



# THE BETTER YOU GET, THE BETTER YOU CAN GET

*How a high school district focuses on increasing  
capacity for growth and change to function as a  
true learning organization*

**Maine Township High School District 207**  
**Park Ridge, Illinois**



**Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.**  
The Learning Company™

**SPN** | Successful  
Practices  
Network

## ***About the Innovative Successful Practices Project***

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Dear Educator,

Beginning in 2017, the Successful Practices Network (SPN) and AASA The School Superintendents Association, have been conducting a study of innovation best practices in public K12 systems from throughout the United States, with support from global learning company Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH).

Dr. Bill Daggett has led a team of nationally recognized superintendents, researchers and data analysts to identify systems that are using innovative approaches to put students first by expanding and supporting student learning and achievement. Schools and districts were selected for further study based on a national search conducted by thought leaders and experts at HMH, SPN and AASA. HMH supported this effort by providing research and reviewers as part of its work to partner with school districts on improving student outcomes.

From that study, 25 national Innovative Successful Practices systems were identified based on their ability to demonstrate rapid improvement in student learning and preparedness through innovative organizational and instructional practices.

Each of those 25 systems collaborated with SPN and AASA to host an on-site visit, detailed data analysis and development of a case study. These case studies are intended to provide an accessible and nontechnical overview of each innovative approach that is backed up with data-driven results.

The participating systems include a wide range of geographies, demographics, student population and resource levels. In spite of those differences, each of these systems shares a common mindset that innovation can drive public education with a strong focus on serving the needs of all of their students.

We have been inspired by the lessons learned from these courageous leaders that took risks to think beyond their traditional systems and approaches. It is our hope that this work continues to inspire, inform and support public education leaders in their efforts to prepare students for success both in school and beyond school.

“The world that our children will live, work and interact in will be fundamentally different than the world we all grew up in,” said Bill Daggett, Founder and Chairman, International Center for Leadership in Education. “To prepare them for success in this changing world our schools need to make fundamental changes as well. These innovative districts are paving the way and showing us how to make the necessary changes needed in our schools.”

“At a time when the new school year is beginning across the nation, there is no better time than now to speak out about the value of public education and bring to the forefront the outstanding work being done by our school districts,” said Daniel A. Domenech, Executive Director, AASA.

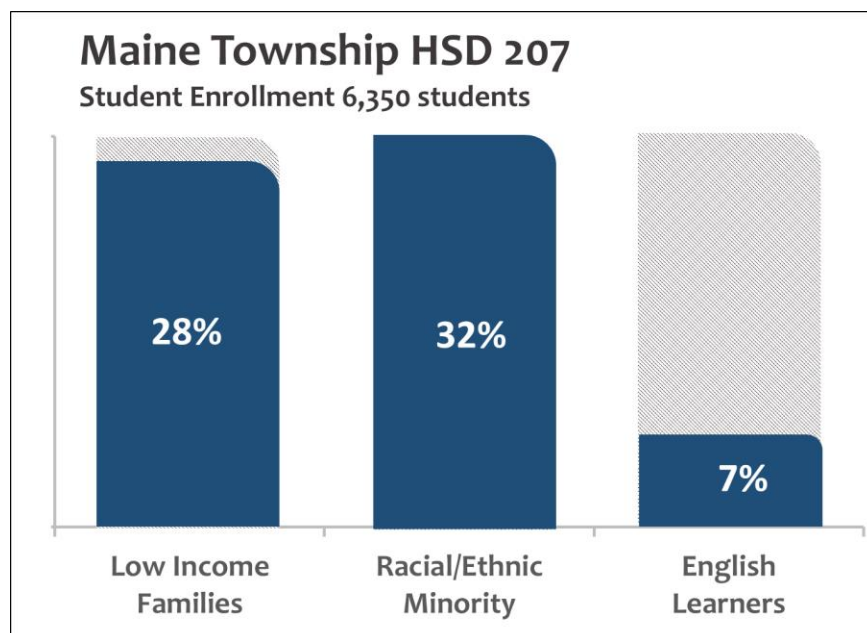
“It’s important to be imagining how our classrooms and schools can look and feel different in the next decade,” said Rose Else-Mitchell, Chief Learning Officer, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. “We congratulate these change-makers for creating a culture of innovation and the conditions for future-focused learning designs in their school districts to accelerate student engagement, growth, and achievement.”

## Introduction

A student population that is growing more diverse and poorer is not an uncommon story we in education hear today about districts around the country. Neither is the fact that this puts increased pressures on educators to meet so many disparate student needs simultaneously. What is an uncommon story, though, is a response to such changing demographics that focuses less, for example, on the specifics of differentiation and response to intervention and more on a far bigger picture and far more transformative goal: always grow capacity to be better. This was how the leaders and educators of Maine Township High School District 207 chose to respond to its changing student population, with great and inspiring success.

## The Challenge

Maine Township High School District 207, located in nine communities adjacent to O'Hare Airport just outside of Chicago, is unique in that it's comprised of only three high schools: Maine East, Maine South, and Maine West. Less unique is a story that a number of districts across the country have experienced in recent decades: its student population has grown more diverse and poorer. Of the district's 6,350 students, 28.4% are from low-income families, and 32% are racial or ethnic and minority students; two of its three schools are majority minority students.



The current superintendent joined 207, as those within the district refer to it, in 2005, first as Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction and then as the superintendent in 2009. When he arrived, he found a school district functioning like so many across the United States. They were fulfilling their promise to teach students what they needed to know to advance to the next grade, and then they sent them on their way. Yet the district and the world around it were changing. Providing students only a traditional education was, in the superintendent's mind, no longer acceptable.

The district takes great pride in matriculating students who come from all over the world. They also understand that the more diverse a student body, the more they have to work to meet all individual needs within it. An evolving demographic make-up was a significant driver of change across the district, yet there was more to it. Simultaneous to changes within 207 were dramatic changes beyond it. The wealth gap was widening. The shifting job market was tipping towards high-skill labor. College was becoming ever more expensive. College debt was growing more oppressive. And the ability to afford the post-secondary certification or degree to gain those in-demand, higher-level skills was moving more and more out of reach for the poorest of students. To 207's leadership, this alone was reason to rethink education. When these realities disproportionately impact their students, they saw they had nothing short of a moral obligation to accept a new responsibility as educators and innovate how their students learn.

## **The Innovation**

Simply put, as a district, they decided they had to be better. They had to be better to close the achievement, access, and equity gaps on their campuses and contribute to their closure writ large. They had to be better to do this in such a way that they could best serve all their students on either side of the economic equation simultaneously and equally. They considered themselves builders of solutions for the very real and very large problems they faced on behalf of their students. And as they have found solution after solution to support their students—both in their schools and well beyond—three driving beliefs have shaped their philosophy of educating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *The Better You Get, the Better You Can Get*

In 2007, the district was looking to migrate off their costly, proprietary email system and into a new one. The technology director suggested they look into Gmail. The district reached out to Google to learn more about Gmail and, some steps later, became Google's first K-12 district

partner. As it turned out, Google was only in the pre-launch stage of its Google Applications for Education program.

With one well-timed phone call and a lucky chain of events, all three of 207's schools became Google Schools. Through the partnership, Google helped 207 move from a poor technology program to one that has been on the forefront of 1:1 cloud computing. Additionally, the experience of how they became a Google School in of itself had a lasting impact. It shaped 207's philosophy of innovation and evolution. It goes like this:

If you're an organization that's been doing things the same way for twenty years, you're a little circle. If someone suggests trying one new thing or doing one thing differently and you do it, the circle grows a bit larger. Thus, your capacity to learn, change, and grow just grew a bit larger. Then you try another new thing. And your circle—and capacity—expands yet again. It's a philosophy that has driven meaningful learning and change in the scores of organizations that embrace it. The better you get, the better you *can* get.

The 207 team believes that innovation can start small, it can be slow, and it can be deliberate. What matters is that you aim to increase your capacity to grow so that you can then increase it again. The foundation of this philosophy is that learning is fundamental to growth and change. Everyone in 207 believes that above any instructional strategy, program, or discipline, they should be most passionate about continuing to learn, regardless of who or what they are teaching.

### *Great Schools Are Great Through High-Quality Teachers Hungry to Learn & Robustly Supported on Their Learning Journey*

Any educator knows there are certain things about working in schools we cannot control. However, 207's leadership team believes there is one thing we can control, and it happens to be what they view as the single most important thing any district can do: put high-quality teachers in every classroom. They see this proposition as dependent on two inputs: attracting and maintaining high-quality, growth-minded teachers.

At large, 207 attracts and maintains high-quality teachers through the same innovation: by functioning as a true learning organization. All 207 educators participate in the district's vigorous and multifaceted adult learning program, which includes foundational learning, one-on-one coaching for every single educator every year, and a range of instructional strands to

make innovation and learning constants in their system. Within the program are also several opportunities for personalized learning and leadership.

As a result of the district's emphasis on ongoing learning, the people drawn to their district are those who want to continue to develop their practice and become better teachers. They attract hungry, high-achieving educators who know growth has no limit. They maintain them through a range of cutting-edge learning opportunities; agency over what, how, and when they learn; and several ways to share their expertise and lead colleagues in their own learning. Not surprisingly, 207's educators find their work challenging, enriching, fulfilling, and never boring.

### Foundational Learning

All teachers participate in a variety of adult learning programs, some of which are required courses—such as cooperative learning, academic literacy, and assessment literacy—and several other optional courses that teachers take to continue their learning. All of 207's adult learning programs are educator led, job-embedded, and take place on campus. Required courses are those that provide important foundational skills and strategies to differentiate student learning and support mastery or competency learning. New teachers participate in a four-year cohort in which they receive training and coaching to build on the high impact strategies 207 values in classrooms, such as cooperative learning and assessment literacy.

Teachers are tenured in Illinois after their fourth year, but the district continues to support teacher growth with advanced courses, which are also teacher trainer led. Courses are often aligned to a teacher's goal setting process with their evaluators and their individual one-on-one coaching plans. In essence, the district's adult learning program serves a dual purpose—to continually bolster teacher efficacy in the classroom and assist teachers in their evaluation cycles. More specifically, the district's adult learning program focuses on high impact strategies that also support growth in the Danielson Framework that is used in the teacher evaluation program. However, the district has an absolute commitment to keeping coaching and evaluations separate. See Appendix 1 for the goal setting document coaches use with educators to help guide learning that will improve their evaluation outcomes.

The Johnson & Johnson Cooperative Learning foundational course (out of the University of Minnesota) is regarded as one of the nation's leading adult learning programs. Its objective is to guide participants towards expertise in cooperative learning, which is where small teams of learners with a range of abilities use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a concept or topic. Integral to cooperative learning is that each member of



the team is responsible for her own learning and for ensuring all teammates also achieve understanding.

Cooperative learning, which is used both with adults and children, has been shown to boost achievement, self-confidence, and motivation. It also improves behavior, engagement, attendance, and attitudes about work/school and colleagues/classmates. All 207's educators go through the cooperative learning program so that they can apply it both to how they learn together as professionals and in their classrooms with students.

The program is run through teacher trainers—teachers who seek to go deeper into cooperative learning such that they are qualified to train others in the tool as well. In the early years of using the Johnson & Johnson model, the district realized that not all teachers were taking cooperative learning back to their classrooms; of those who were, most were the program's trainers. This realization sparked a commitment at the district level to include coaching and support staff training as frequently as possible in all adult learning programs and to empower teachers to lead their own learning. This decision aligns to what we more recently know from the neuroscience of learning, which says that empowered and self-directed learning and teaching others to learn require use of the skills that contribute to deeper learning and mastery learning. The district made this choice for two reasons: 1) to promote deeper learning and transform more of its educators into people not merely learning a new concept, but also putting it into practice; and 2) to increase its capacity for growth and change so that they could take on more learning initiatives. Today, the district has more Johnson & Johnson Cooperative Learning trainers than any other organization in the world.

Since literacy unlocks nearly all learning capacity, all teachers participate in the foundational academic literacy training program run by on-staff academic literacy specialists. The program guides content area teachers to support literacy instruction in their discipline. It also focuses on mastering a broad range of reading for meaning and vocabulary strategies. All three high schools are working to create agreed upon academic vocabulary that are taught across disciplines. As a byproduct of this program, more and more of the district's teachers are adept at identifying students in need of additional literacy supports and applying appropriate intervention strategies.

The district's educators also go through an assessment literacy program, again led by teacher trainers. The district sees assessments as integral to delivering personal learning; assessments are a conduit to students taking ownership of their learning and are a necessary piece of

mastery learning. Teachers are trained in how to guide students through a self-assessment process, which includes analyzing assessment results to identify where they are in their learning process and setting learning goals to maintain growth. It also equips teachers with how to use assessment data to provide necessary interventions as needed and just-in-time.

Teacher trainers can apply or volunteer, and sometimes leadership will specifically recruit people to become teacher leaders. Trainers are full-time teachers who are utilized now and then to oversee job-embedded training, as job-embedded learning is what has been shown to be most effective. The district, however, has several ways teachers can get involved in sharing expertise or guiding colleagues, as they want every teacher to have the opportunity at some point to function as a leader.

### Personalized Professional Learning & Coaching

For five years, 207 has been providing yearlong, instructional coaching for every teacher. The district's classes of 2018 were likely the first high school graduates in the country whose teachers for all four years each had instructional coaching and a personalized coaching plan for the sole purpose of improving learning conditions for students. The district calls this "all-in" coaching. In leadership's experience, most coaching programs are opt-in, which means educators can also, and often do, opt-out. District leadership believed that if they really were going to continue to expand their capacity to improve and meet the evolving and ever complex needs of students, coaching had to be "all in." To make this possible, the district worked with the 207 Teachers' Association to remove some elements of the old evaluation program that neither side believed was useful. Both sides agreed to pilot and then implement all-in coaching in the 2014-2015 school year.

While their personalized, all-in coaching program has been in place for five years, two years ago, the district opened up their coaching training process to educators beyond their district. Under the superintendent's guidance, they opened the Chicago Coaching Center. Educators participate in instructional coaching training programs and earn one of two levels of certification. All of 207's instructional coaches go through this program as well as those teachers who want to coach a student teacher in the district's newest coaching path (explained below). Teachers who desire to become coaches or just improve their practice also participate in the training. In its fifth year, the Coaching Center has prepared more of 207's coaches to move into administrative leadership roles; the district, thus, sees ongoing development of future coaches as vital to filling leadership roles with highly skilled and prepared educators as they become available.



The district's coaching model is largely flexible, as leadership believes that the most powerful learners lead their own learning. Thus, they wanted each teacher to feel empowered in their learning journey and have agency over their individual coaching plan. So they built a personalized professional coaching model as follows: when the program launched in 2014-15, educators were initially required to engage in one-on-one coaching every other year, though that is no longer the case. With their coach, each teacher devises a personalized coaching plan, which outlines specific growth and learning goals for the year. In the off years, teachers were allowed to choose from one of five learning pathways. The program has been so successful in achieving growth goals that now teachers are free to choose from the following pathway options every year (see Appendix 2 for more detail about each pathway):

1. One-on-one coaching: Teachers work one on one with a trusted coach to improve their practice.
2. Peer-to-peer coaching: Teachers work in a group to improve their instructional practice with the support and guidance of one coach.
3. Instructional rounds: Akin to hospital rounds, coaching cohorts (groups of teachers) cycle through different classrooms to observe specific instructional strategies being modeled; as a cohort, they then engage in guided practice of those instructional strategies and give and receive feedback for improvement.
4. Action research: Teachers conduct scientific inquiry on a problem of practice and report findings with colleagues. Research cohorts then coach the next group through the research cycle.
5. Coaching pre-service teachers: Teachers who have been trained as coaches can coach student teachers at Northwestern University or National Louis University.

For the past couple of years, the district has been piloting a similar personalized coaching program for administrators. Like teachers, every administrator will soon also have their own coach and personalized coaching plans. The objective is to offer the same level of support to administrators so that they, too, can pursue ongoing growth and become better leaders and supports to teachers and students.

#### Innovation Learning & Implementation Support Cycle

At 207, innovations are often coming up, not being sent down, the chain. That educators feel comfortable suggesting innovations big and small to leadership is a function of the district's DNA—a mindset of innovation is part and parcel with a mindset of ongoing growth and change. It's also a result of the fact that all educators know and trust they have leadership's support as

they suggest and try new things. In this sense, 207's professional development and ongoing adult learning is truly teacher initiated and teacher led.

One of the primary ways innovations are promoted and encouraged is through the innovation support cycle, or a four-step process to train staff to use and implement piloted innovative practices:

1. When it is decided that a school or the district will try a new innovation, they will launch a pilot program; the support cycle begins with a handful of staff getting exposure to and training on the concept.
2. Then the trained teachers and an administrative liaison partner to develop a full training program for staff.
3. Once all staff has completed training, the district creates a coaching cohort that follows an instructional rounds approach to provide guided practice and feedback on the innovation as it's being implemented.
4. Since the district focuses on, trains in, coaches for, and evaluates on innovative strategies that are high impact, they want everyone to apply what they learn in their classrooms for the benefit of all students. Thus, the final step of the implementation cycle is to provide for educators what they need to use new innovations and instructional tools with fidelity and success. This can include an institute day, where educators from all three schools collaborate and practice together. It can also include ongoing coaching and instructional rounds—or whatever a teacher or cohort requests to grow proficient in newly acquired skills.

In many cases, teachers can, and do, opt-in to spearheading an innovation or participating in a pilot program in a range of ways. The effect is a kind of positive peer pressure; with so many educators in all three buildings always participating at some stage of the innovation support cycle, their peers grow curious and also want to participate in new innovative practices. The district has used this innovation support model for all manner of new strategies and programs, including, but not limited to: Google G Suite; problem-based learning; high-impact instruction; differentiated instruction; blended learning, 1:1 learning intersected with instructional strategies; and Q-focus.

The district is currently amid a virtual blended learning pilot program with 150 of its 494 total teachers participating across 30 different courses. Core to the pilot is that 207 is a 1:1 Chromebook and cloud computing school and has been since 2011 and 2008, respectively. They also have a partnership with Sprint, launched in 2015, to ensure that every student can access

internet while away from school. Students without home internet are given a donated Sprint hotspot. This allows learning to continue outside of the confines of 207's buildings, which unlocks increased capacity for blended learning tactics, such as the flipped classroom.

The virtual blended learning pilot's most distinctive feature is that it is designed to advance the district's work to personalize learning experiences by optimizing the appropriate blend of time needed inside and outside of class; that is, finding the balance between time spent with teacher direction and time spent working independently or collaboratively with students to research, study, or create evidence of mastery of skills or understanding. The teacher structures the course so that students have: elements to complete outside of the classroom; elements that engage the entire class in whole class meetings; and elements that engage specific small groups, which are targeted to the specific student needs. The result is that when a student has already completed the classwork for a given day or week, they can opt out of attending that class and instead use that time complete other work. Students who do attend the class often do so in a smaller group and can use that class time to get extra support from the teacher, rather than trying to find that time before or after school. Students are also practicing time management and self-directed and self-monitored learning—all skills needed in college and careers.

The blended concept allows the district to be nimble and continue their evolution from an industrial model (everyone in the same place at the same time getting the same information) to one that resembles a medical model, in which each student is known and supported at the right levels in a moment in time. Students who already have a strong foundational knowledge in a course, or who are able to demonstrate competency faster than classmates, can move at their own, faster pace and even advance into other classes at a faster rate. This, in turn, allows time to explore other areas of interest including careers, while the teacher has more time to devote to students who need more support.

At 207, innovation is always unfolding and training and coaching are always happening. Thanks to deliberate steps the district has taken to increase teacher trainer capacity, support is always available to all educators. It's also natural, organic, and free of any stigma. That educators are so engaged in learning programs is a function of the appealing and broad teacher-driven offering. It is also a function of leadership's commitment to keep adult learning separate from evaluations. Teachers can rest assured that the leaders and trainers running a learning program are always there only to help their peers grow. Per leadership, it is this promise of their adult learning model that has allowed it to grow and grow. All in all, this amounts to a true culture of learning and a district that operates as a true learning organization.

### *Students Engage in Personal Learning; Schools Engage in Personalized Service*

In a moment when 50% of students come out of college with too much debt and are also underemployed, 207's leadership believes that educators must go beyond personalized learning. Instead, they must view student learning as *personal* and view themselves as the creators and providers of *personalized service*. Personal learning is something that students engage in, where personalized service is what educators provide—in *service* of empowering every student with everything they need to make the best decisions to create a successful, fulfilling, sustainable future.

The superintendent describes it this way: "See the student as the individual they are. Their learning journey is *personal* to them; therefore that's what we at 207 consider '*personal learning*,' which is owned and led, to the extent possible, by the student him or herself. What schools can do, besides facilitating conditions and space to support each student's *personal learning*, is provide a high level of '*personalized service*' to each student. This is achieved through a combination of multi-tiered systems of support for academic and social emotional learning and other crucial 21st-century supports, such as career and college advisement that goes far deeper than what schools have traditionally provided."

The district's innovative approach to personal learning, and equipping teachers with all the skills that go into delivering it, is manifest in its innovative adult learning programs and pathways. The many components of personal learning, from the required foundational assessment literacy course to the current virtual blended learning pilot, routinely become learning opportunities and coaching pathways.

The district's personalized college/career advisement program is designed to provide interest-based opportunities to engage in authentic career experiences specifically to inform post-high school career and education plans. Personalized college/career advisement for every student exists as a full-scale, always expanding and improving program. In addition to providing students opportunities to understand and use career skills, the college/career advisement program has a bigger picture objective: to create the conditions needed such that every student can smartly choose a high-demand career that pertains to their passions and is realistically

achievable. The 207 team sees arriving at this decision as function of four factors depicted in this graphic:



Therefore, the district's personalized college/career advisement program aims to support students in thinking through and learning about each of these four factors. The end goal is that each student is as prepared as possible to make the wisest and most practical post-high school education or career decision and to avoid making a decision that could inadvertently impair or limit their future prospects.

#### What You Love Doing & What You Are Good at

Every freshman across the district completes the YouScience aptitude test. The online test uses algorithms and science to ascertain a participant's natural aptitudes and fundamental interests. It then generates a highly personalized report that matches a participant to a best-fit career path. Students use this information to begin exploring different career pathways that align to their strengths and interests.

Every 207 teacher is asked to include at least one authentic career-related learning activity in each course. The purpose of this is to show what professionals in a given field actually do in their careers so that the career exploration process is concrete, not abstract, to students. Examples have included a senior-level writing class taking field trips to publishing houses and

engaging with editors and writers to learn the life and process of a writer. In addition, teachers across all disciplines frequently bring visiting professionals within that discipline into school to discuss, for example, what a physicist or chemist does in a work setting. These learning activities help students begin to contemplate which of the career pathways they are exploring may no longer be worth pursuing and which ones they'd like to explore more deeply.

At the district level, a program to provide for every student some kind of relevant career experience is constantly unfolding, growing, and improving. Launched in 2014, the district follows the Project Lead the Way model of creating or accessing real-world career experiences in a range of disciplines, not just engineering. Today, the district offers several career pathways that students can begin exploring through learning activities as freshmen and sophomores and then through real-world learning opportunities as juniors and seniors; they include: Arts, Communication & Media; Business & Communications; Environmental Sciences; Engineering, Manufacturing & Design, Health & Human Services; and Exploratory Studies.

To oversee the expansion, development, and operations of this robust career pathways program, the district hired a District Career Coordinator. One of this educator's primary charges is always to expand professional partnerships to increase capacity to place students in real-world career experiences. In turn, students can continue to refine the factors of post-high school decision making. Professional partners are local and beyond. Together, the coordinator and partner will find the optimal way the partner can provide students a real-world career experience, be it teaching students about the realities of their careers (through seminars, as guest speakers, as mentors, etc.) or providing actual experiences (such as projects, internships, job shadowing opportunities, etc.). Today, the district has more than 550 professional partners who have provided over 1,200 annual career experiences for students.

#### What the World Needs & What You Can Get Paid for

Arguably the most innovative part of 207's career guidance program is their process to determine the return on investment of various career paths and the education required for them. To do this, the district uses the JobsEQ software service. JobsEQ provides access to a database of thousands of jobs and related data. The software allows users to search a job; it then returns a profile that lists the job's current availability and demand, its mean salary, the necessary degree/certification to obtain the job, and the schools that have the highest placement rates for the job.



As an example, a student might be interested in entertainment law. With her counselor, she will search “entertainment lawyer” in JobsEQ. Generating a search about entertainment law will return general and current facts of a given field or career. For entertainment law, that might be that most entertainment lawyers live in Los Angeles and New York City; or that presently there are more entertainment lawyers than there are jobs available for them. JobsEQ is also searchable by zip code; geo-specific search results include average starting salaries, job availability, and highest college placement rates for a given field, in any searched zip code. Counselors can use this information to calculate a “return on investment.” This allows students and families to plan the right education course based on getting to the career in the least amount of time and without an excessive debt burden, which is conditional on the salary and jobs outlook of a given career.

### The Individual Career Plan

Helping students explore career interests, aptitudes, and pathways through all four high school years allows ongoing, insightful conversations—between counselor and students, teachers and students, students and students, and students and families—about what different careers mean over a lifetime. Yet conversations are not just for interest; they are also meant to translate into concrete career-learning related goals for every student, every year. This is recorded in the Individual Career Planning Sheet, which is monitored and updated every year by the student and counselor. Please see Appendix 3 for the Individual Career Planning Sheet that every student in 207 has and revisits to inform future plans.

The inputs, activities, expectations, and progress monitoring that go into completing and updating the Individual Career Plan span across all four years of high school, as outlined in the following milestones chart.

#### **Milestones in the Pathway Process**

*The Pathways process is outlined by grade in the graphic below*

8th grade	9th grade	10th grade	11th grade	12th grade
Self-Exploration				
	Interest Inventory: Begin Individual Career Plan			
		Explore Pathway		
			Select a Pathway	
				Apply to Post Secondary
			Review/Update Individual Career Plan	
				Change Pathways at Any Time

## The Impact

The robustness of 207's personal adult learning program has had a direct impact on student achievement. Thanks to the educator-led and hybrid flexible/formalized nature of the district's coaching pathways and innovation supports, teachers are always working to improve a range of skills that go into instruction. With so many learning opportunities, many can actively work to turn weaknesses into strengths, expanding their instructional capacity that much more. As individuals and as a collective, 207's teachers are always growing more skilled at their practice. Put another way, they are always getting better.

The most revealing data about the success of 207's innovative philosophy and practices is that since 2002, the district's students have gotten poorer and more diverse—two factors that typically result in falling standardized test scores. However, in spite of their students' changing demographics, they are achieving at levels far above the days when the district was an affluent, predominantly white suburb of Chicago. While the district doesn't chase testing, they consider improved scores a natural and productive byproduct of an improved personalized service and personal learning program and teachers ever more adept at delivering it. In the window from 2002 to today, the average ACT has risen from 21.7% to 22.6% in a state that required every junior to take the ACT until recently. All three schools routinely appear on *Newsweek's* top schools list and in *U.S. News and World Report* and the *Washington Post Challenge Index*, which lists the nation's most challenging schools.

Given that 207's educators care so deeply about equipping students with the capacity to make the best post-high school decisions for them, they track their college graduates' graduation rates. The graduating class of 2009's six-year college graduation rate was 58.5%, which was an increase of nearly ten percentage points from the class of 2003's rate of 48.9%.

## Discussion Questions

1. How can we increase the capacity of our professional development and/or coaching program so that our staff can handle more innovation? What hurdles would we need to overcome or roadblocks would we need to remove to make coaching more accessible, even required for all educators?
2. Do we know if your educators are hungry for ongoing growth and disappointed by a lack of it? How can we turn our district/school into a learning organization to attract and maintain the highest-quality teachers?
3. What opportunities are we missing or tools are we not using to begin exposing students to career skills, interests, and pathways from an early age? How can we support them to begin to understand their passions and how their aptitudes merge with them to translate into career paths and options after graduation?
4. Does our academic program sufficiently address the realities of college and its expense? Do we support students enough in making the wisest and most practical post-high school decisions for them? Are their parents/guardians involved?

## Appendix 1: Where Coaching & Evaluation Intersect: Goal Alignment and Goal Setting Document

That coaching and evaluations are kept wholly separate has been crucial to the success of 207's robust and flexible coaching program. Yet, the district knows that evaluations are important, both at the district level and to individual educators. To help each educator get the best evaluation outcomes possible, coaching intersects in goal setting; coaches work with each educator to set goals aligned to evaluations, using the following document as a guide.

## **Sample Goal Document**

Form must be completed before meeting with the observer.

Please process through the following questions as you select your goal for the coming observation cycle. As you contemplate these questions, you are encouraged to discuss your ideas with your colleagues, coaches, department chair and other administrators who you feel can give you supportive feedback.

What do your students do that make you feel good about your practice?

What do your students do or not do that stand out as a concern for you?

What would you like to see your students be able to do, or do better, as a result of your professional growth in the coming year/s?

Turn that sentence into a goal. For example, if you would like to see your students be able to communicate their learning to you and their peers at a higher level and on a more consistent basis, you might set the following goal:

My students will routinely engage in summarizing their learning and reflecting on the skills and concepts learned in my class as a means to formatively assess their progression through the curriculum of the course I teach.

Or, if you want your students to more confidently engage socially in school and home and have a more positive self-image, you might set the following goal:

My students will routinely engage in self-awareness practices to combat cognitive distortions about themselves as a means to increasing their social confidence and appropriate responsiveness to form tighter bonds with their peers in and out of the school setting.

My students will routinely self-monitor the progress of their short-term and long-term academic or career goals that are created in collaboration with their counselor as a means to help support increasing self-confidence and independence.

Goal Statement:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Please select the component you feel best reflects the goal you are trying to achieve.

(Drop down menu) [Here, teachers select from a drop-down menu of specific goals from components in the Danielson Framework.]

3. From that component, please cut and paste the sentence/s or phrase/s from the rubric that connects most closely to the behaviors you would like to see your students exhibit.

4. Optional: What other domains/components, if any, do you feel this goal is linked to? [Cross Reference Resource](#) (If unsure, leave blank and discuss with your department chair.)

5. Please list or describe the professional learning and coaching you are considering engaging in to achieve this goal.

6. Optional: Please list the additional support you may need to achieve this goal.

7. What sources of evidence will you use (quantitative and/or qualitative) to reflect on progress toward achieving your goal?

The following chart is an example of how a teacher might address the questions of the goal setting document with her coach.

## Goal Setting and Action Planning!

		Specific Action Plan		
<u>Rubric</u> Areas of Focus	Goals (SMART!)	Actions	Timeline	Success Criterion
<p><u>Focus One:</u></p> <p>The coach appropriately balances feedback, praise, and suggestions to facilitate an evidence-based conversation that challenges and advances teaching practice.</p>	<p>Balance feedback, praise and coaching to develop coaching conversations and challenge teachers when necessary. Question stems will be helpful, as well as book readings such as <i>Having Hard Conversations</i> by Jennifer Abrams, to push teachers to not only settle for the norm, but push themselves further.</p>	<p>Finish reading <i>Having Hard Conversations</i> before the school year begins. Strategize for early in the year conversations and prep for the difficult ones in order to push teachers.</p> <p>Additionally, I will look for feedback from my coaching team to not only review the conversations taking place, but how to take the discussions further.</p>	<p>Complete a minimum of one difficult conversation by the end of August and another two by the end of September. To follow up, goals will be created within days of the meeting (if not sooner), and hopefully there will be data to look at in future sessions down the road.</p>	<p>In order for this goal to be successful, these conversations will not only take place, but there will be student-centered goals created as a result of these meetings, and possibly even student data to demonstrate results.. These conversations will be focused on those who don't always set or move to goals, and this preparation will push them towards trackable goals.</p>



<p><u><i>Focus Two:</i></u></p> <p>The coach expands their own repertoire of pedagogical instructional strategies and demonstrates an advanced understanding of the organization's vision.</p>	<p>Initiate blended learning practices in the classroom to stay ahead of the trend in my district, as well as work with others on blending their own classrooms.</p>	<p>Participate in the Blended Learning cohort provided by district 207.</p> <p>Read articles and books about blended learning to understand how it works effectively.</p> <p>Through the district cohort, attend another area high school using BL already.</p>	<p>Cohort and readings will be completed in the summer and blend a class at the beginning of the year (if ready), or starting second semester.</p>	<p>Feedback from colleagues will be examined and discussed to determine how helpful the coach was with initiating, carrying on, and coaching throughout the blended process. Since this is relatively new for our school, I will be learning and coaching at the same time to my responsibility is to stay ahead.</p>
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## Appendix 2: Individual Coaching Options

In the 2017-18 school year, educators were able to select from this chart which coaching opportunity they wanted to engage in for the year. When the program launched in 2014-2015, the district required 1:1 coaching every other year. Thanks to the success of the program in achieving meaningful teacher growth year after year (a function of high quality coaches who've established trust with colleagues, ongoing expansion of teacher leadership opportunities, and the district's honoring of the original promise to keep coaching separate from evaluations), the district now allows teachers to select the path best for them in a given year.

## Coaching Plan Options 2017-18

	Individual Coaching Plan	CLEAR	Instructional Rounds	Peer-to-Peer Coaching Plan
When	Each staff member will participate in an individual coaching plan with a building coach, department coach or literacy mentor during at least one year of the two year cycle.	Option for the year in the two-year cycle that a staff member is not participating in an Individual Coaching Plan, unless Department Chair approves substitution.  Non-Tenured teacher with APTL approval	Option for the year in the two-year cycle that a staff member is not participating in an Individual Coaching Plan.  Non-tenured teacher with APTL approval	Option for the year in the two-year cycle that a staff member is not participating in an Individual Coaching Plan.  Must be a Tenured Teacher
What	One-on-one coaching with a building or Departmental Instructional Coach or literacy mentor.  -Minimum of <i>3 full periods</i> which <i>could</i> look like... - classroom visit, meeting to discuss visit, meeting to discuss ideas or plan OR - 3 meetings surrounding planning or instructional strategies  *This plan can be paired with participation in a professional learning cohort	Design and implement an action research project on a collaborative action research team, facilitated by Instructional Coaches and other trainers.  -Brief summer trainings -Monthly meetings with the District group and/or project groups. -Informal mentor work during 2017-2018 with new CLEAR participants. -Present group project findings during second summer.	Groups of 3-5 teachers, facilitated by an IC, visiting classrooms with the expectation of implementing observed strategies in a teacher's own classroom.  - ½ day classroom visits, data collection, and data analysis - meeting to discuss strategies based on what the group learned from classroom visits - implement strategies and observe classrooms - meeting to debrief observations and reflect on implementation	2 staff members planning together and observing each other implementing instructional strategies'  -Minimum of <i>6 meetings (3 focused on each partner)</i> which <i>could</i> look like... - planning meeting, classroom visit, and follow-up -Building or Departmental Instructional Coach or literacy mentor will attend at least 1 of the coaching meetings for each teacher -Pairing must be approved by dept chair. -Pairs must attend peer coaching workshop  *This plan can be paired with participation in a professional learning cohort

The pre-service teacher coaching option, not included in the above chart, where 207 teachers coach student teachers at Northwestern University and National Louis University, was added in the 2018-19 school year:



## Appendix 3: Individual Career Planning Sheet

As part of the district's personalized career/college advisement program, each student is required to explore different careers and, with the guidance counselor, fill out this sheet every year. Together, the student and counselor make sure goals are being met and that the sheet is updated every school year to reflect the student's evolving and, hopefully, more refined career goals.

Individual Career Planning Sheet	
<b>Grade 9</b>	<b>Date:</b> _____
<b>I am currently planning on doing the following after graduating from high school:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="radio"/> 2-year community college (Oakton)</li><li><input type="radio"/> 4-year college/university</li><li><input type="radio"/> Military</li><li><input type="radio"/> Work</li><li><input type="radio"/> I do not know yet</li></ul>
<b>Two Careers that interest me are:</b>	<b>To work in this career, I need to earn a:</b>
1. _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="radio"/> High School Diploma</li><li><input type="radio"/> Associates Degree/Certificate (2 years)</li><li><input type="radio"/> Bachelors Degree (4 years)</li><li><input type="radio"/> Masters Degree</li><li><input type="radio"/> Other: _____</li></ul>
2. _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="radio"/> High School Diploma</li><li><input type="radio"/> Associates Degree/Certificate (2 years)</li><li><input type="radio"/> Bachelors Degree (4 years)</li><li><input type="radio"/> Masters Degree</li><li><input type="radio"/> Other: _____</li></ul>
<b>One goal that I would like to set for this year (career or academic) is:</b>	
<b>Goal:</b> _____	
<b>Steps that I need to take to accomplish my goal are:</b>	
1. _____	
2. _____	
3. _____	
4. _____	
5. _____	
<b>Classes that I may want to take at Maine West in the future to help me prepare or decide on a career choice are:</b>	<b>Additional Notes:</b>
_____	
_____	
_____	

**Go to: [www.whatsnextillinois.org](http://www.whatsnextillinois.org) to find out more about some of the classes that we discussed today!**

ID:

Name:

