Research Article

Closing the Gaps with Leadership and Vision: A Case Study of Continuous Improvement

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Abstract

The challenges of school improvement are great for those serving as instructional leaders. The quality of the leadership strategies and methods used to foster academic achievement and accrue sustainable change do impact final outcomes. This article provides a case study of a district striving to achieve new benchmarks of academic performance and exceeding those goals through a specific method known as Lean which utilized Respect for People and Continuous Improvement. The strategies for school improvement included the use of a district Playbook with shared processes and standards. The Playbook's targeted outcomes lead to outstanding achievement results. This study provides a front line look at how to close the achievement gaps.

Key Words

school improvement, district playbook, lean, continuous improvement, respect

The importance of continuous improvement is well-established for the educational sector (Schmucker, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Sparks, 2018; Flumerfelt & Soma, 2012; Flumerfelt, 2012; Balzer, 2010). However, the need for continuous improvement can lead some administrators to misinterpret this strategy into the practice of "reinventing or realigning the wheel" and thinking that simplistic replication is the only pathway to creating change. In reality, a proven way to impact change is to create a learning organization (Senge, 1990; Argyris & Schon, 1996), which includes respect for people first, supported by demonstrations of the use of continuous improvement second. These priorities are significant in school improvement and are sometimes unknown or forgotten.

Through the dual lenses of Respect for People and Continuous Improvement, stakeholders can feel safe and valued and that change that produces better results matters. Therefore, they are more willing to collaboratively re-evaluate practices and actively participate in and own the improvement needed to close the gap.

While the need to improve school outcomes is widely recognized and practiced for a variety of reasons (i.e, equity, the moral imperative of education, etc.), the journey into the creation and sustaining of change is something that schools and all organizations struggle with. And because change management itself requires a space within leadership and organizational sciences, this indicates that change is hard to implement and maintain. It requires a framework and discipline to engage well. This challenge is a contributing factor to the traditional outcomes of educational change as having a low success rate for longevity and success (Horsley & Kaizer, 1999). Self-sustaining power structures, workflows and a heavy compliance environment for schools mitigate against the ingredients for innovation and change. Saranson (1919-2010) long ago stated that this situation, "… almost automatically rules out options for change" (1990, p. 35). However, schools are now taking the challenge to grapple with the gaps between the hopes of school reform and the ability to engage in improvement (Dykema, 2002).

Before presenting a case study of how the achievement gap was closed in one school system, background on the two driving principles of Respect for People and Continuous Improvement are described next.

Respect for People

Respect for People is defined as a mindset and practice founded on the humanity of valuing others through meaningful inclusion, active listening and developing potential. This results in a disposition from instructional leaders in a school system that process/system owners and end users of a product or service determine value, not the decision makers or managers of the system. This is because these stakeholders, teachers, staff, parents, students, community, etc., can quickly identify where a process or service is not working or is working and help to solve these problems. The mindset of Respect for People, therefore, relies on collaborative coaching cultures and job/position security, whereby it is safe for valued stakeholders to call out a problem–and also be called upon to help to solve it. And, further, it means that identifying and solving problems requires data-driven analysis and decision making, not just inspiration or emotion, where the 'squeaky wheel gets the grease.' The practice of Respect for People translates into defined routines of safe protocols for stakeholder input, feedback and ownership of improvements. Respect for People is what the DNA of the school is about, readily found in the culture of the school. Examples include participative leadership and accountability expectations, regular internal communication and problem solving through

huddles, after action and problem review data digs. Any of these protocols are surrounded with feedback loops and accountability for reporting back; building trust; reporting with authenticity of data and results, and using observations where the work takes place as one source of truth, etc.

Respect for People has long been advocated for instructional effectiveness for instructional improvement to solve curricular barriers, instructional technology gaps and teaching quality issues, for example. Cologne (2022) provides insights into the value add of inclusion for special education students with severe disabilities and families. She found that the realistic versus the intended outcomes of inclusion are sometimes lacking. However, they were improved by removing the exclusion that these students and their families often feel from the school community. The countermeasure to exclusion is broadly found in Respect for People. In another example, Delgado, Wardlow, McKnight and O'Malley (2015) advocated for integrated collaborations for K-12 classroom technology decisions. Respect for People also has applications for teaching quality, such as highlighted by a study of Texas science teachers (Robina, Mundy, Kupczynski & Challoo, 2018) where it was found that it was more impactful to student achievement to provide training and support for teacher efficacy. And, further, that increasing teacher efficacy is more effective than reducing class size in terms of impacting student achievement.

The examples of the power of Respect for People in closing the achievement gap are numerous. And even if these examples did not exist, our human spirits certainly guide us into the way of working and living whereby it is internalized that people matter. Scholars and practitioners alike have long advocated for the development of social capital in an organization as a competitive advantage for performance outcomes (Porter, 1990).

Continuous Improvement

Continuous Improvement is a mindset and practice defined as a fierce commitment to positive change based on cycles known as the Plan-Do-Check-Adjust (PDCA) cycle. The PDCA cycle was first outlined by Shewhart (1918-1967) as a statistical control method (1939). It proved helpful in organizational experimentation, to find optimal solutions through problem solving, testing and revising work.

It begins with identifying a problem through data analysis (Plan), figuring out solutions to pilot against targets (Do), examining the results of that testing cycle (Check), and making changes to either sustain the pilot or to revise it (Adjust). Deming (1900-1993), Shewhart's protege, then popularized PDCA through his groundbreaking work in Total Quality Management (TQM) and his book, Out of the Crisis (1982). TQM became a driving force for world-class standards in manufacturing based on 14 points of focus. TQM then opened the way for Toyota to become the leader in the Lean Performance Management system. Lean Continuous Improvement has since been used and engrained in all sectors, including banking, supply chain, healthcare, government, law, construction and education.

The application of Continuous Improvement is becoming widely accepted in education, such as with the Michigan Department of Education's Michigan Integrated Continuous Improvement Process (MICIP) designed to systemize meeting the holistic needs of students, followed by instructional planning, and followed by the process of funding (MDoE Website, 2024). MICIP is described as a mindset (Need, Plan,

Fund) using PDCA approaches, such as assessing, planning, implementing.

Two decades ago in 1996, in 2001, and again in 2006, Schmoker (1996) identified Continuous Improvement as best practice for change navigation in schools (Schmoker, 1996; Schmoker, 2001; Schmoker 2006). He understood it as a sustainable method of adding value to instruction.

Continuous Improvement is advocated for as the key to help schools bridge the divide between desired goals and current reality. Since it occurs when a shared commitment to change is established through Plan work, beginning Continuous Improvement is not difficult for schools to establish per se. However, the full PDCA cycle is often incomplete, impacting the full benefit and sustainability of Continuous Improvement. Fullan (2001) described Continuous Improvement as hard because "The big problems of the day are complex, rife with paradoxes and dilemmas" (p. 2). Further, Elmore (2003) delineated Continuous Improvement as a journey of cultural alignment of "norms and values" that impact instructional practice. When instructional practice norms and values are driven by measures of efficiency, such as with the cold cognitive model of high stakes testing, the journey is hard to engage. Ferrero (2005).

So, school improvement has been sought after universally for a long time (White, 1997), it requires an organizational change process like continuous improvement to achieve. Elmore (2003) provided that where time is given and trust is built around shared norms and values, embedded in continuous improvement, instruction will improve (Berry, 2011). For example, Schmoker (2006) highlighted the success of teachers implementing new instructional practice under the norms of "authentic literacy" (p. 51) and he further highlighted that continuous improvement is not an event, but a collaborative and transparent process of meeting regularly, piloting ideas, refining them, and finally publishing them while training people to implement them. This is like the practices of Professional Learning Communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Smylie (2010) also identifies how highly regarded continuous improvement is as principled practice.

Further, Resnick (2010) urged schools to use good resource management, including social capital management, all levels (from district policy to classroom practice) for instructional reform to occur. She clarified that this has not been done widely in schools and the pesky gap between the shared commitment to school improvement and the ability to implement exists. Unfortunately, Resnick (2010) further stated, "attempts to design education organizations and test those designs empirically in a continuous cycle of improvement are still rare" (p. 195). Since continuous improvement is highly contextualized in terms of tactics, for an overall framework, school leaders can rely on Elmore's (2006) views as:

> One does not 'control' school improvement processes so much as one guides them and provides direction for them, since most of the knowledge required for improvement must inevitably reside in the people who deliver instruction not in the people who manage them. (p. 58).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) also found that certain principle-based leadership behaviors are helpful to second order, deep, change. Again, this is not presented as a prescriptive approach to continuous improvement. Blankstein (2010) endorsed this conceptualization by describing

continuous improvement as careful, thoughtful and organic work fostered by collective reflection, collaborative work and leadership development. In short, continuous improvement is a method, not a routine, for closing the gap.

The Playbook

The interrelationship between Respect for People and Continuous Improvement does provide enablers to bring forth a Playbook of strategies for instructional success. This is because it is possible to establish a learning culture around these two principles, Respect for People and Continuous Improvement, when these tenets are used in an aligned system (Emiliani, 2010). This powerful combination, resulting in organizational learning, has been proven in other sectors, such as with Toyota's early lessons in organizational learning (Rother & Shook, 1999). And further, Weick's (1993) conclusions on high-reliability organizations and their sensemaking aptitudes, Argyis and Schon's (1978) double loop learning model that tests assumptions of system functionality, and Spender and Grant's (1999) work on developing organizational learning as an innovation strategy, provide great foundations for the Playbook.

Discovering the benefits and risks of using Respect for People in tandem with the rewards and struggles of a commitment to Continuous Improvement is a way to gain systemic benefits on many fronts, including developing "organizational intelligence" (Flumerfelt, et. al, 2017) something commonly known as "working smarter, not harder." In fact, this system of practice is the foundation for Lean world-class management (Womack, Jones & Roos, 1990; Womack, Jones, 2003: Balle, Jones, Chaize, & Fiume, 2017). Both Respect for People and Continuous Improvement are needed as a system. And if either element is missing or misaligned, then it is difficult to gain or fully leverage organizational learning, and in turn, better leadership strategy deployment and better outcomes. That is why a Playbook based on these two principles is very impactful.

Case Study

Below is an account of an administrator from a growing district outside of the Dallas/Fort Worth, TX, area which serves just under 17,000 students. This administrator (Administrator A) learned to use the world-class tenets of Lean, based on Respect for People and Continuous Improvement. In the process, she enjoyed the benefits of organizational learning and the execution of exciting instructional leadership tenets and practices which got outstanding results. Presented next is her story of using Respect for People and Continuous Improvement, also known as the Lean Performance Management System, to close the gap.

Learning to Use Respect for People and Continuous Improvement

In her new role as a central office chief curriculum and instructional officer, Administrator A was able to take on the tasks of the entire curriculum and instruction system. Since she was transitioning from the high school principalship, she wasn't sure that she knew enough about curriculum and instruction, let alone if she could supervise this type of work for a large district. Her mentor, the Superintendent, however, provided her with the tools and professional learning that she needed to be successful in her role. As a 'Lean' thinker, her Superintendent taught her that Continuous Improvement would not be possible if leaders of the organization first did not build a culture of trust, Respect for People.

She knew her job was to implement his vision for curriculum and instruction and to create systems that allowed the organization to continue to evolve and improve. And while she was faced with this daunting challenge, even

though she knew little about systems in curriculum and instruction, she did trust her Superintendent and knew that he was experienced in using Lean for school improvement. The entire central office instructional team and the district instructional team were in pursuit of best instructional practices through the Lean Performance System and had been trained and coached accordingly.

In an interview with the superintendent, he stated that Respect for People and Continuous Improvement were foundational for the achievement attainments of the district in several ways. First, regarding Respect for People, the district developed all curricular work through the empowerment of the faculty by growing the knowledge of the faculty through collaborative work of developing, testing and deploying curriculum. This curriculum had to be aligned with state curriculum standards, but it was not purchased, a practice done by many districts. The curriculum was written and vetted by teachers in the district for better customization and learning pathways for their students. Teachers were paid for these efforts. The district used an inverted or flipped power model where central office leaders were listening to teachers, visiting classrooms and on campus working with schools to deliver quality instruction. Second, regarding Continuous Improvement, constant data reviews took place, and changes were made to get better results. Problem solving and adjusting became so commonplace that change was simply viewed as a part of the culture of instructional improvement.

Since everything was so new to her, both her job and her use of Lean, she selected to scope the district and then design a district Playbook as a framework for her work. Working with the Superintendent, this Curriculum and Instruction Playbook created a routine of work that was pursued daily.

These are the five key elements of the Playbook, based on enacting Respect for People and Continuous Improvement:

1. Write our own, district-created curriculum.
   This element was selected to ensure that students and their families were respected based on their learning needs and that specified curriculum, aligned with state standards, could be delivered. It also enabled teachers to be the process owners of curriculum creation and delivery, representing a very powerful form of respect through empowerment. As process owners, the teachers could also pinpoint more effectively where curricular improvements were needed and implement them through continuous improvement. The support, guidance and oversight of instructional coaches and central office personnel kept this process on track over two years as curriculum was developed, tested and delivered.

2. Develop and provide our own two tiers of assessments to conduct quality checks in our system as curriculum-based and unit assessments.
   This element was selected to ensure results from the curriculum development and delivery as the Check and Adjust steps of the PDCA cycle. When performance gaps were identified, the process was to keep the cadence of continuous improvement in place and address gaps through the teacher teams and PLCs. Blaming people for problems was not the countermeasure, but, rather, collaborative problem solving to dig into where realignment of curriculum and teaching was needed. This again demonstrated Respect for People by having the process owners drive process improvement.

3. Identify essential standards for each course in each grade level.
   This element was selected to create clarity for grade-level planning, teaching, assessment and interventions. With clear, simplified standards, the faculty and instructional staff had clear benchmarks to work toward. When standards were not met, then continuous improvement ensued and was engaged by faculty and building teams to identify where improvements could be made.

4. Create focus and clarity for the members of our organization.
   This element was selected to make sure that people understood roles and expectations. Through clear role and process depictions, ongoing communication loops, reinforcing success and addressing gaps, people could understand where urgency is needed to ensure priorities were clear. This is an effective way to establish Respect for People by helping to optimize efforts and time through clarity and focus. Also, as Continuous Improvement work ensues, these efforts of focus and clarity create pathways to get to problem solving that matters.

5. Instructional coaches and campus leaders implement quality checks at the campus level an information is relayed to central administration for support and guidance.
   This element was selected to make sure that overall curricular and instructional processes and results were working well and serving students. The basis for data-driven decision making requires taking data sets and analyses and making sense out of them, so that data utility progresses from data to information to knowledge to organizational intelligence. This ontology is ongoing and iterative work that underscores Continuous Improvement. It demonstrates Respect for People by ensuring that logic and rationale driven objective decision making.

The importance of this Playbook was instrumental in obtaining the improvements needed. Each of these elements are combined and examined in more detail next. This is followed by a presentation of results from the Playbook method.

Playbook 1: Write Our Own, District-Written Curriculum

For years, the district used an online container for curriculum. While the curriculum container was well thought out and a useful guide for teachers and curriculum leaders, it was known that the best professional learning that could be offered to teachers in the district was to involve them in the curriculum writing process. So, there was a task of creating a system to manage the curriculum writing process in order to create tight control about what that process looked like. Using Continuous Improvement and Respect for People, Lean process mapping was useful collaboratively at this point to identify the most value-added tasks and remove wasteful steps.

DuFour (2009) wrote about systems by stating, “a systems approach to school improvement represents the antithesis of a culture based on individual isolation and independence. The focus is on creating powerful systems that promote the continuous improvement of the entire organization” (paragraph 5). To have a quality process of curriculum writing, a systems approach of a field of teams of teachers for every grade level.

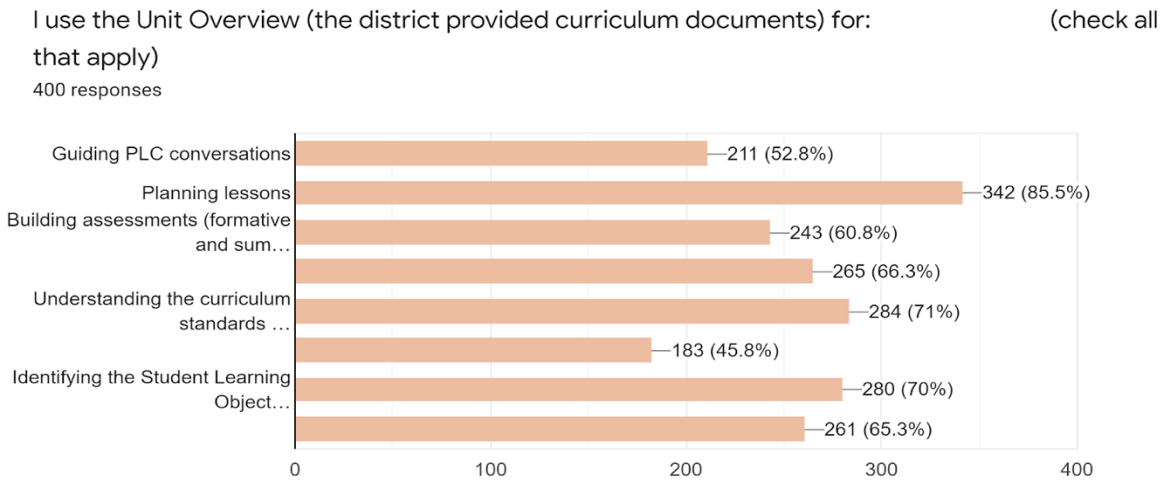
and every course in the four core content areas were formed: English language arts and reading, math, science, and social studies. Each team was small, with five or six teachers on each team with connections to building PLCs assured. For these teams to be successful, the tenet of Respect for People and the use of Lean Continuous Improvement was critical. Simply talking about ideas together was not enough, they had to work together driven by the Playbook founded on Respect for People and Continuous Improvement. Teacher teams were supported to continue in their work, vertical and horizontal communication lines were maintained. Also, to ensure the process steps were occurring to engage learning, they followed the process maps. And they kept testing the work in the proven continuous improvement cycle. They also created a common and straightforward curriculum overview template to be used for each content area using continuous improvement tools. Key descriptors based on metrics that mattered were used and arranged visually into the template. The team members were then tasked with analyzing current curriculum needs based on assessment data.

The vision for the streamlined curriculum overview document was for any teacher or leader in the district to be able to pick up the curriculum unit overview for any course in any grade level and be familiar with the contents and support/resources that were available for each course. This is one way they demonstrated Respect for People. The vision for the assessment process was that data-driven, logical, and rational thought would be used to identify both systemic dysfunctions along with root causes. Each teacher team was able to develop, test, gain feedback, reflect and revise each component of the curriculum overview template. This is how they engaged in Continuous Improvement.

In this part of The Playbook, they stuck to our system of tenets. Respect for People was extremely important in this process. This was enacted as: 1) our own teachers wrote the district curriculum, influenced by assessment data from our students and 2) the curriculum unit overview documents were streamlined for every grade level and content for ease of use. Continuous Improvement was equally important to the as well. This was in play as teachers: 1) developed and piloted work products and 2) sought feedback from teams of teachers on their campus, grade level curriculum and assessment teams and committees and 3) used the feedback to drive changes in each of the curriculum overview templates. Figures 1 and 2 below depict the feedback they obtained to ensure Continuous Improvement.

Figure 1

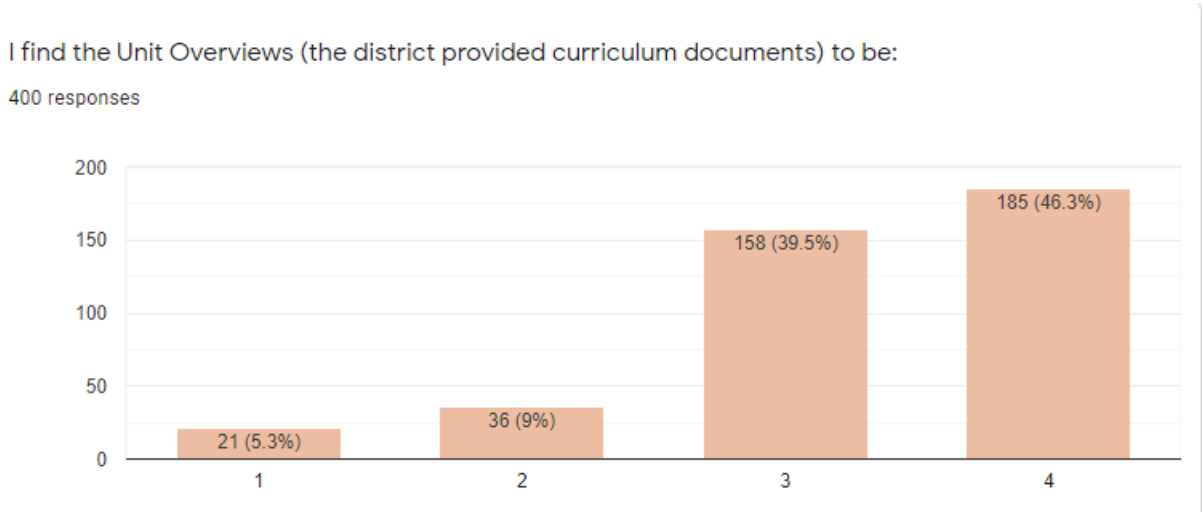
Survey Data from 400 Teachers Asking How They Use the Unit Overview Document



How useful teachers find the unit overview documents with 1 being not useful and 4 being very useful.

Figure 2

How Useful Teachers Find Unit Overview Documents with 1 Being Not Useful and 4 Being Very Useful

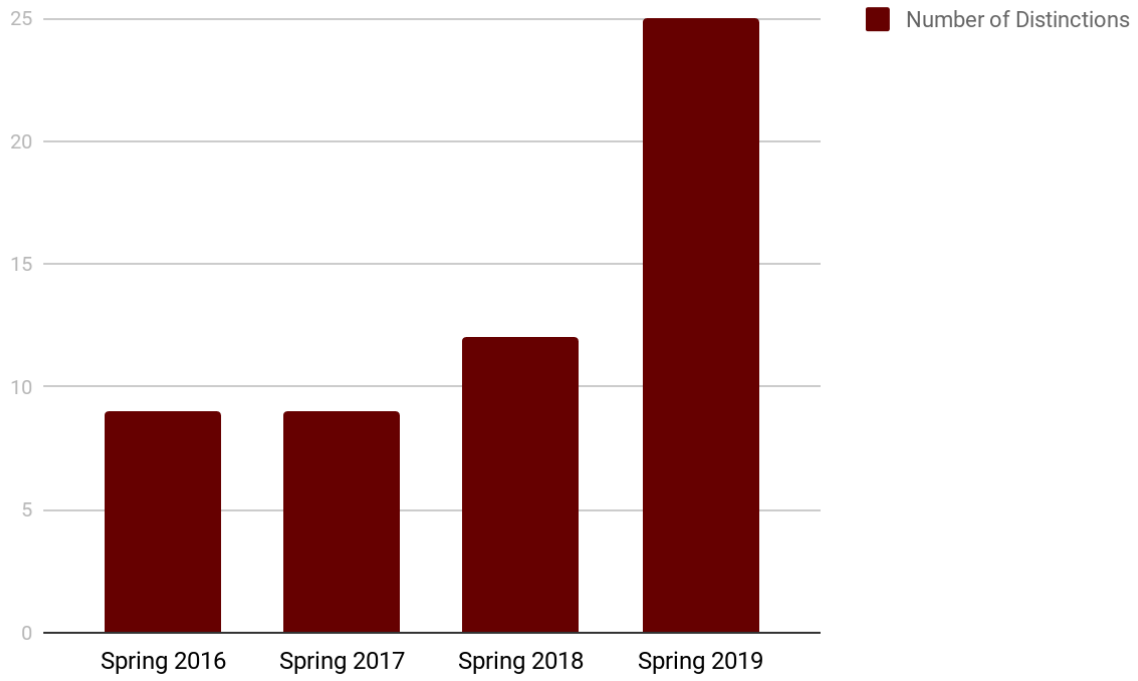


Over the course of the last three years, they created a district-written curriculum created by over 350 staff members. The impact that 350 staff members had on their campuses and their individual content-specific teams resulted in positive results in student achievement.

Through the tenants of Respect for People and Continuous Improvement, they increased the number of academic distinction designations, included in the state accountability system in Year Three, from an average of 9 to 25 distinctions. Figure 3 depicts the improvement trend.

Figure 3

Four-year Trend of Academic Distinction Designations



Playbook 2: Write Assessments to Conduct Quality Checks, Develop Curriculum-Based Assessments and Unit Assessments

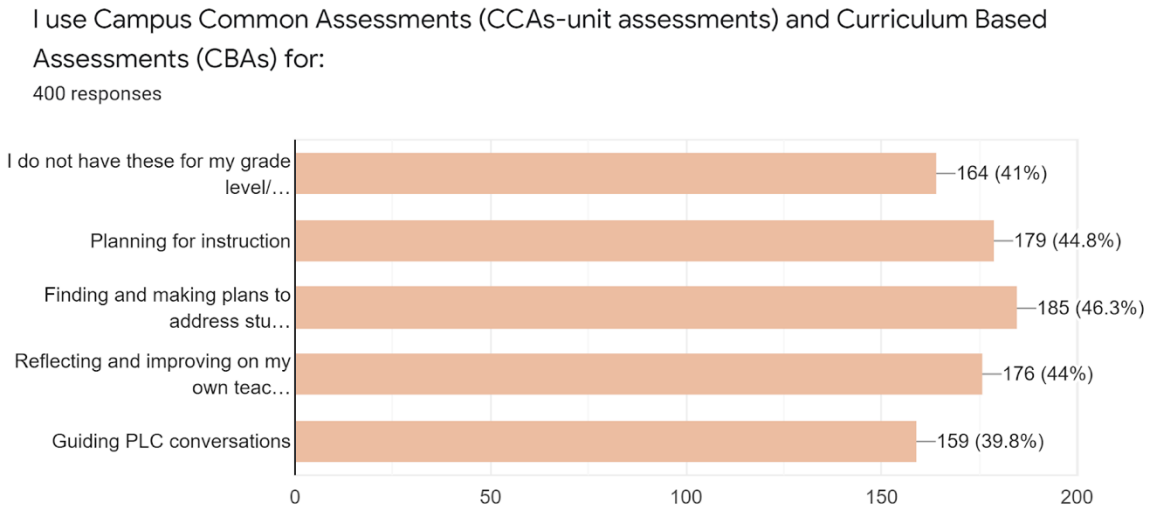
The next element in the Playbook that the curriculum team tackled was writing assessments. While they wrote unit assessments, they also were tasked with creating curriculum-based assessments (CBAs), two per year for each grade level or course that had a state assessment tied to it. Downey, English, Poston, and Steffy (2009) refer to assessments in the following manner, "It is recommended that districts develop summative assessment measures that parallel not only the state's accountability assessment but also the district curriculum objectives" (p. 53). They used a common template for this phase of work as well in order to build out the system. The formula for these assessments was simple: 1) write a 12-21 question assessment, 2) only assess the most frequently assessed standards on the state

assessment that our students historically have done poorly on, and 3) ensure that assessment composition of items is 30% high rigor and 70% easy-medium rigor. This formula was specific and targeted. When conducting Continuous Improvement, the need for succinct descriptions designed to solve the problem at hand is needed. Their formula provided this guidance.

Each curriculum coordinator was tasked with creating one curriculum-based assessment to be given in the fall semester and one to be given in the spring semester. Over-testing students was never the goal; therefore, the Superintendent's vision was only to administer this type of quality check twice a year. While this concept was foreign to the members of the organization, with careful thought, support, and planning, the CBA process in the district became very successful. Respect for People was essential in this aspect of the Playbook. They had some teachers who in the past were not accustomed to comparing their data with other teachers around the district, and they had to be coached so that they could learn the value of collaboration. And relying on Continuous Improvement, these teachers anxiously awaited their assessment results to see how well their students performed in order to begin improvement planning. Figure 4 depicts how teachers used the CBA process.

Figure 4

How Teachers Reported Using Data from Curriculum-based Assessments



Playbook 3: Identify Essential Standards for Each Course in Each Grade Level

While creating unit overviews for the purpose of being the primary planning resource and guide for teachers has significantly impacted the system, our curriculum and instruction team still longed to provide greater clarity to teachers about what to teach and to what depth and specificity. They wanted to allow teachers to have greater focus and clarity when looking at their standards. Dufour (2009), wrote about how the systems approach to school improvement involves a process which he calls essential learnings. A process is put into place to ensure teams clarify the essential learnings for each course, grade level, and unit of instruction; establish consistent pacing, create frequent common assessments to monitor student learning, and agree on the criteria they will use to judge the quality of student work. One of the ways to approach this desire was to identify essential standards for every course in every grade level. Through a two-day process, they brought in teachers from Kindergarten through 12th grade to accomplish this task. Figure 5 depicts a sample curriculum overview document.

Figure 5

Sample Curriculum Overview Document

Academic Vocabulary	Differentiated Instruction & Planning Supports
Unit Vocabulary **place value**-the value of a digit as determined by where it is in a number such as ones, tens, hundreds, one thousand, ten thousand, hundred thousand, etc **thousands period**-three-digit grouping of whole numbers where the grouping consists of a thousand place, ten thousand place, & a hundred thousand place **ten thousand place**-the position of the fifth whole number from the right, the second digit in the thousands period **represent**-express indirectly by an image, form, or model; show visually **mathematical relationship**- **Related Vocabulary** **compose**-to combine parts or smaller values to make a number **decompose**-to break a number into parts or smaller values **compatible numbers**-numbers that are slightly adjusted to create groups of numbers that are easy to compute mentally **numerical expression**- a mathematical phrase, with no equal sign, that can contain number(s), unknown(s), &/or operator(s) **properties of operations**-laws or properties that apply to arithmetic operations	Unit 1 Resource Alignment Document RISD Additional District Provided Resources to Supplement Unit TEKS Clarification (TEA provided) Vertical Alignment Document (TEA provided) **Differentiation:** • 3rd Grade Supplemental Aids ○ **Students need to be taught how to fill in and when to use the supplemental aids.** **Differentiation Scales: (linked)** 3.2A 3.2D 3.4A 3.5A LINK to Student Friendly ELPS **Technology Integration: (linked)** Online Games: • Investigations Games

Red=Readiness TEKS, Blue= Supporting TEKS, Green=Financial Literacy TEKS, Black=Processing TEKS, Maroon=TEKS NOT Assessed

Rockwall ISD Unit Overview	3 Math Unit 1: Place Value to 100,000 & Addition/Subtraction within 1000
credit-buying or obtaining goods or services now with an agreement to pay in the future **human capital/labor**-abilities, skills, & education that helps to make a worker more valuable **interest paid**-money paid for borrowing money or making purchases on credit **relationship -** how two things or numbers are connected; the connection of what is taken in (input) and what is produced (output) **savings plan**-a plan to set money aside for future use **scarcity**-when human wants for goods & services are greater than the quantity of goods & services that can be produced using all available resources	• Interactive Skills • http://illuminations.nctm.org/ Activities and Instruction: • www.k-5mathteachingresources.com • www.thinkingblocks.com • www.mathwire.com/index.html Financial Literacy: • Texas Council of Economic Education Lessons • Free Personal Financial Literacy Book • Financial Literacy Interactive Lessons • Practical Money Skills

Those teachers, along with a facilitator and curriculum coordinators, were able to work together to identify the skills that build upon one another from grade level to grade level. Once teams of teachers identified those key skills by grade level, each team was tasked with identifying a select few standards to call the essential standards that would be identified in our curriculum documents. The intent of identifying these standards was for teachers to better identify priority standards that needed to be taught with greater depth and specificity than other standards included in our curriculum documents. The use of Respect for People included creating clarity and focus for members of your organization. With the number of standards that teachers are required to teach each year, identifying essential standards by grade level, by course, was one way that they could provide more focus for their teachers on what to teach and with what degree of specificity. And that method was the enabler for Continuous Improvement work. Figure 6 depicts a sample of Math Essential Standards.

Figure 6

Sample of Essential Standards

RISD Math Essential Standards

Pre-Kindergarten	Kindergarten	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	6th Grade
V.A.1 Child knows that objects, or parts of an object, can be counted.	K.2A Count forward & backward to at least 20 with & without objects	1.2C Use objects, pictures, & expanded & standard forms to represent numbers up to 120	2.2A Use concrete & pictorial models to compose & decompose numbers up to 1,200 in more than one way as a sum of so many thousands, hundreds, tens, & ones	3.2A Compose & decompose numbers up to 100,000 as a sum of so many ten thousands, so many thousands, so many hundreds, so many tens, & so many ones using objects, pictorial models, & numbers, including expanded notation as appropriate	4.2B Represent the value of the digit in whole numbers through 1,000,000,000 & decimals to the hundredths using expanded notation & numerals	5.2B Compare & order two decimals to thousandths & represent comparisons using the symbols >, <, or =	6.4G Generate equivalent forms of fractions, decimals, & percents using real-world problems, including problems that involve money
V.A.2 Child uses words to rote count from 1-30.	K.2B Read, write, & represent whole numbers from 0 to at least 20 with & without objects or pictures	1.2F Order whole numbers up to 120 using place value & open number lines	2.2B Use standard, word, & expanded forms to represent numbers up to 1,200	3.2D Compare & order whole numbers up to 100,000 & represent comparisons using the symbols >, <, or =	4.2F Compare & order decimals using concrete & visual models to the hundredths	5.4F Simplify numerical expressions that do not involve exponents, including up to two levels of grouping	6.7A Generate equivalent numerical expressions using order of operations, including whole number exponents, & prime factorization
V.A.3 Child counts 1-10 items with one count per item	K.2C Count a set of objects up to at least 20 & demonstrate that the last number said tells the number of objects in the set regardless of their arrangement or order	1.2G Represent the comparison of two numbers to 100 using the symbols >, <, or =	2.2D Use place value to compare & order whole numbers up to 1,200 using comparative language, numbers, & symbols (<, >, or =)	3.3F Represent equivalent fractions with denominators of 2, 3, 4, 6, & 8 using a variety of objects & pictorial models, including number lines	4.2G Relate decimals to fractions that name tenths & hundredths	5.3A Estimate to determine solutions to mathematical & real-world problems involving addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division	6.3D Add, subtract, multiply, & divide integers fluently
V.A.5 Child counts up to 10 items and demonstrates that the last count indicates how many items were counted.	K.2D Recognize instantly the quantity of a small group of objects in organized & random arrangements	1.5B Skip count by twos, fives, & tens to determine the total number of objects up to 120 in a set	2.2F Name the whole number that corresponds to a specific point on a number line	3.3H Compare two fractions having the same numerator or denominator in problems by reasoning about their sizes & justifying the conclusion using symbols, words, objects, & pictorial models	4.3D Compare two fractions with different numerators & different denominators & represent the comparison using the symbols >, =, or <	5.3E Solve for products of decimals to the hundredths, including situations involving money, using strategies based on place-value understandings, properties of operations, & the relationship to the multiplication of whole numbers	6.3E Multiply & divide positive rational numbers fluently
V.A.8 Child verbally	K.2E Generate a set using concrete & pictorial models	1.3B Use objects & pictorial models to solve word problems involving joining,	2.3C Use concrete models to count fractional parts		4.3E Represent & solve addition & subtraction of	5.3G Solve for quotients of decimals to the hundredths,	6.4B Apply qualitative & quantitative reasoning to

Playbook 4: Create Focus and Clarity for the Members of Our Organization; Coach Leaders on Quality Checks

Creating focus and clarity for members of the organization is a primary role of the Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) Department.

The campus leaders wanted focus. They wanted to know where to allocate the resources of effort, time and funds, especially when campus needs pull them in so many directions on a weekly, daily, and hourly basis which leads to the discussion of control in the curriculum process. Frase et al. (2000) wrote about Standard One (control) of the curriculum management audit by writing the following, "If an organization is not in control, the likelihood of it being able to accomplish its mission is diluted." (pg. 85).

They further wrote, "organizations that meet Standard One of the audit are more likely to be able to make a difference in student learning." (p. 85). The need to identify focus areas (control) for campus leaders was evident. Each month the C&I department provided professional learning for campus leaders at a regularly scheduled monthly meeting. The intent for this meeting was purposeful and strategic.

If the one chance to impact all members of our leadership team was once a month, our team had to be specific about answering the question: "What do we want campus leaders to know, learn, and implement in order to keep the system moving forward in a positive direction?" For this reason, our curriculum and instruction team carefully crafted brief lessons each month. Just like a teacher in the classroom, they built a skeleton of a professional learning lesson for leaders, then tweaked, reviewed, and tweaked them again, until the final objective and takeaways for that lesson were so clear, that they could ensure all stakeholders would walk away having common learning and understanding.

These lessons were first prefaced with the Call to Action that the District Strategic Planning Committee created to empower learners to embody independence, value relationships, and achieve excellence as thriving members of a dynamic, global community. That Call to Action was then followed by reading our Vision for Curriculum and Instruction as the promise to provide a guaranteed and viable curriculum, with support, to provide relevant quality instruction for all. This strategy was built on Respect for People because the goal was to enable specific instructional leadership, not just expect it, as the Call to Action stated. It also required Continuous Improvement as the means to perfect the lessons to maximize the use of meeting time and learning.

To provide clarity to campus leaders, one of the key elements of the monthly meetings with all stakeholders had been to open every meeting or professional learning opportunity with these two statements. It was just as important to remind campus leaders, every month, of our Call to Action and our vision for Curriculum and Instruction as it was to provide clarity to the teachers on what to teach and to what depth and specificity.

Therefore, for the last three years every meeting with campus leaders was opened with all stakeholders reading these two statements. This technique is a way to engender engagement as a demonstration of Respect for People, and to remind our instructional administrators what Continuous Improvement requires--an ongoing and iterative journey of change. The tendency to become distracted and forget what the core values are, our goals, and the vision as a district was so common, they could

not imagine a better way to start every meeting. Not only were they consistent in the openings of the meeting time with campus leaders, who now can recite both from memory, but they were also consistent in the content that was provided to district leaders.

For Principals, Assistant Principals, and Instructional Coaches, they ensured that all three stakeholder groups had the opportunity to participate in the same professional learning around curriculum and instruction each month. It was found that the key to moving an entire system forward in a positive direction, where members of the organization shared a common understanding of mission, vision, and goals, that they had no choice but to ensure they were providing the same professional learning opportunities, monthly, to each stakeholder group. Over the course of three years they have realized that this has been one of the key plays in the Playbook. Not only was it key to coaching the Campus Principals, but it was key to coaching Assistant Principals and Campus Leaders (via our Instructional Coaches), by allowing all groups to participate in the same type of professional learning monthly.

Playbook 5: Instructional Coaches and Campus Leaders Implement Quality Checks at the Campus Level and Information is Relayed to Central Administration for Support and Guidance.

As an extended effort to focus campus leadership on the right work, the Superintendent facilitated quality checks once a year. Each campus leadership team is invited to sit down with the Superintendent and can analyze campus assessment data. During these quality checks, the Superintendent asked questions to seek understanding about the systems that each campus leader has on his or her campus about student achievement. He conducted 21 quality checks annually, toward the end of the first semester. The message that this sent through his participation in these quality checks is clear: the priority is taking care of students. Through these quality checks campus leaders saw Respect for People in action of the Superintendent challenging and encouraging campus leadership teams to be reflective in their pursuit of Continuous Improvement so that students were well prepared to be thriving members of a dynamic, global community.

Summary

In summary, the use of the world-class performance management system, known as Lean, founded on the tenets of Respect for People and Continuous Improvement gave this district the mindset and tools to operationalize a customized Playbook for solving instructional problems.

The Playbook, reinforced, measured and enacted, included critical strategies:

1) Write their own district-created curriculum.

2) Write their own two tiers of assessments to conduct quality checks in our system through curriculum-based assessments and unit assessments.

3) Identify essential standards for each course in each grade level.

4) Create focus and clarity for the members of the organization.

5) Coach campus and district leaders and implement quality checks at the campus level by central administration.

These efforts have provided excellent achievement results, improved the instructional culture and empowered them to a clear vision for the future.

It is hoped that this story of tackling the substantial, complicated and complex systems of curriculum, assessment and instruction provides insights into the feasibility of driving instructional improvement and achievement increases. The narrative here shared specific strategies that were derived from clear problem identification and problem solving. Many different strategies were used to gather both qualitative and quantitative data on the current state of various instructional systems, system-based needs assessments were conducted, and instructional staff were heavily involved in analyzing the situation to understand it deeply.

From this informed, data-based perspective using Lean mindsets and tools, this principled Playbook was derived. This Playbook for the District contained strategies tailored to meet the needs of this school system. The Playbook was deployed with a cohesive leadership team, operating under clear mission, vision, values and goals and using the Lean toolkit.

To simplify this narrative into replicating this exact Playbook into another district setting is not recommended, unless the context is extremely similar to the one described here and only if the problems needing solution are identical. Each school system is different, so the needs of each system should be brought forth using Respect for People and Continuous Improvement.

However, in any case, the power of Lean thinking and the usefulness of the Lean tools will benefit any school in any context.

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