

Building Strong School Team Connections

Building Network Connections

Actualizing the power of a network to accelerate improvement depends on network members connecting with and learning from each other. This learning happens in intentionally designed participation structures: regularly scheduled and carefully designed network meetings, team meetings, and cross-team idea sharing routines. Network leaders design and support participation structures and introduce tools and routines that organize what network members are learning, learn from the variation across the different network contexts, and connect what is learned across teams.

Building Team Connections

Improvement networks in the Bill & Melinda Gates Networks for School Improvement (NSI) initiative structure collaborative teams in order to support improvement work at the school level. Hub leaders build effective school teams by supporting their team processes and improvement work, thus building a space for collaborative learning.

Spotlighting Networks for School Improvement

Based on 2022 Network Health Survey data, four NSI were achieving in internal-team connections and two NSI had statistically significant growth in this area.* In this brief, we summarize some of the practices these networks use to support strong internal-team connections. Some patterns emerge as leaders describe:

- Intentional membership
- Making time for regular meetings
- Building protocols to structure effective discourse
- Building datasets to catalyze meaningful improvement work

New York City Department of Education City-Wide Networked Improvement Community for Multilingual Learners

Our team has developed a coaching scope and sequence that includes protocols for building trust, supporting leadership development, and developing meeting routines. Protocol driven trust building discussions centered on equity and race are essential to ensure authentic and honest reflection among the school teams. With these in place, the bulk of time is dedicated to **collaboratively developing and debriefing Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles**, a practice which promotes a substantive exchange of ideas and feedback based on real change in classrooms.

* **Note on methodology:** NSI were considered "achieving" in an area on the 2022 Network Health Survey if they were in top 25% relative to all 2021 NSI. They were considered "significantly improving" if members' perspectives in 2022 were significantly more positive than their perspectives in 2021 (based on a standardized t-statistic).



Baltimore City Public Schools: Baltimore Secondary Literacy Improvement Community (BSLIC)

In developing its Teacher Fellowship, BSLIC network leaders spent time thinking about **what behaviors and dispositions they wanted to grow in their teachers and then developed structures and routines grounded in that purpose.**

One disposition the network prioritized was engagement in disciplined inquiry – teachers clearly defining a theory of improvement, attempting to test it, and continuously interrogating it using data and evidence. This norm was incorporated into the process of identifying and hiring teachers to participate in the Fellowship. Teacher candidates were interviewed by network leaders, with questions that focused on teachers' learning from failure and on the productive use of student data for growth. After teachers were selected as Fellows, they participated in summer network kickoff meetings in which they engaged in **simulations to apply the principles of improvement science and reflected on their own habits as improvers.**

As the fellowship continued, the network's **biweekly learning huddle structure facilitated a set of routines:**

- first, **individual reflection on real-time data** gathered during PDSA testing,
- then, **shared reflection within small groups of teachers with a common context** (e.g., teaching the same grade-level or testing the same change idea),
- finally, **individual planning time** to iterate on their change idea implementation.

While the specifics being discussed at each huddle might change, **consistent use of this structure** allowed teachers to feel comfortable sharing their successes and challenges and to glean new ideas for adaptations from each other.

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-Cal Ed Partners

California Education Partners: 8th Grade

At California Education Partners, we believe that the district is the unit of change to make lasting improvement for students. As a result, **our improvement teams are constructed with membership from the district office, site leaders (principals, assistant principals), and classroom teachers.** Because districts rarely convene groups like this on their own, we work intentionally to build equity of voice on the team regardless of position in the district. If the team is to be effective, they must see each team member's perspective as essential. Additionally, we believe that **it is critical to have a team lead with decision making authority around this work.** This allows the work of the team to be validated by the district and avoids situations where the team's efforts are in conflict with the district vision and are dismissed, resulting in decreased motivation.



Teach Plus

The Teach Plus NSI is structured around supporting school-based teams to implement continuous improvement cycles in their middle schools. By coaching teacher leaders on CI and teacher leadership best practices and administrators on CI and distributed leadership best practices, Teach Plus is growing capacity at the individual school level to implement teacher-led continuous improvement, driven by **middle school grade level teams**. Working across fourteen Chicago schools, all of which are their own unique environments with different strengths and challenges, we have structured our Hub team to regularly share information about what schools are working on, what they're struggling with, and where there are successes. We also have spent more time and thought on creating structures and opportunities for schools to collaborate and learn across the network. **We meet weekly as a Hub team as well as in two formal, full-day "Hub step back retreats" to assess where schools are at and how our supports are working.** Additionally, we regularly check in with pertinent CPS district leads to ensure that we are aligning our work with the priorities coming from central office, especially the Distributed Leadership supports that were rolled out this year.

Partners in School Innovation: Middle Grades Success Network Learning Network 3 (LN3)

We intentionally spend time with our clients engaging in the "partnering and enrolling" phase. During this phase we build an awareness of team needs. From there, we often discover **school teams need different types of support.** For example, one school team might need to more clearly identify members of their instructional leadership team and then charter said team in an aligned role and purpose. Other times, we have supported the co-creation of agendas for school and grade-level data analysis that we might model or co-facilitate. **The agendas would include a specific data analysis protocol that met the need of that school context and also include norms and roles to ensure collaboration and equity of voice.**

Each team has a regular meeting to plan and collaborate. In convening spaces, we intentionally group participants; sometimes we group within school teams for context. Additionally, **teams leverage the platform Mighty Networks** to create a virtual community of practice; our team used it to encourage asynchronous engagement, unpacking best practices for clients.