

SUMMIT24

MARCH 25, 2024 | 3:30–4:45 PM

7D. Putting networks in context: How NSI navigate complex environments

Please be sure this session has been added to your schedule in the Summit app

PRESENTED BY:

- *Megan Duff, Vanderbilt University*
- *Jennifer Zoltners Sherer, Partners for Network Improvement*
- *Jennifer Lin Russell, Vanderbilt University*
- *Sinead Chalmers, Bank Street Education Center*
- *Chris Thorn, Partners in School Innovation*
- *Matthew Swenson, New Tech Network*



Carnegie Foundation
for the Advancement of Teaching

PRESENTERS



Megan Duff
Vanderbilt University



Jennifer Zoltners Sherer
Partners for Network Improvement



Jennifer Lin Russell
Vanderbilt University



Sinead Chalmers
Bank Street Education Center



Chris Thorn
Partners in School Innovation



Matthew Swensen
New Tech Network

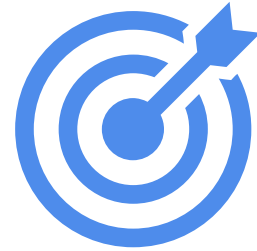
SESSION AIMS



Participants will be able to **define** system alignment within improvement networks.



Participants will add to their toolbox of **strategies** for navigating their environments.



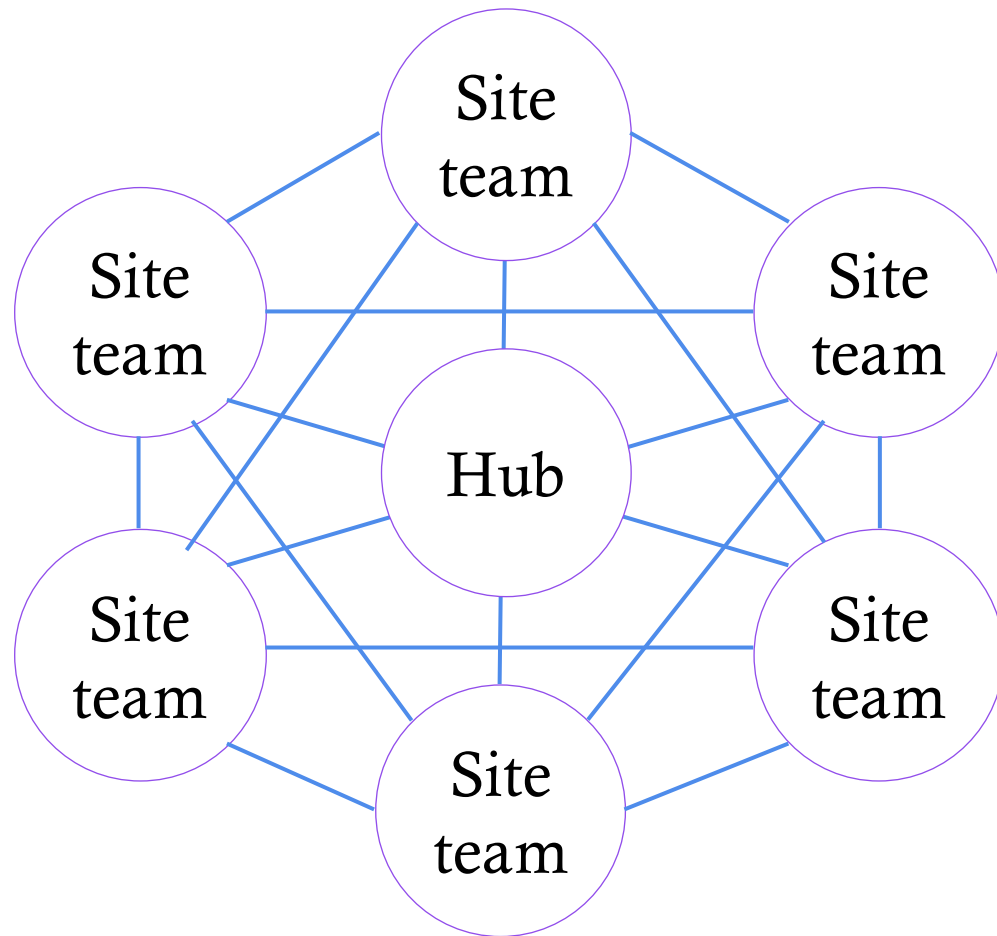
Participants will grapple with **challenges** of system alignment for productive network development.

ACTIVATING QUESTIONS

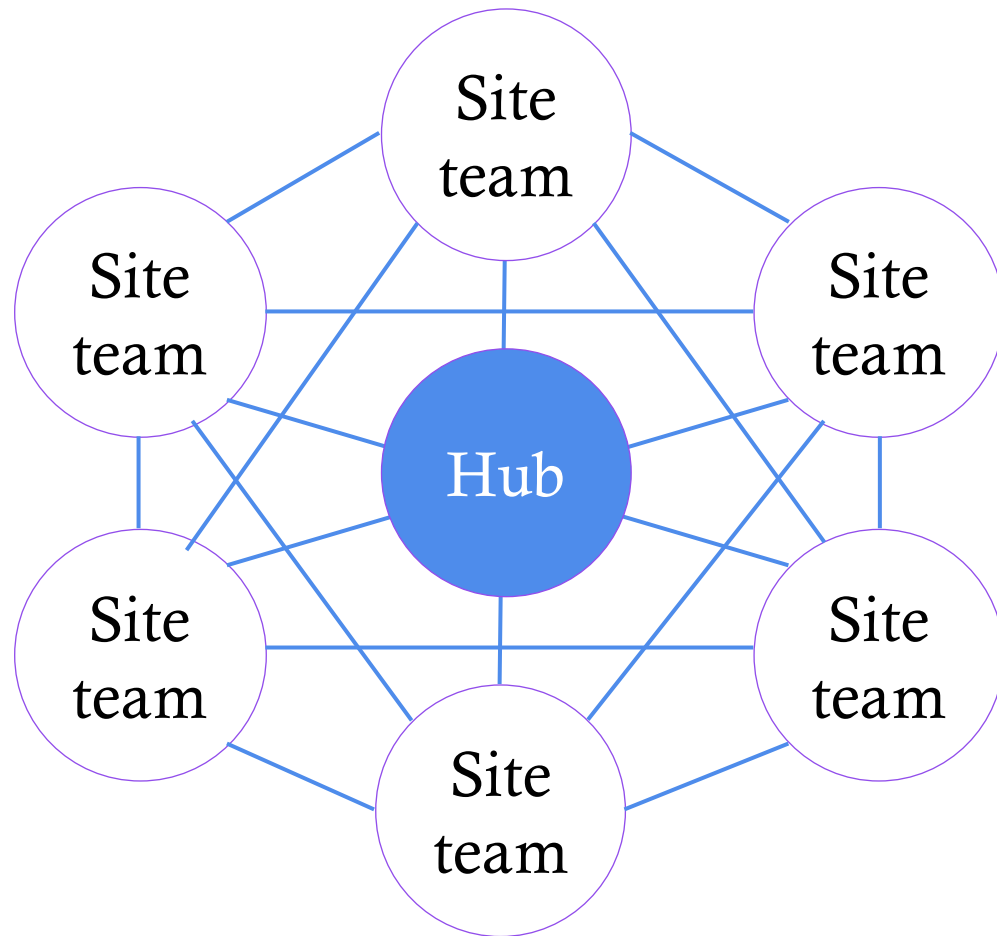
What conditions in the districts or schools with which you work support networked improvement?

What conditions in the districts or schools with which you work complicate networked improvement?

DEFINING IMPROVEMENT NETWORKS

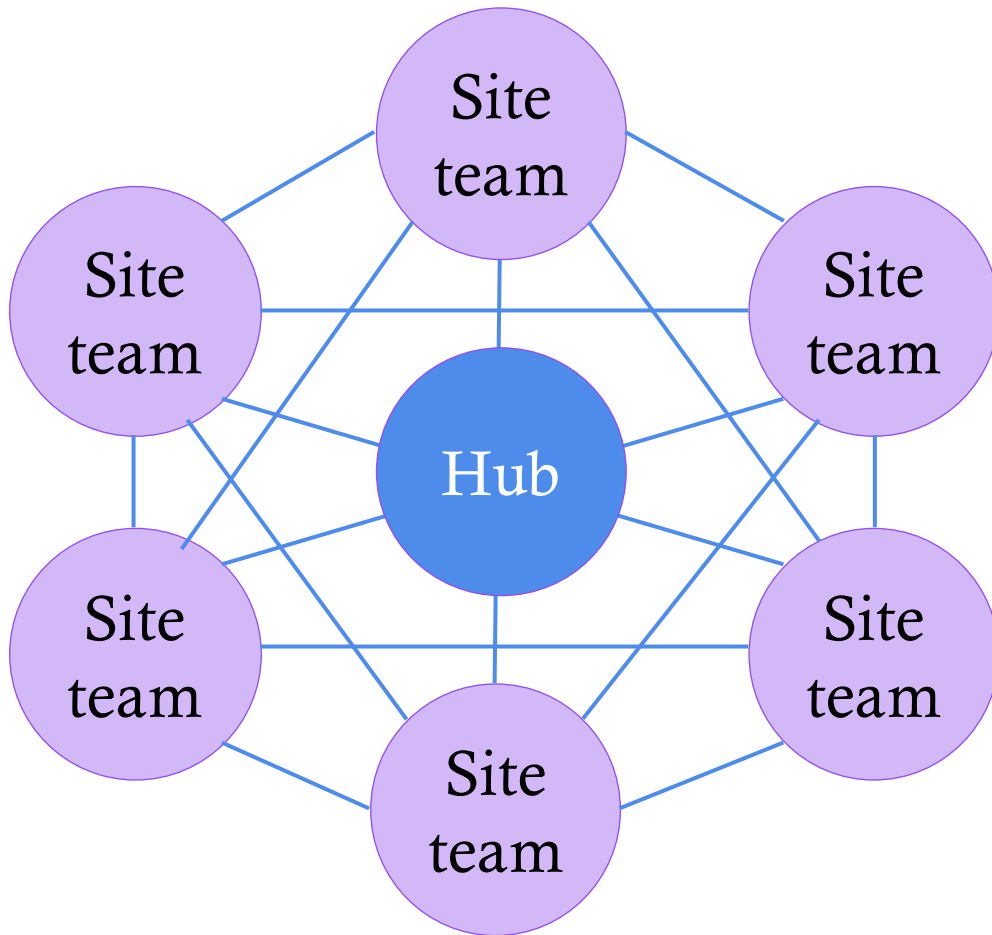


DEFINING IMPROVEMENT NETWORKS



- Network leaders
- Establish structures and routines to support continuous improvement on site teams
- Create opportunities for inter-organizational learning

DEFINING IMPROVEMENT NETWORKS



- Network members
- Explore root causes of common problem
- Identify a measurable aim
- Develop theory of improvement
- Use data-based inquiry routines (e.g., PDSA cycles) to test and refine interventions

WHY IS SYSTEM ALIGNMENT A PERSISTENT CHALLENGE FOR IMPROVEMENT NETWORKS?



US education system is notoriously pluralistic & turbulent



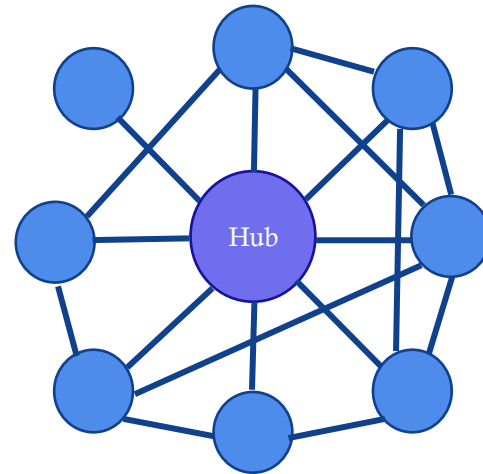
Networked improvement asks educators to embrace new logics

Logic of inquiry
Logic of community
Logic of equity

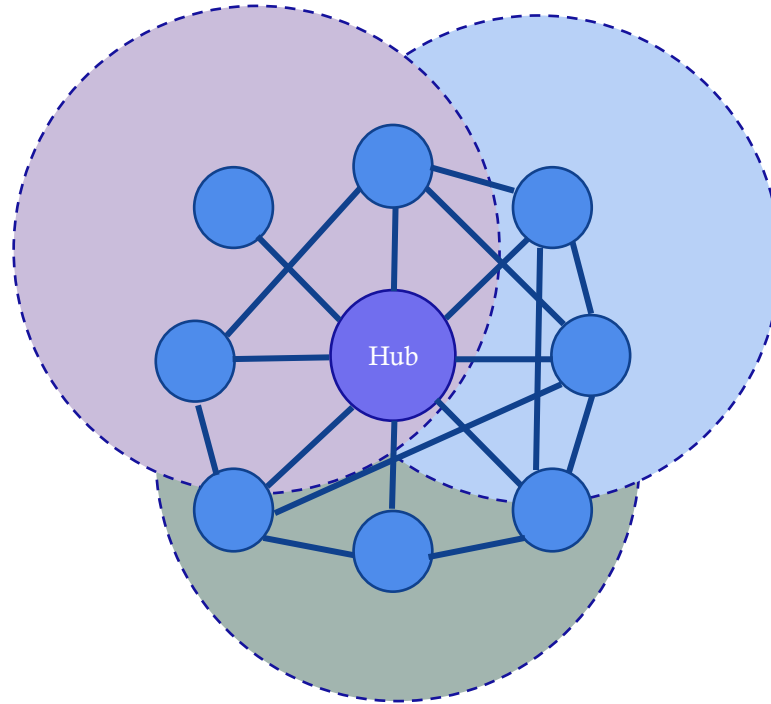


Local policies and priorities often compete with or contradict improvement logics

NETWORKS MUST SIMULTANEOUSLY CRAFT INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ALIGNMENT

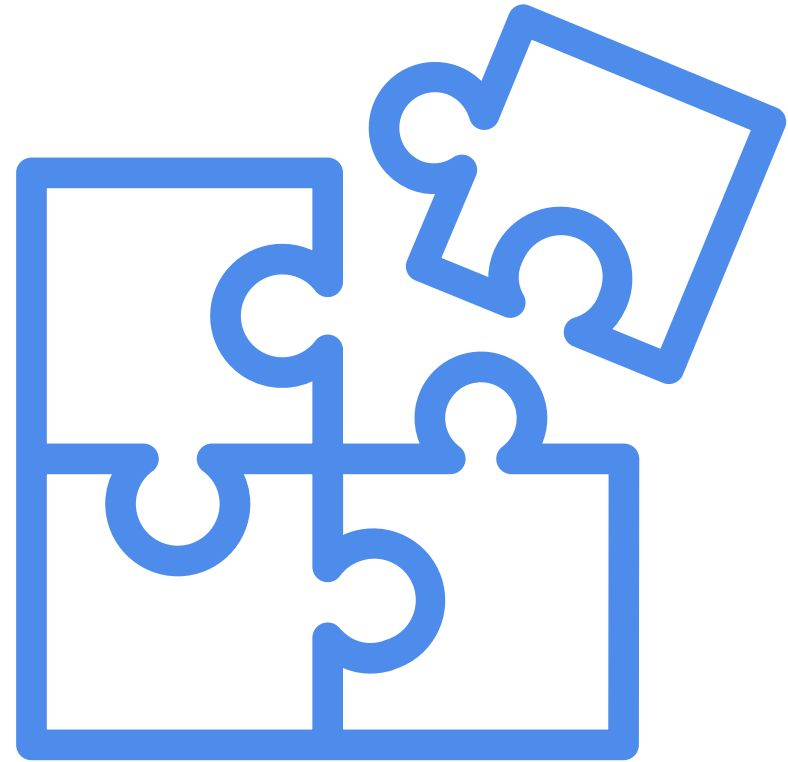


NETWORKS MUST SIMULTANEOUSLY CRAFT INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ALIGNMENT



SYSTEM ALIGNMENT IN ACTION

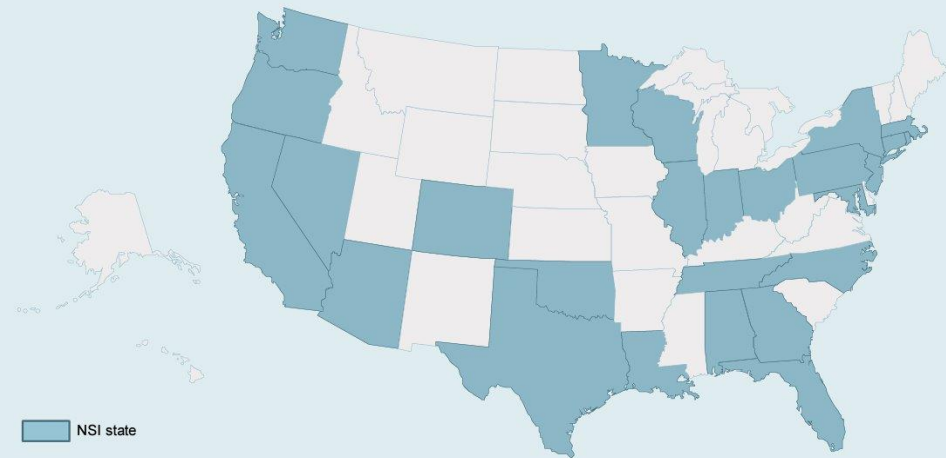
What strategies, roles, and routines do networks use to navigate complex environments?



NETWORKS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Working together to help students succeed

NETWORKS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: SCHOOL LOCATIONS



What is the NSI Initiative?

- 43 networks of middle & high schools
- Nearly 600 schools in 155 school districts
- Affecting over 150,000 students across 23 states
- \$300 million+ investment in NSIs
- \$35 million in support ecology & evaluations

THE NETWORK HEALTH PROJECT

- Conceptualize and measure “network health and development” in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Provide actionable data to network leaders and the foundation to support network development
- Mixed methods longitudinal study of the development of a large sample of improvement networks



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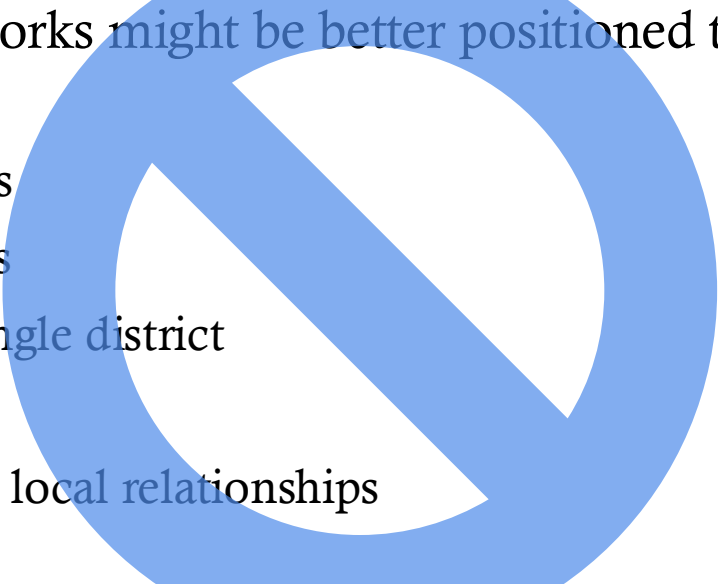


Partners for Network Improvement
Research, Strategy, & Evaluation

WHAT WE'RE NOTICING

- We hypothesized some networks might be better positioned to craft internal and external alignment:
 - Networks with district hubs
 - Non-instructional networks
 - Networks operating in a single district
 - Smaller networks
 - Networks with pre-existing local relationships
 - More mature networks

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- 

WHAT WE'RE NOTICING

Robust processes for school and member selection

Developing strategic connections

Intentional inclusion of school and district leaders

Balancing decision rights with network members

BANK STREET

Sinead Chalmers

Navigating the NSI Context: Bank Street & Yonkers



ED CENTER MISSION

The mission of the Bank Street Education Center (Ed Center) is to **disrupt inequity through systems-level change**. We do this by working closely **with partners**—from teachers and families to policymakers and higher education leaders—to design better educational experiences for everyone.



YONKERS PUBLIC SCHOOLS



23 Schools

1 District

Est. 2018

24,529 students

8th Grade On-Track
Focus: **Math**

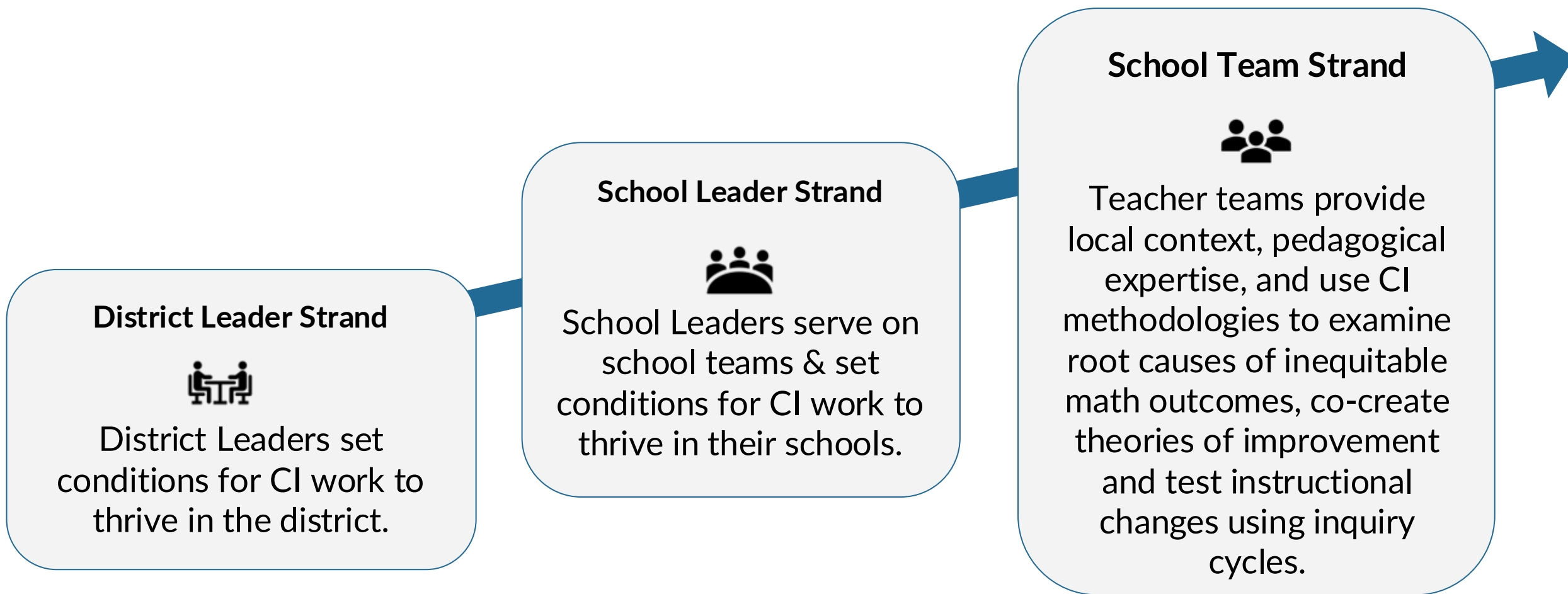
District Problem: Students who are Black, Latinx, and /or experiencing poverty are disproportionately under prepared for success in upper-grades mathematics.



Network Goal: Increase the percentage of Black students, Latinx students, and students experiencing poverty who are on track for success in high school by the end of 8th grade.



CREATING A THROUGHLINE



CREATING A THROUGHLINE: ACTIVITIES & SUPPORT



District Leaders

- Bi-weekly strategic planning meetings
- Community Partnership Meetings
- District Strategic & Improvement Plans
- Alignment to improvement structures: Math Vision & Data Liaisons



School Leaders

- School Leader Meetings
- Alignment to School-Level Priorities
- 4 Keys to Success Framework & review of diagnostic assessments



Teacher Teams

- Bi-weekly - monthly in-school coaching
- Classroom visits + observations
- Monthly network engagements
- Co-create resources: TOI Toolkit, Measurement Card, + PDSA Workbook



LESSONS LEARNED & CONSIDERATIONS

- Identify opportunities to understand the landscape of priorities
- Build trust & community across layers of the system
- Identify frequent opportunities to co-create across layers of system
- Identify district partner to support communication, alignment, and coordination

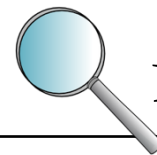
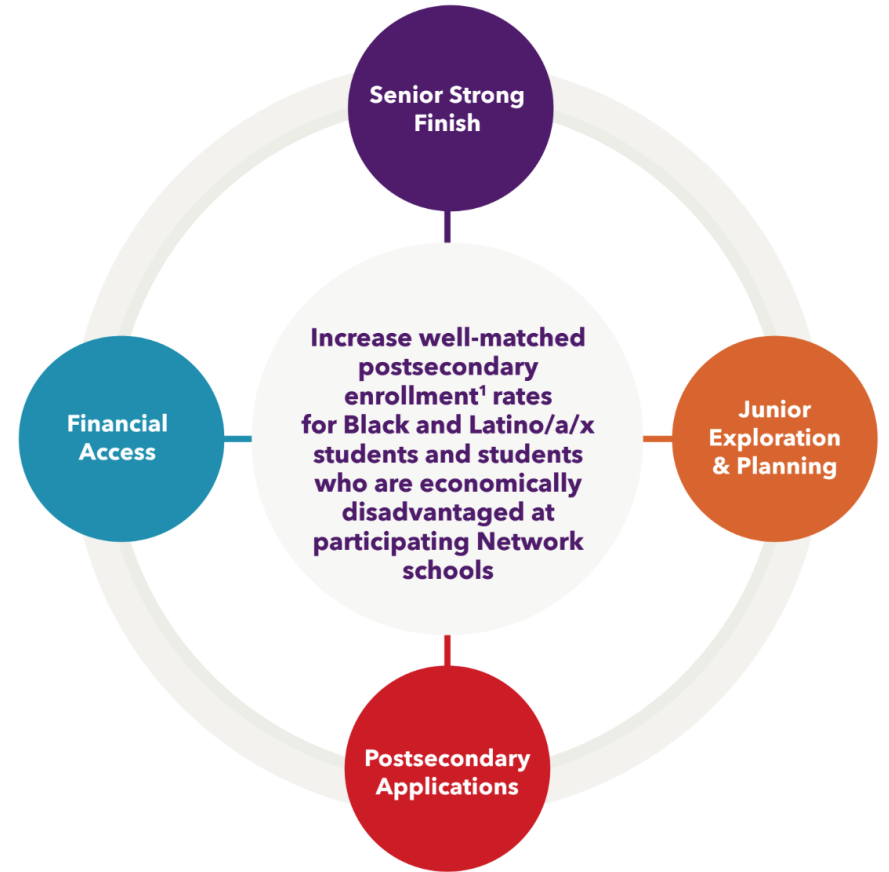
Questions? Contact Sinead Chalmers; schalmers@bankstreet.edu



NEW TECH NETWORK

Matthew Swensen

NTN COLLEGE ACCESS NETWORK



NTN College Access Network Case Study

Link: rb.gy/q3tf4e

NTN COLLEGE ACCESS NETWORK

Affordances and constraints of your local system(s)

- What conditions support your improvement work?
 - Clearly articulated recruitment and onboarding processes
 - Often an alignment with state, local, and district strategic priorities
 - Regularly scheduled supports for school improvement team and district sponsor(s) built into model
- What conditions present challenges to your work?
 - Network of composed of 15 distinct districts from 3 states – coaching is mostly virtual
 - Shifting/competing priorities within a school or district
 - Misalignment of district and school leadership priorities
 - Staff transitions and capacity
- How (if at all) have these conditions evolved over the life of your network?
 - Early learning from first cohort significantly impacted the onboarding and supports of future cohorts
 - COVID-19 exacerbated some of the challenges

tinyurl.com/NTNResourceGuide

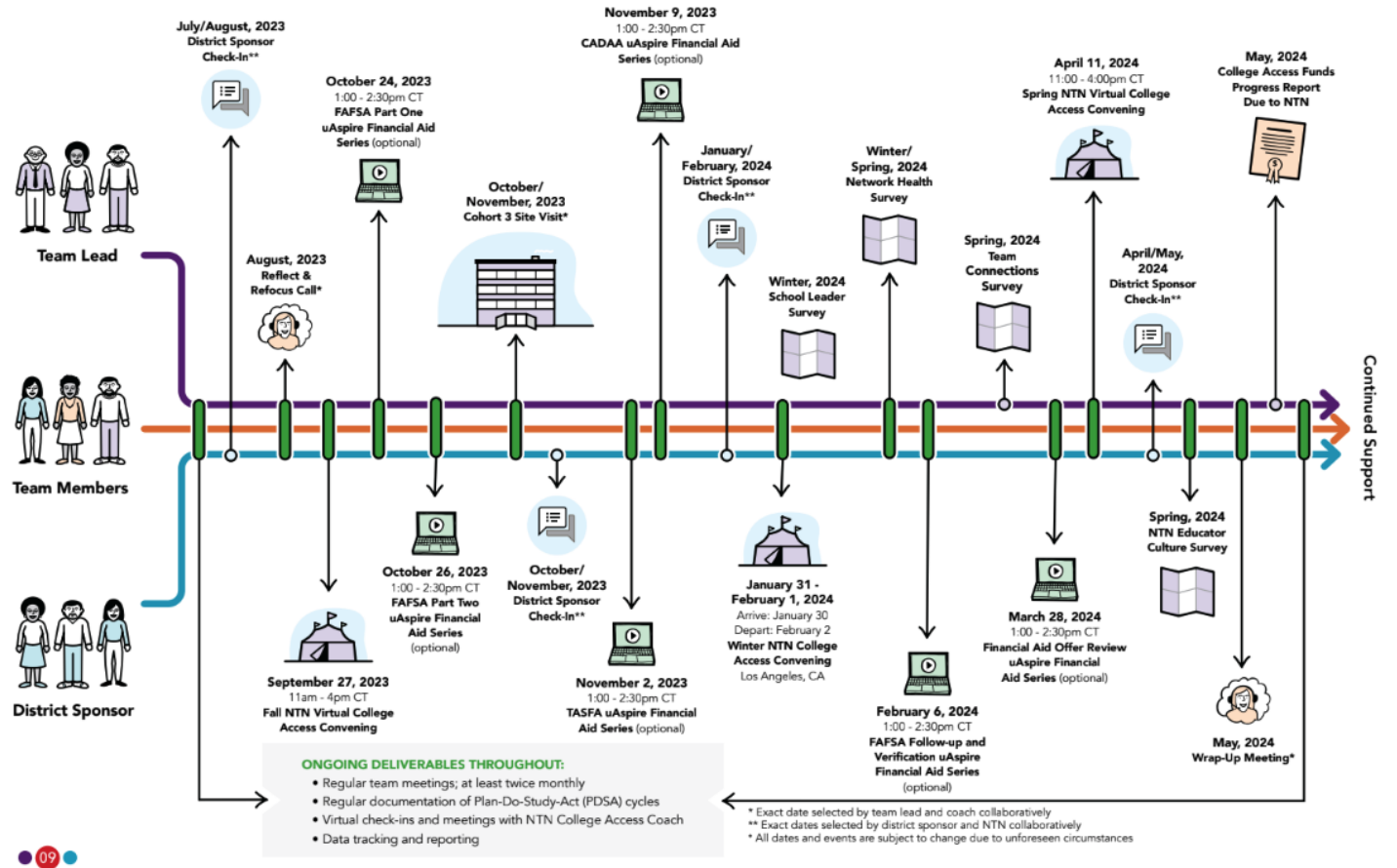


NTN College Access Network 23/24 Resource Guide

NAVIGATING THE ENVIRONMENT

2023/2024 Trail Guide

In September 2019, New Tech Network (NTN) announced a new college access initiative supported by a Networks for School Improvement (NSI) grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). The NTN College Access Network partners with a diverse group of schools and districts to improve college access by leveraging continuous improvement practices. The multi-year initiative is focused on measurable improvements in well-matched postsecondary enrollment rates for Black and Latino/a/x students and students who are economically disadvantaged at participating network schools.



PARTNERS IN SCHOOL INNOVATION

Chris Thorn

ABOUT PARTNERS IN SCHOOL INNOVATION

- We formed 4 different networks
 - School District of Philadelphia
 - Cohort 1 - 11 schools across 5 local networks with an average of 7% of students on grade level
 - Cohort 2 – 12 schools in one local network with an average of 25% of students on grade level
 - East Side Alliance
 - Cohort 2 – 7 (later 11) schools serving high proportions of MLL students across 5 elementary district in East San Jose with an average of 30% of MLL students on grade level
 - Los Angeles Unified SD
 - Cohort 3 – 8 schools serving high proportions of Black students across 2 local districts with an average of 15% of students on grade level
- One of our explicit goals was to explore how our approach to networked improvement would need to be adapted to work across different contexts with varying facilitating conditions – generally low alignment

ABOUT PARTNERS CONTEXTS

- Affordances and constraints of your local system(s)
 - What conditions support your improvement work?
 - Greater attention to student voice (recognizing trauma, OTL, attendance, etc.) and increasing openness to seeing the impact of systemic racism (uneven impact of the pandemic)
 - Shifts in adult and student agency
 - Benefits of collaboration and collective action
 - What conditions present challenges to your work?
 - Rapid leadership turnover of both mid-level and senior leaders in SDP and LAUSD and the reorganization of schools into different management structures aligned with new leaders' theory of action
 - Lack of autonomy at the school and network level – PL time, PL needs, too many priorities, etc.
 - How (if at all) have these conditions evolved over the life of your network?
 - The biggest shifts have been in schools that have embedded improvement practices in the standard operating procedures – but the lack of autonomy and arbitrary top-down changes are constantly eroding school and network capacity.

NAVIGATING THE ENVIRONMENT

- Share one high-leverage strategy you have used to navigate environmental complexity
 - We are explicitly testing [vector theory of change](#) strategies in high complexity contexts
 - Focus on the direction of travel and multiple small tests/probes – more stories like this/less like that
- What have you learned in this process?
 - One current theory is that we should be working with labor organizations from the outset since there are no easy solutions to the shifting politics of school board and state agencies.
 - Create more autonomy for schools and networks through greater empowerment using CBA and external threats (SIG status, takeover, etc.) to carve out contract language to support improvement
- What challenges or questions remain?
 - This is still a theory, but there are organizations who are working on greater school and network autonomy as an antidote to district inability to support alignment. We are partnering with two organizations working on this problem nationally.

CONTINUED GRAPPLING

- Alignment is a two-way street
 - Are some district contexts not ready for this work?
 - Should this work look different depending on local conditions?
 - What are the equity implications of our answers to these questions?
- Some networks are thriving despite continued alignment challenges:
 - What is the role of system alignment in network development?
 - Is it ever preferable to buffer the local system?
 - What are the sustainability implications of our answers to these questions?

Q & A



**KEY
TAKE-AWAYS
FROM TODAY'S
SESSION**

What is one idea, strategy, or tool that you will take back to your organization?

Thank you for attending!

Instructions for completing the session feedback survey:

Click on the **Survey Button** at the bottom of the session page *or* **access your profile page** and click on 'Surveys' to find the survey for this session

IMPROVEMENT IN EDUCATION
CARNEGIE SUMMIT24