



DISTRICT CHALLENGE

How can school systems support schools to build professional learning communities of teacher leaders to create instructional coherence that leads to meaningful classroom-level improvements?

OVERVIEW

With funds from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Bank Street Education Center has created the NY Network: a network of four urban school districts in New York State committed to continuous and collective learning. By providing support in co-constructing a comprehensive strategy for implementing an instructional vision, the Education Center's aim is to create teacher and student-level improvements across classrooms at scale.

THEORY OF ACTION

The Education Center believes that the coherence of a school's culture, structures, and instruction enables teachers to effectively challenge and support students. We partner with school systems to create the conditions for school-level coherence by growing the capacity of teacher leaders to facilitate professional learning communities with a focus on the instructional core: the relationship between the student, teacher, and the content with which they are engaged. In order to do this, we establish a throughline of learning across the layers of a school system to engage leaders at both the central and school levels to ensure that a common vision and commitment to the work is realized. This becomes a strategy designed to enable shifts in teacher leadership and classroom practices aligned to challenging standards while staying responsive to student needs. By supporting professional learning through these structures, improved learning experiences and outcomes for all students will be realized.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND INQUIRY

In the network's planning year, the Education Center developed strong relationships throughout the NY Network and earned the trust of key stakeholders across school systems, including superintendents, department superintendents, and heads of teaching

District Capacity

Rochester

- Student population: 27,552
- Schools: 50
- Teachers: 2,421

Syracuse

- Students population: 19,951
- Schools: 34
- Teachers: 1,577

Utica

- Student population: 9,773
- Schools: 13
- Teachers: 647

Yonkers

- Student population: 25,270
- Schools: 39
- Teachers: 1,545

Project Reach Across Four Districts

Number of school systems:
4 (Syracuse, Rochester, Utica,
and Yonkers)
Number of schools: 58
Number of teachers: 666
Number of students: 41,940

Our Partnership With the NY Network

and learning. Each school system identified a current instructional challenge by crafting a focus of inquiry, and then studied that question through a collaborative review done in partnership with the Education Center. Using this information, the school systems and the Education Center then co-developed multi-stage strategic implementation plans designed to impact the quality of classrooms at an increasing scale over 18 months.

Implementation

With the official launch of the NY Network, the Education Center is providing support to districts to implement their strategic plans by using the evolving, research-based Districtwide Instructional Initiative (DII) framework as a guide. The DII is the lens through which districts will approach their work to improve or sustain practices in four key areas: leadership vision and commitment, change management structures, intentional adult learning experiences, and student-focused and evidence-based decision making. The Education Center leverages this framework to support school systems by:

- Creating professional learning opportunities for system and school leaders that directly impact teaching and learning as well as their own leadership practices
- Establishing professional learning communities for system leaders and teachers that create systems for continuous improvement of the quality of curriculum and instruction at the school and/or system level
- Creating high-quality tools and designing feedback loops to help assess the impact of professional learning on teacher practice and student learning and make adjustments accordingly

The systems also participate in network-wide convenings to engage in common learning and share implementation successes, challenges, and learnings. They learn how to position schools as the unit of change for instructional improvement, fostering school coherence and the capacity to engage in improvements to instructional practice and student learning that are aligned to challenging standards across classrooms and over time.

Impact

As the NY Network continues its implementation phase, the systems are building leadership capacity through the layers of each system, including central offices, schools, and classrooms, to successfully implement instructional initiatives at scale. As a result, 20 percent of each participating school's teachers will be equipped and empowered to lead their peers to implement shifts in instructional practice that align to rigorous state standards and are responsive to student needs.



"[I recognized] the importance of working with schools and teachers in helping them create connections between their instructional decisions and student learning." – *System staff*

"The school as the unit of change concept enabled me to think about the areas of strength within the district. It also helped us focus on examining areas that are challenges." – *System staff*

"The inter-district collaboration and additional lens from Bank Street were critical in helping us articulate our plan and revise the workplan for implementation." – *System staff*