-based assessment that correlates with what research has shown to be essential attributes of effective school turnaround leaders. Not everyone who is interested in participating makes the cut. Because the program focuses on building capacity, school districts learn how to use the same assessment system to hire principals in the future.

The assumption is that not every good administrator has the expertise and disposition for what many consider the toughest job in education. "You might have a principal who's very nice and caring and could be effective in a

high-achievement school where most kids come ready to learn,” says Koehler. “That principal may not have the specialized skill levels to go into low-performing schools.”

And third, the two-year program involves ongoing training, accountability, and support. Professors expect high-level thinking, participation, and learning that is then applied and evaluated. Typically, professional development for school leaders includes workshops at conferences or graduate courses in college — short-term sessions that do not offer on-the-job feedback.

Consistent with its system focus and ongoing support, the University of Virginia program visits school districts before they are accepted and throughout the program to determine whether they are willing to establish the infrastructure, conditions, support, and accountability measures to effect sustainable change efforts. This includes removing barriers that can directly or unintentionally impede principals’ progress.

In Arizona’s Whiteriver School District, for example, Superintendent Jeff Fuller says he learned that principals were overburdened with paperwork. In some cases, they were being asked to submit the same information about teacher qualifications or other categories every time a state or federal compliance form required it. Fuller spearheaded the creation of an online tracking system that is being developed for data collection, maintenance work orders, and other administrative functions that once bedeviled principals.

“We’re trying to reduce the load on principals — an objective easier said than done,” Fuller explains. “The shift was

to go from compliance to ‘I want principals focused on what’s happening in classrooms.’”

But more support carries the expectation of better results. Fuller says the five schools in Whiteriver, which serves the Fort Apache Indian reservation, once had inconsistent curricula and instruction and too much tolerance for failure. Participating in the School Turnaround Specialist Program showed school and district leaders not only that they *had* to get better, but *how*.

Whiteriver educators have altered school schedules and changed how they assess students and use diagnostic information. Every school now has a room dedicated to tracking achievement data, and teachers meet weekly to discuss individual students — “where they are, whether they’re moving up or down, and what we’re doing about it,” Fuller says. “This week I am telling our elementary schools we’re going to have transportation for students involved in after-school tutoring, and we have to figure out how to do that.” Participating in the University of Virginia program showed everyone how to move from talking about problems to solving them.

SCALING UP

Fuller, who calls the School Turnaround Specialist Program training “the most meaningful, best thing we’ve ever done,” says he is trying to figure out how to sustain the lessons learned.

Koehler and Buntrock have the same goal, which is why they’ve begun shaping a strategy to help the SWCC spread the turnaround leadership practices throughout the states served by the center. The regional collaborative



BRIEFLY

» A strong emotional bond with a parent is essential to a baby's earliest learning, development, and sense of security and well being.



» Babies who experience ongoing stress, trauma, or lack of parent responsiveness show symptoms of anxiety, depression, or other psychological problems.



» The California Center for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health serves as a statewide hub for organizational development, research, and evaluation.

EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH:

Raising Awareness, Taking Action

An estimated 9 to 14 percent of infants and very young children in the U.S. experience emotional or mental health issues serious enough to interfere with their development and learning.

When infant or toddler behavior changes in troubling ways, parents are usually the first to notice. Typically they consult a pediatrician or other professional to figure out how to relieve their child's distress. But too frequently these behavioral symptoms are either missed or disregarded by parents and other important adults in the child's life. As a result, a small problem may grow and become harder to treat, sometimes evolving into a long-term mental health issue.

Nearly 20 years ago, a cross-disciplinary group of California early childhood health, education, and human services professionals decided to increase awareness about the human and social costs of untreated mental health problems among children ages birth to five, and they decided to take action to strengthen infant-family mental health systems and services in the state. Building on numerous accomplishments over the years, members of this original group recently created the California Center for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health to serve as a statewide hub for infant-early childhood mental health services in organizational development, research, and evaluation.

At the outset, the cross-disciplinary group that eventually created this new center knew that any strategy for improvement would need to take into account both the social stigma attached to mental health issues in general,

and the widespread belief — among health care providers as well as lay people — that babies and very young children don't experience mental health problems. "Historically, infant mental health hasn't been taken seriously," says Virginia Reynolds, Director of the Center for Prevention and Early Intervention (CPEI) at WestEd, and a member of that groundbreaking group. "But people who work closely with very young children and their families have known for decades that it's a health concern among this age group."

As one way to begin to shift public perception, the team resolved to use the term *mental health* consistently in their communications with professionals and policymakers, rather than the "softer" but less precise *social* or *behavioral health*. Reynolds notes that attitudes among professionals have begun to change as research on infant brain development produces increasing evidence that babies who experience ongoing stress, trauma, or lack of parent responsiveness show physiological and psychological symptoms of anxiety, depression, or other psychological problems.

BUILDING ON TWO DECADES OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Reynolds and several other members of the original group have been instrumental in moving the work forward continuously since 1992 through a series of funded projects and through their own individual work.



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But people who work closely with very young children and their families have known for decades that it's a health concern among this age group.

From 2001 to 2003, the group headed the California Infant, Preschool, and Family Mental Health Initiative, a multifaceted, collaborative project that established new models of mental health service delivery. Initiative members offered training and consultation opportunities for mental health professionals and produced literature and reviews of best practices for early childhood mental health care.

Another important product of early collaboration among this group of California mental health professionals was the *California Training Guidelines and Competencies for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health*, the first such manual ever published in the state. Reviewed by national experts, the updated 2009 edition defines several categories of specialization in infant-family mental health care for practitioners and those who train and mentor them. It also sets detailed standards for professional knowledge, skills, and clinical/field experience for each category. For example, the Transdisciplinary Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health Practitioner category lays out requirements for professionals in such disciplines as audiology, social work, and physical therapy. In 2009 an online professional endorsement process was initiated to more formally recognize the professional competencies, and to guide consumers in selecting a mental health care provider, consultant, or trainer.

As part of implementing this series of foundational projects, members of the cross-disciplinary group of professionals that originally formed two decades ago have provided training in evidence-based infant-family mental health practices to nearly 12,000 professionals representing a variety of health and human service agencies and

programs. This includes 6,700 personnel in California, more than 4,700 in 15 other states, and nearly 500 from outside the U.S.

The rollout in 2012 of the California Center for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health builds on this history and represents a major step toward accomplishing the group's long-term goals. Housed at WestEd's CPEI, the center offers technical assistance, resources, and training of trainers to help state and local agencies build capacity to provide high-quality infant-family mental health care. Services range from broad-based collaboration on policy issues at a national level to conducting training and workshops in the field with professionals.

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES THAT GROUND AND INFORM THE WORK

Every aspect of the work that California stakeholders have undertaken to improve mental health care for infants and young children and their families is grounded in key evidence-based practices. One such practice is relationship-based care. A strong emotional bond with a parent is essential to a baby's earliest learning, development, and sense of security and well being. Professionals who follow best practices in infant mental health care — as established by research and experts in the field — focus on assessing the state of the infant-parent relationship and working with the family in culturally and socially sensitive ways to strengthen it.

"The goal is to support the families so they are able to do the best job they can caring for their child," says Karen Moran Finello, a developmental psychologist specializing

in children from birth to five years old and their families, and a member of the original project team. “Supporting the infant-parent relationship promotes healthy development both within the family and within the child. A lot of the related intervention work involves being a detective, working with the family to figure out what’s not working and change it.”

Because of the stigma often attached to mental health issues, she adds, some associate mental health care with serious psychiatric problems. “We think of physical health as having a continuum; we want to promote good physical health and eliminate or treat long-term physical problems,” she says. “We also know that some physical problems require long-term treatment and don’t just disappear. In the same way, best practices in mental health care include promoting good infant-family mental health, and intervening quickly in problems.”

Most projects the group has implemented target the needs of low-income or at-risk populations. Families are referred for care through early learning programs, welfare case workers, and other channels. Reflecting the history of how health and social services have been delivered in such communities, professionals from various disciplines typically make home visits to work with the infant and family. Because families are often coping with a number of issues, a care provider’s work can be complicated, intense, and emotionally draining.

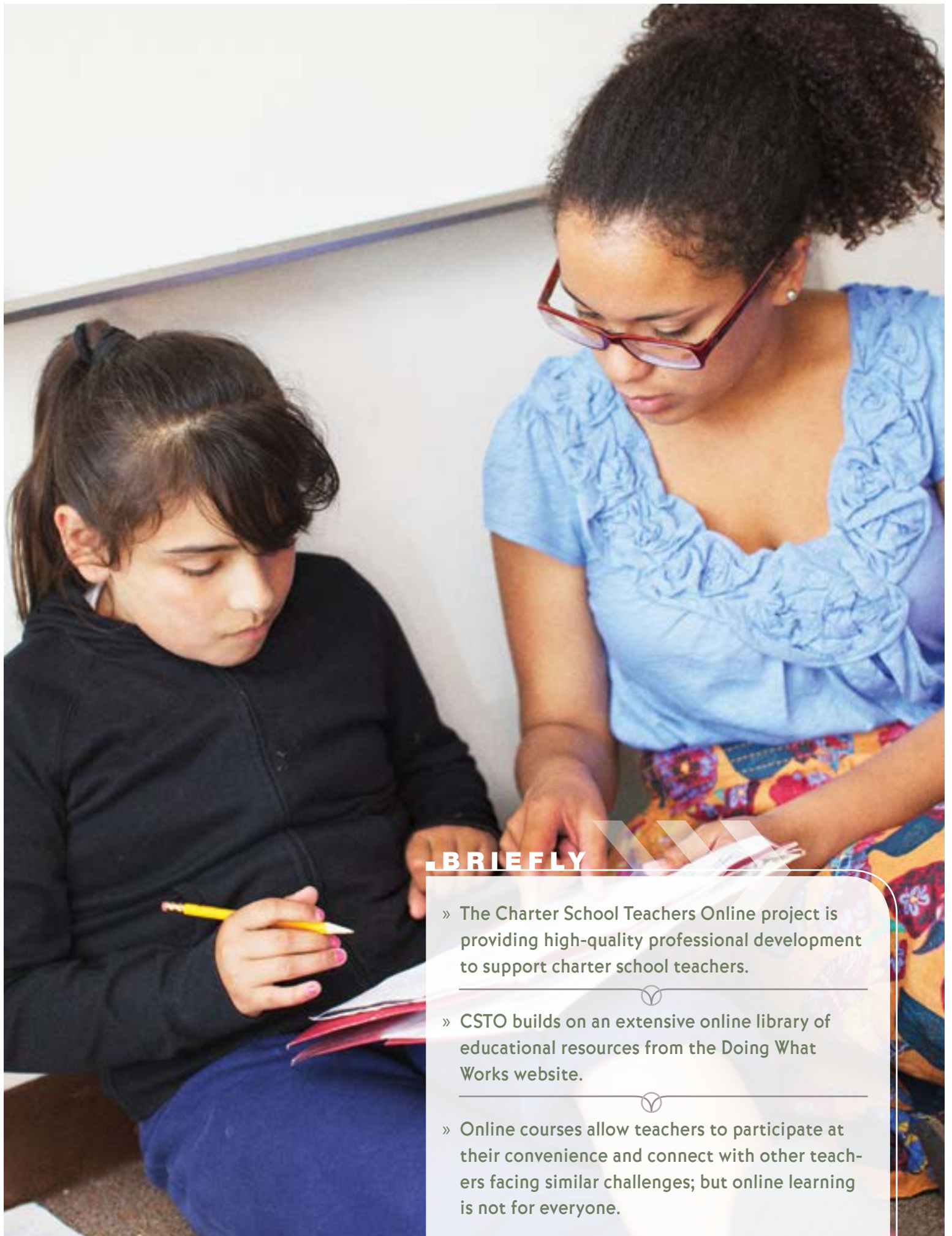
To guard against burnout and to foster collegiality and support professional development, “reflective practice,” another essential evidence-based approach, is integrated into many aspects of project work. For example,

a facilitator trained in reflective practice might help an individual or small group of practitioners take a step back from a challenging assignment in order to reflect on ways to apply relevant knowledge and theory to the work, to focus on the important infant-family or family-practitioner relationships involved, and to explore possible approaches to working effectively with the client. A reflective practice facilitator’s role is to listen carefully and ask strategic questions that support a practitioner to figure out a workable plan for moving forward to achieve goals in mental health promotion, intervention, or treatment.

With an organizational structure in place and a veteran team providing leadership and guidance, the new California Center is looking to grow and expand its reach. “Our combined success in policy and practice has meant that people are starting to get the importance of mental health care for very young children and their families,” Reynolds says. “And we’ve been able to build coalitions among top experts in a variety of health and human service fields who are passionate about and committed to improving infant-family mental health care.”



For more information about the California Center for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health and related projects, contact Virginia Reynolds at 916.492.4017 or vreynol@WestEd.org.



BRIEFLY

» The Charter School Teachers Online project is providing high-quality professional development to support charter school teachers.



» CSTO builds on an extensive online library of educational resources from the Doing What Works website.



» Online courses allow teachers to participate at their convenience and connect with other teachers facing similar challenges; but online learning is not for everyone.



FILLING A NEED:

Professional Development FOR Charter School Teachers

Teachers and administrators in independent charter schools tend to wear multiple hats and have enormous workloads. Most independent charters are small. Many are geographically isolated. And a good number are struggling financially; just meeting the monthly payroll can be difficult. All too often, opportunities for high-quality professional development in this context are minimal or nonexistent.

WestEd's Charter School Teachers Online (CSTO) project is working to fill this gap. "We're interested in promoting high-quality charter schools, and we believe one of the keys is excellent instruction," says Sarah Feldman, a WestEd Senior Research Associate and CSTO's director. "Achieving excellent instruction," Feldman adds, "depends in large part on providing opportunities for teachers to engage in effective professional development."

CSTO was created in 2010 when WestEd was awarded a three-year, \$1.7-million contract from the U.S. Department of Education to develop online professional development specifically for charter school teachers. Funding came from the U.S. Charter Schools Program with an aim to support charter schools nationwide.

BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURE ONLINE

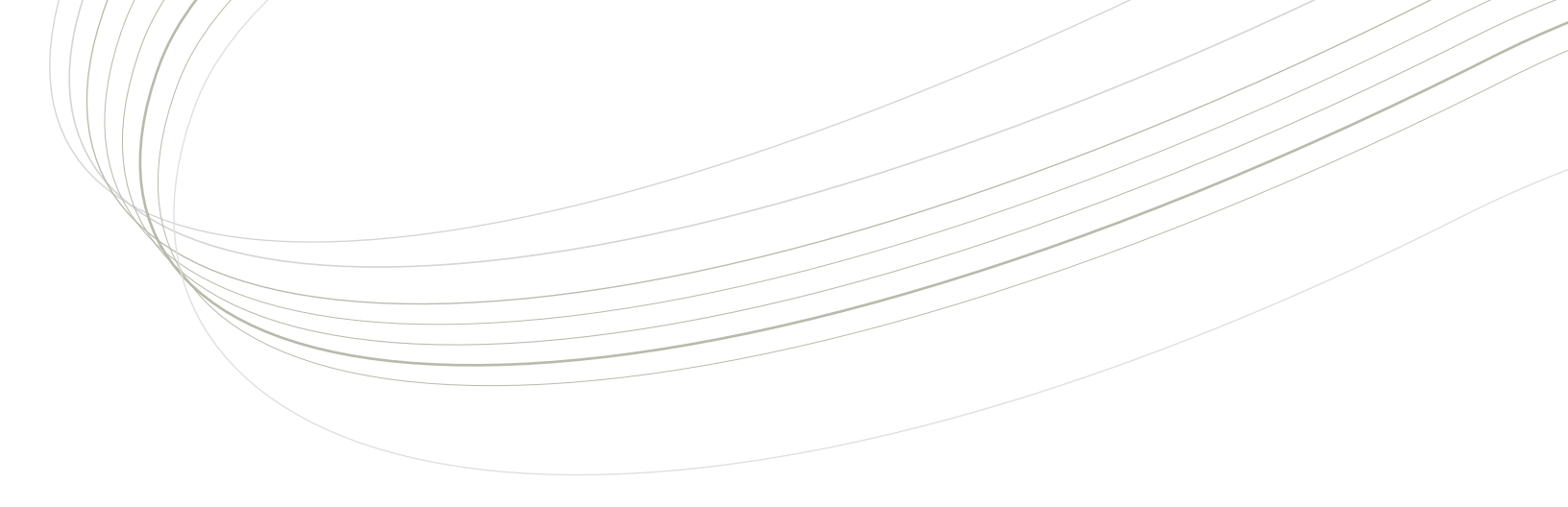
Moving professional development online is key to CSTO's approach to overcoming the geographic and cost constraints of reaching charter school teachers. CSTO builds on an extensive online library of educational resources from another WestEd project, Doing What Works (DWW). Nikola Filby, director of Innovation Studies at WestEd, describes DWW as a collection of "open education resources" that bridge research and practice. Funded

by the U.S. Department of Education and developed by WestEd in partnership with American Institutes for Research and RMC Research Corporation, DWW offers professional development workshop packages. School districts can access the material free of charge at the DWW website (www.dww.ed.gov). However, as Filby points out, "DWW only takes people so far. It's great to see CSTO building on that base and putting these materials together in a more structured way."

CSTO is developing and facilitating eight online professional development courses, each spanning four to seven weeks. Five of the courses are designed to give charter school teachers strategies they can use to boost middle and high school students' reading comprehension. They cover topics ranging from ways to more effectively lead discussions on textbook material and teach new vocabulary in the classrooms, to strategies for teaching to the Common Core standards for reading.

There are also two new courses coming on fractions and one on increasing reading comprehension in grades K-3. All the courses utilize material from the DWW website as well as additional resources such as surveys, checklists, and assessment tools.





Each course is divided into weekly sessions in which participating teachers engage in online activities such as viewing a short video or slideshow, completing a reading selection, and participating in online discussion forums. For example, the course on reading comprehension strategies features a video demonstrating a “thinkaloud,” a process of reading out loud while interjecting one’s own thoughts and questions about the material.

Explains the expert demonstrating the thinkaloud strategy, “It’s a way to make visible the invisible process of reading by verbalizing what’s going on in my head as I try to make sense of a task.” After viewing the video, the participating teachers study various questioning techniques as a way of monitoring their own reading comprehension and, ultimately, that of their students. Participants also learn how to use a range of questioning techniques when teaching in their specific content areas.

Other lessons highlight strategies such as scaffolding instruction; using graphic organizers; and teaching students to annotate the text. Participants also use a rubric to score sample student work, then discuss in an online forum what they would “infer about the strengths and weaknesses of the classroom instruction” based on the students’ efforts.

During the course, the materials ask teacher participants to “process your learning through the lens of a focus student, someone you currently teach [and] on whom you can center your observations and reflections of student learning and teacher practice.” To that end, teachers respond to questions such as “What do you notice about the types of questions your focus student asks?” and “What instructional strategies might be useful in supporting your student to improve in summarizing?”



ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Feldman, the courses are designed to be highly interactive and practical. In addition to engaging in small-group discussions with each other and their instructor, the charter school teachers regularly reflect on and write about their own classroom practice and collaboratively create WIKIs, web pages where they share and update lesson plans. They are asked to “check in” online daily, and to spend a minimum of two hours per week on course activities. As the participants complete assignments, they receive feedback from their online colleagues and WestEd facilitators.

One advantage of learning online: Teachers can do so at their convenience; all they need is a computer with Internet access. Another strength, Feldman says, is that “if you’re the only eighth-grade science teacher at your small charter school, it gives you a chance to connect to other eighth-grade science teachers facing similar challenges.”

To be sure, learning online isn’t for everyone. To succeed, participants must be thoughtful when sharing their ideas and experiences, comfortable doing so in writing, open-minded and respectful of others’ opinions, and self-disciplined and organized.

Yet, Filby notes, “clearly, online everything is the wave of the future.” Therefore, “understanding what it takes to provide good online professional development in general is important.” Beyond that, she notes often “it is possible to get deeper engagement and easier to respond to each others’ comments and build conversations in an online setting than in a class where people are tied together in real time.”

Moving professional development online is key to CSTO's approach to overcoming the geographic and cost constraints of reaching charter school teachers.

Since CSTO began as a pilot in 2011, over 80 teachers in Michigan, Arizona, California, New York, and the District of Columbia completed CSTO courses, with plans to expand to more states. The teachers, recruited by charter school support organizations such as the Michigan Association of Public School Academies and the California Charter Schools Association, can receive continuing education credits for each course they complete. Arizona teachers receive a stipend to participate in the pilot.

Feldman is encouraged by the overwhelmingly positive feedback CSTO courses elicit. One participant, evaluating the overall value of a recent class, wrote, "I do not have much collaboration in my school and this type of experience allows me to 'see' what other teachers have to say." Yet another teacher praised the course's practicality, noting, "I, too, have never had a course or inservice that gave so much and created the excitement to put into effect what was learned as soon as I could."

Participants' responses to surveys and follow-up interviews by an external evaluator highlight the effectiveness and innovative qualities of their experiences with the CSTO modules. More than 90 percent of survey respondents agreed or highly agreed with the statements "This module was a highly effective learning experience" and "I learned new techniques by completing the module." Among the many posts by teachers at the end of modules, a teacher wrote: "I've started using both Thick & Thin questions and in-text notation in my literature classes, and I've already seen an improvement in depth of comprehension and retention."

Another commented on how the material was so useful "that I implemented with my students the day I learned it!"

A follow-up survey found that 97 percent of respondents indicated classroom implementation of one or more skills lasting at least two semesters beyond when they took the CSTO module.

Typical of many respondents, a veteran middle school teacher from a charter school in Michigan asserted a strong connection between her CSTO coursework and her students' improved performance in reading, noting: "One-hundred percent of my students achieved at least a year of reading growth, and of students who were below grade level, 96 percent achieved at least two years of growth."

NEXT STEPS

Feldman notes that although participation in CSTO is currently limited to teachers working at independent charter schools in the states participating in the pilot, she hopes that, when the grant period ends in 2014, the courses can become available to new and veteran teachers in other states and other contexts.

"This effort is all about how adults learn and how to engage and motivate busy teachers to continue improving their practice," she says. "Our goal is to provide high-quality professional development. And what's good for charter school teachers is good for *all* teachers."



For more information about WestEd's Charter School Teachers Online project, contact Nikola Filby at 415.615.3124 or nfilby@WestEd.org, or Sarah Feldman at 415.615.3372 or sfeldma@WestEd.org.



■ BRIEFLY

» Traditionally community colleges have emphasized providing access to students, but some are shifting focus to raise graduation rates.



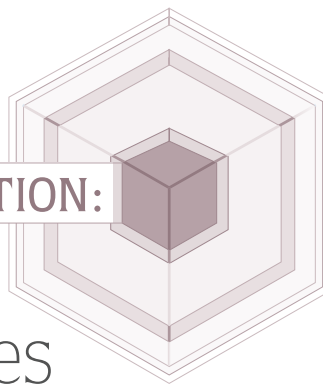
» The Completion by Design (CBD) initiative is helping community colleges build their own sets of policies, practices, and programs to address why more students are not graduating.



» CBD has created an online database of relevant research materials, resources, and tools.

FROM ACCESS TO COMPLETION:

A New Focus for Community Colleges



For the vast majority of the roughly 8 million students enrolled in community colleges in the U.S., earning a certificate or associate degree after two or three years is little more than an elusive dream. Consider the numbers: Only 21 percent of students who enrolled in a community college in 2005 had earned such a credential three years later. Among black and Hispanic students, the figures were even more dismal: 12 and 16 percent, respectively.

“Traditionally, community colleges have focused heavily on providing access to students, especially those who have been underrepresented on college campuses,” says Kathy Bracco, Senior Policy Analyst at WestEd. “And, while that’s been great, it is increasingly clear that an emphasis on access alone is not enough and that we also need to be more focused on supporting students so that they *complete* their intended plans, such as earning a certificate or degree.”

Completion by Design (CBD), a five-year, \$35-million project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, aims to increase the odds that community college students — who constitute nearly half of all U.S. undergraduates — complete a program of study. Accomplishing this may require revamping the way community colleges operate. Andrea Venezia, a WestEd Project Director, describes CBD as engaging colleges in “systemic and structural change” around policies and practices on everything from developmental education and advising to program requirements and costs. “CBD colleges are redesigning the core of what students experience, including their programs of study and student supports,” she says.

MULTIPLE POINTS TO GO OFF TRACK

Bracco notes that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to boosting community college completion rates. Instead,

each individual CBD college is designing and implementing its own “completion pathway,” a set of policies, practices, and programs addressing the specific reasons why more of its students are not graduating. “The reasons differ from college to college and system to system,” says Bracco, “and you have to look at your own context and determine where you can make the greatest impact.”

One of CBD’s early steps was to create an online Knowledge Center — <http://knowledgecenter.completionbydesign.org> — a database of relevant research materials and tools. The Knowledge Center houses research-based materials and tools from across the field, including from a group of organizations called the National Assistance Team, charged with providing technical assistance for CBD colleges.

WestEd oversees the Knowledge Center and has contributed publications such as the “Changing Course” planning guide and planning tool that provide information about CBD’s main principles, examples of reforms that meet those principles, and self-reflection questions to help colleges develop and implement reforms.

The planning guide, “Changing Course: A Guide to Increasing Student Completion in Community Colleges,” notes that there are several points in students’ college careers at which they are most likely to be “slowed



down or sidetracked.” The first is their initial semester on campus, when due to poor academic preparation many students are placed in developmental, or remedial, education classes.

“They can get easily discouraged,” says Bracco, pointing out that according to the research, “having to take two or more courses in developmental education significantly reduces the likelihood that students will complete a course of study.” Even many students who don’t require developmental education or who manage to successfully complete it sometimes get tripped up by the next hurdle: so-called “gatekeeper” courses such as entry-level English and math.

Bracco points out that most community college students are older, have greater financial need, and are more likely to be juggling classes, jobs, and family obligations than their peers at four-year institutions. As a result, it’s not uncommon for even those students more than halfway through a program to drop out of school because of the “complexities of their lives.” Yet another problem: long waiting lists for required classes. “That means delays, that it’s going to take students longer to finish school,” she says. “And we know that the longer it takes, the less likely they are to do so.”

A FRAMEWORK AND PRINCIPLES TO PLAN FOR SUCCESS

CBD’s Changing Course Guide includes a Loss and Momentum Framework, developed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, that spells out these and other situations likely to derail community college students

and offers ideas on how they can be counteracted. The colleges have been asked to use the framework to help them determine when and why they were most likely to lose students and to specify, in their implementation plans, steps they might take to help students maintain momentum.

Guiding their efforts are CBD’s “Design Pathway Principles,” developed by the Gates Foundation, WestEd, the Community College Research Center, and the Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group). Drawn from research, practice, and the colleges’ own experiences during the project’s planning phase, the principles call on community colleges to:

- » Accelerate students’ entry into coherent, sequential programs of study by establishing clear program prerequisites, eliminating nonessential requirements, and ensuring that student progress is aligned with learning outcomes and field competencies
- » Minimize the time it takes to get students college-ready by helping them avoid developmental education or complete such requirements while they work simultaneously in college-level classes
- » Ensure that students understand exactly what they have to do to fulfill the requirements for a certificate or degree
- » Customize instruction, making it program-specific, relevant, experiential, and engaging
- » Integrate student support services, such as advising and study skills lessons, into the instructional program
- » Monitor student progress and provide feedback, using data to inform program planning and staff professional development

The solution ... involves "looking at all the different pieces and thinking about how you rework them to create a coherent whole, with the focus on students' experiences and supporting them through to completion."

- » Create monetary and nonmonetary incentives to motivate students
- » Increase the use of technology to customize instruction, monitor student progress, improve student motivation, and reduce costs

Through a competitive grant process, the Completion by Design initiative has chosen teams of community colleges in three states to receive technical assistance and funding to put the Design Pathway Principles in place. Located in Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio, the participating colleges have demonstrated interest in and the capacity to make innovative changes to boost their completion rates. They are working together in three state cadres that receive technical assistance from members of the National Assistance Team, which includes experts from a number of organizations, including WestEd, the Community College Research Center, the RP Group, Public Agenda, and Jobs for the Future.

According to Venezia, the wide scope of CBD — the fact that it is attempting to "change the community college experience across the board" — is what makes it most significant. She describes the effort as a huge challenge, and one that cannot be met with a "silver bullet" or "magic list." The solution, she says, involves "looking at all the different pieces and thinking about how you rework them to create a coherent whole, with the focus on students' experiences and supporting them through to completion."

She likens the process to ongoing attempts at systemic reform in K–12 education, where educators are struggling with issues such as "trying to figure out the key leverage

points, determining which aspects of change are leadership-driven and which are structural or can be changed in other ways, and identifying what's replicable, and in what context."

Although it is still early in the life of the project, and therefore impossible to draw definitive conclusions, Venezia urges others in the community college field to study the CBD Loss and Momentum Framework and Design Pathway Principles, which are discussed in great detail in the "Changing Course" guide and planning tool, both available online from the Knowledge Center website and from WestEd.org.

"The focus on systemic redesign, integrating academics and student supports, creating coherent programs of study with developmental education as an onramp into those programs, creating opportunities for students to take compressed or accelerated developmental education, and contextualizing coursework — those are all reforms that other colleges can take away from CBD's work so far and apply to their own situation," she says.

While many colleges across the country are experimenting with such reforms, CBD is unique in trying to knit all of those elements together as it redesigns the college experience for students.



For more information about WestEd's role in the Completion by Design project, contact Andrea Venezia at 415.615.3248 or avenezi@WestEd.org or Kathy Bracco at 415.565.3012 or kbracco@WestEd.org.

Featured Resources & Services



Making Sense of SCIENCE: Matter for Teachers of Grades 6–8

By Kirsten R. Daehler, Jennifer Folsom, & Mayumi Shinohara

This comprehensive professional development course for science teachers provides all the ingredients for building a scientific way of thinking in teachers and students, focusing on science content, inquiry, and literacy. Teachers learn to facilitate hands-on science lessons, support evidence-based discussions, and develop students' academic language and reading and writing skills in science, specifically on the topic of matter.

The full bundle of materials — Facilitator Guide, Teacher Book, and accompanying CDs — includes everything needed to effectively lead this course with ease:

Price: \$249.95 | Format: Two books, each with a CD
Publisher: WestEd, 2012 | ISBN: 978-1-938287-02-2
Product #: MSS-12-01RD

For copies of just the Teacher Book, which includes a follow-up Looking at Student Work™ component to support professional learning communities, use the following ordering information:

Price: \$59.95 | Format: Trade paper
Publisher: WestEd, 2012 | ISBN: 978-1-938287-01-5
Product #: MSS-12-03RD

WestEd.org/mss

Field Guide to Geometric Transformations, Congruence, and Similarity



By Nanette Seago, Patrick Callahan, Mark Driscoll, Jennifer Jacobs, & Johannah Nikula

Aligned with the Common Core State Standards, this first-of-its-kind illustrated guide helps both secondary school teachers and students understand geometric transformation, similarity, and congruence. This resource features definitions of important terms; color coordination of key phases; diagrams with examples and nonexamples; examples of precise and imprecise language; and properties for translation, rotation, reflection, dilation, congruence, and similarity.

Price: \$9.95 | Format: Print
Publisher: WestEd, 2012 | ISBN: 978-1-938287-06-0
Product #: MATH-12-02RD

Order a pack of 30 guides and receive 34% off:

Price: \$197 | ISBN: 978-1-938287-08-4
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Project Spotlight Videos



Understanding Science for Teaching

The Understanding Science for Teaching project at WestEd has a proven track record of strengthening teachers' content knowledge, transforming classroom practices, and boosting student achievement in science. We invite you to view a short video of Project Director Kirsten Daehler highlighting the importance and impact of this research-based initiative and why she's excited to help educators make sense of science!



Doing What Works

Educators nationwide benefit from Doing What Works (DWW), an online library containing free research-based resources and tools. Kelly Stuart, DWW Director of Dissemination at WestEd, talks about this U.S. Department of Education-funded key initiative. How does DWW support and improve K-12 classroom instruction? What does the future hold for this project? Find out from Stuart!

<http://vimeopro.com/WestEd/project-spotlight-interviews>



New REL West Website Redesign

The website for the Regional Educational Laboratory West has undergone a redesign, bringing enhancements and new features. Visit the site for up-to-date information, research findings, tools, and a free reference desk service that provides referrals and brief responses to education questions.

» relwest.WestEd.org

FEATURED FREE RESOURCES FOR DOWNLOAD



Changing Course publications

The *Changing Course* guide and companion tool help community colleges facilitate productive conversations and develop comprehensive plans to rethink and redesign their systems, programs, and instruction. Created for faculty, staff, and administrators to support efforts to increase student completion rates,

these publications grow out of *Completion by Design*, an initiative that works with community colleges to increase completion and graduation rates for students, particularly those from low-income families.

Changing Course: A Guide to Increasing Student Completion in Community Colleges

Thad Nodine, Andrea Venezia, & Kathy Reeves Bracco | WestEd, 2011

► www.WestEd.org/cs/we/view/rs/1237

Changing Course: A Planning Tool to Increasing Student Completion in Community Colleges

Andrea Venezia, Kathy Reeves Bracco, & Thad Nodine | WestEd, 2011

► www.WestEd.org/cs/we/view/rs/1238



Effective District Planning and the Required Local Educational Agency Plan (LEAP): Insights from Successful Districts

Patti Crotti, Heather Mattson Almanzán, Kris Flynn, Eric Haas, & Sharon Tucker | WestEd, 2012

Districts have the difficult yet crucial task of implementing state and federal programs and policies — as well as their own — to improve academic achievement. This study examines the planning and implementation of district improvement efforts in general and focuses on the influence of Local Educational Agency Plans (LEAP) required of all California districts receiving funds under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

► www.WestEd.org/cs/we/view/rs/1236



Evaluation of the Electric Company Summer Learning Program

Betsy McCarthy, Lisa Michel, Michelle Tiu, Sara Atienza, John Rice, Jonathan Nakamoto, & Armando Tafoya | WestEd, 2012

The Electric Company (TEC) television show won the hearts of children because it made learning fun. Thirty years later, the iconic show has returned as a summer program teaching literacy, numeracy, and mathematics vocabulary in an entertaining and engaging manner. In this report, WestEd researchers describe a formative evaluation study of TEC in 2009 and provide feedback on successes and areas for improvement.

► www.WestEd.org/cs/we/view/rs/1227

R&D ALERT

R&D Alert covers issues affecting schools, communities, and human development professionals throughout the United States. Current and previous issues are available at WestEd.org/R&DAlert. Your comments are welcomed. Please address them to Noel White at nwhite@WestEd.org.

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will seek to align leadership training and develop a common understanding of what it takes to transform low-performing schools. As they learn how to scale up the model, they will share that knowledge with other states and school districts.

They'd also like to extend the principles to help all schools improve, not just those at the bottom. "Superintendents know that if their schools are going to be better, they have to have better leaders," says Koehler. "And they need new approaches to school leadership training." Marie Mancuso says districts are considering providing incentives to principals who have graduated from the University of Virginia program to mentor and coach other leaders.

"A lot of times districts mean well, but in education we are not really used to thinking about the system and everyone being in it together," Buntrock says. "If you start thinking about systems, and you have structures and a culture in place to help and hold people accountable, then you're not so dependent on a 'hero' principal. When he or she moves on, there's less likelihood that the school will go back in decline."



For more information about the SWCC, contact Paul Koehler at 602.322.7004 or pkoehle@WestEd.org; or Marie Mancuso at 602.322.7003 or mmancus@WestEd.org. For information about the University of Virginia's School Turnaround Specialist Program, contact LeAnn Buntrock at 434.924.3806 or BuntrockL@darden.virginia.edu.

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