

Carnegie Forum

Online Q&A 'Getting Serious about Capacity Building'
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We framed the session around the 'wrong' and 'right' policy drivers:

Wrong Drivers	Right Drivers
Accountability	Capacity building
Individual teacher and leadership quality	Collaborative work
Technology	Pedagogy
Fragmented strategies	Systemness

Fullan, Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform, 2011.

1. What are the top three starting places for a new leader (especially in a totally broken system)?

Reference: See the Case Study on this very topic from Ben Adlard School, and new principal Marie-Claire Bretherton in Fullan, *Nuance* (Corwin, 2019).

- Focus first on creating a culture of trust, collaboration, and ongoing learning across the entire organization. It takes *at least 6 months* to establish a degree of trust. Leaders must name the goal (climate of trust); model it; and monitor it (is it getting better?).
- Participate as a learner in working with staff to consider and support teachers. Listen in with teachers and folks across the system to learn about their practice and their most pressing challenges.
- Define, find and leverage good examples of powerful pedagogy within the system. Increase their visibility and create multiple opportunities for teachers to learn from peers. Create a climate of openness, transparency, non-judgmentalism, and specificity of practice-linked outcomes.

2. What measures of learning should be used?

- Multiple measures, but especially those agreed upon as valid and legitimate among teachers, school leaders, and system leaders. With ‘measures’ we don’t simply mean standardized measures, but also ‘small data’ available in the work produced by students and observations of teacher practice. The closer the measures are to the pedagogical core (the interaction between educators and learners in the presence of knowledge), the more useful the evidence, and the more likely to support positive improvement.
- Be very clear about what outcomes you are trying to achieve and use the measures that tell you if you are *not* achieving them—then adjust what you are doing based on what you are learning and keep going.
- Assess the quality of collaboration, focus on high-yield teaching strategies, and their evidence of impact.

Check out Donohoo, and Katz, *Quality Implementation* (Corwin, 2020).

3. How can we use right drivers in extra large urban districts?

- Select a small number of priorities. Have focused interaction laterally and vertically. Learning is the work of everyone across the system.
- The right drivers are better than the wrong drivers regardless of the size of the district. We have proof that the wrong ones do not work, so work towards imperfect implementation of the right drivers as opposed to perfect implementation of the wrong ones.

4. How can the right drivers be used in most struggling districts, where they are most difficult to stick?

See also our response to question 1.

- They’re ‘most difficult’ if you aspire to emulate conventional ‘well-off’ districts. But the right drivers are actually easier and more strategically sound if your priority is on building a system actually focused on powerful learning. The key notion is to figure out how to turn ‘disadvantage’ into ‘possibility’ (e.g., less prepared teachers being more open to take the role of learners; insufficient number of teachers opening up the possibility of multi-age grouping and longer blocks of time for inquiry based learning; desperation of system leaders with low improvement in struggling districts opening up opportunities for flexibility and radical departure from conventional solutions...)
- Just start—the wrong ones obviously don’t work so you will lose nothing by doggedly going after the right ones.

Read, Burns et al, *Closing the Opportunity Gap: Positive Outlier Districts*. Palo Alto, CA; Learning Policy Institute, Stanford.

5. How can we get policymakers to unlearn the need for extensive external accountability?

- Link them with leaders in top performing systems within the US or beyond. Almost invariably, the systems doing the best work put the right drivers in the drivers seat, with the wrong drivers used selectively and in the service of the right drivers.
- Be very clear about the metrics you are using to determine success. Be honest and open in what you are using and why, and also about where you are making progress and where you are not. Create a system that is better (i.e., more effective) than the external one in improving conditions and learning for your students.

Recommend reading of Fullan, Chapter 4, Culture-based accountability, *Nuance*, Corwin Press, 2019).

6. How do we build capacity of teacher candidates?

- Expose them as early and as often as possible to powerful practice (pedagogy, collaboration, leadership) from experienced teachers and leaders.
- Consider initial mentoring, and true coaching over time that shows, not just tells the teacher what to do and is a partner in helping them succeed. Be reasonable about how long it takes to really get good at anything and do not overwhelm them with trying to improve everything at once.

Do a book study on Hargreaves & Fullan, *Professional Capital of Teachers*, Teachers College Press, 2012.