



STRUCTURES & SUPPORTS

BUILDING A THROUGHLINE APPROACH TO DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP

BRIEF

When teachers, school leaders and central office staff are all pulling in the same direction, districts can more effectively implement initiatives that help students learn. However, it is commonplace in partnerships between school districts and outside organizations, such as educational nonprofits, consulting firms, and institutions of higher education, to work in narrower ways that actually discourage districts from developing the type of coherence that is essential to improving outcomes for kids.

Bank Street College is committed to collaborative, systematic district reform that supports every layer of the school system so that districts are able to thoughtfully plan and implement large scale instructional improvement initiatives to achieve maximum impact on student learning. The Bank Street Education Center “Education Center,” has developed a “Throughline” approach to district reform, designed to support districts across the system to foster conditions that enable schools to act as units of change and embed strong instructional practices through teacher leaders and teaming. The concept was developed out of our team’s significant collective experience working in the New York City Department of Education on system-wide change initiatives, and in response to literature that identifies the need to coordinate instructional leadership across five components: a coherent instructional system, teacher networks, coaching, school instructional leadership, and district instructional leadership. The Throughline

THROUGHLINE APPROACH

GROUNDING IN EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING

FOCUSED ON ADULT DEVELOPMENT

BUILT AROUND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

SUPPORTED BY DISTRICT CONDITIONS

RESULT: CLASSROOM AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

Teacher/other staff grow, develop, and shift practice to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of all students



approach is Bank Street's effort to work with districts to coordinate many of these components to benefit students.

Since the Education Center was founded in 2014, we have gathered a substantial amount of information that confirms many of our instincts and much of the literature about what matters in system-wide reform. It has also taught us lessons about some of the challenges that arise in supporting districts to coordinate layers of the system to improve instruction. Additionally, our data will inform our next steps as the Education Center embarks on its third year as an organization. This report aims to tell the story of how the Throughline has developed, by describing how three of the Education Center's early partnerships on the East Coast

and in the Midwest unfolded. While each of the partnerships was distinctive, this report also aims to cull some "lessons learned" across the partnerships, drawing on themes that have emerged from reviewing key documents across the three districts, visiting over 50 classrooms, and conducting interviews with teachers, leaders and other school personnel in the districts.

Our reflections on the data and our experiences have surfaced several lessons for engaging in professional learning partnerships with school districts. First, **building a shared and actionable vision of an instructional core is a challenge at the district level.** District actors are often siloed from one another, and decisions about matters such as curriculum adoption and instructional vision tend to be

made by central office staff without a commitment from key stakeholders, such as teachers and building principals. Second, **districts need intensive support to create coherent adult learning experiences**, as well as tools and resources, that support school-level change and align with the instructional goals of the district. Districts' needs range from materials creation and specific skill development for coaches and teachers to holistic professional development planning for the scope of a school year or longer. Third, **broad work with districts in one area doesn't necessarily translate into deep system-wide engagements, and vice versa**. We believe there may be a relationship between the breadth of the work and the depth of the engagement a district can absorb.

Finally, our work with districts has strengthened our commitment to the Throughline. Given that districts have limited resources, we have honed our approach to **position the school as the unit of change as a crucial element of this work**. While district leaders, coaches, principals, teachers and other school staff must have a stake in the district's vision, schools must take ownership of an instructional vision and create structures within the school, which are supported by the district, to enact meaningful change in classroom practice.



DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP SUMMARY

	DISTRICT ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EDUCATION CENTER SUPPORTS	DISTRICT GROWTH POINTS	PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGES
PORT CITY	What curriculum resources and accompanying teacher development supports will strengthen instruction across pre-K programs?	District-wide curriculum review committee Professional development with coaches and district leaders	District leadership and staff report higher engagement in instructional decision-making, and increased knowledge of high-quality early childhood practices	Engaging teachers directly in ongoing professional learning
LAKESIDE	How can we build the capacity of our network teams to support standards-aligned instruction across all schools?	Professional learning sessions with principal supervisors (and some building principals) tied to the Common Core Collaborative classroom observational visits	Principal supervisors report increased knowledge of high-quality classroom instruction, coaching practices	District leaders express frustration that classroom practice have not shifted as a result of the principal supervisor professional development
COLONIAL TOWN	How do current resources, practices, and supports align to developmentally meaningful, play-based, trauma-informed approaches to learning?	Conducted collaborative district-wide review Created Professional Learning Map, established Vision Committee Conduct Professional Development for 125 teachers	District is creating a belief statement for early childhood education and is communicating with stakeholders District is aligning professional learning experiences for adults with the district curriculum and best early childhood practices	District turnover and decentralization in pre-K programs District needs intensive support to create professional development resources, tools, and materials