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# Managing Networks for School Improvement: Seven Lessons from the Field

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# Managing Networks for School Improvement: Seven Lessons from the Field

## **Abstract**

In recent decades, new networks for school improvement (NSI) have proliferated across the country. These emerging organizational structures present education leaders with an opportunity to build dynamic infrastructures to engage schools in improvements to teaching and learning. NSI are diverse. Some NSI are part of school districts, while others are contracted by school districts to design blueprints for school improvement. What all NSI have in common is a central hub supporting a set of member schools, like the center of a wheel and its spokes.

In this guidebook, we focus on common lessons for designing improvement infrastructures from the perspective of leaders across four different types of networks, including:

- Local district superintendents who support schools in a particular geographic area;
- Field support centers, which partner with district superintendents in the intermediary space between the central office and schools;
- Affinity organizations, which are independent non-profit organizations that work under contract from the central district office to support a select group of district schools; and
- Charter school management organizations that operate outside the district, supporting their affiliated member schools.

Our aim was to better understand how NSI were responding to the increased demands of recent shifts to more rigorous college- and career-ready standards. These seven lessons emerged from interviews with central office administrators overseeing NSI and staff working in network hubs, as well as from observations of professional learning (PL) sessions provided by hubs. We hope these lessons are useful to your work improving teaching and learning in your school, network, or district.

## **Keywords**

School Improvement, Networks

# MANAGING NETWORKS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT:

## SEVEN LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

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We also interviewed central office administrators in the New York City Department of Education who worked with the NSI. Without their willingness to share their stories, this guidebook would not offer the richness and authenticity afforded by their experiences.

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We dedicate this guidebook to educators across the country whose time and dedication contribute to improving public education. We hope it provides useful information as you seek ways to work together to improve school performance for students, teachers, and network participants.

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# OVERVIEW

In recent decades, new networks for school improvement (NSI) have proliferated across the country. These emerging organizational structures present education leaders with an opportunity to build dynamic infrastructures to engage schools in improvements to teaching and learning. NSI are diverse. Some NSI are part of school districts, while others are contracted by school districts to design blueprints for school improvement. What all NSI have in common is a central hub supporting a set of member schools, like the center of a wheel and its spokes.

In this guidebook, we focus on common lessons for designing improvement infrastructures from the perspective of leaders across four different types of networks, including:

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Our aim was to better understand how NSI were responding to the increased demands of recent shifts to more rigorous college- and career-ready standards. These seven lessons emerged from interviews with central office administrators overseeing NSI and staff working in network hubs, as well as from observations of professional learning (PL) sessions provided by hubs. We hope these lessons are useful to your

work improving teaching and learning in your school, network, or district.

## Lesson One: Develop a Clear and Coherent Instructional Vision

A central aspect of supporting instructional improvement across a network of schools was developing a clear and coherent vision for instruction. Although NSI varied in their visions of high-quality curriculum, pedagogy, and educational outcomes, nearly all NSI articulated core beliefs to guide how network members conceptualized teaching and learning. Increasingly, these core beliefs were translated into more specific supports, particularly in the areas of curriculum and lesson planning.

## Lesson Two: Empower Schools to Make Decisions

At the same time, many network hubs sought to empower their member schools by deliberately granting them decision rights over matters such as goal-setting, operations, curriculum use, and professional learning. In general, empowerment of member schools enhanced leader and teacher engagement with NSI instructional visions and programs. In several networks, NSI leaders empowered schools by sharing responsibility for school- and network-level goal-setting with principals. NSI also jointly collaborated on data analysis to empower educators to make informed instructional decisions. Regardless of whether schools opted into a network curriculum or the hub mandated its use, all NSI in our sample valued adaptation and teacher-level instructional decision-making to some degree.

### **Lesson Three: Create Two-Way Communication**

Open dialogue kept news and information flowing between network hubs and their member schools, fostering feelings of openness that encouraged NSI participants to contribute and share. Established lines of communication helped network hubs learn about the needs and challenges faced by schools in order to better support members across the network. Established lines of communication also helped the hub to disseminate messages about their instructional design to members.

### **Lesson Four: Facilitate Inter-School Collaboration**

NSI developed ways to foster collaboration between member schools to promote knowledge-sharing, accelerate network-wide learning and innovation, and strengthen bonds of network trust. Many network hubs created formal opportunities for principals and others in leadership positions in member schools to meet and collaborate. Others identified principals and schools to serve as network-wide exemplars of best practices, while still others focused collaborative opportunities at the teacher level, often within professional learning (PL) sessions. We found that while network size and geographic spread had implications for the extent of inter-school collaboration, even those that struggled to forge strong connections among all schools found ways to strategically connect small groups of schools to leverage critical school-level expertise.

### **Lesson Five: Build Trust Among member Schools**

NSI stability and sustainability largely depended on relational trust. Trust was integral to a

network's ability to identify critical problems of practice in ways that monitoring and more formal evaluations could not. A number of structures such as formal meetings, advisory groups, school intervisitations, and retreats helped to build trust across networks. These opportunities helped members share and demystify challenges and opened new opportunities to learn. Many NSI acknowledged that while it was especially important to build trust when they were launching their network or facing periods of radical transition or change, strong relational trust was an enduring good for network improvement.

### **Lesson Six: Know the Landscape**

NSI needed to be mindful of where they were positioned in the political and institutional environment in order to understand and try to mitigate the impact of external changes on their operations and resources. The regulatory environment shifted dramatically for most NSI in NYC under the 2015 NYCDOE restructuring, weakening the market mechanisms that undergirded the previous system of support. Some NSI had to learn to operate with tighter budgets, new accountability structures, and revised lines of authority with the district central office and member schools. While these external shifts were challenging and required adaptations, the district restructuring also presented NSI with opportunities to refine their supports and diversify their resources and outreach.

### **Lesson Seven: Design for Improvement**

To varying degrees, the NSI in our study viewed their supports as works in progress, deploying mechanisms to gather data and other evidence to build and modify them. This was particularly important given adoption of the New York State Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), which produced seismic shifts in how NSI hubs

judged the quality of their instructional guidance and supports. NSI found that more specific and codified resources produced a stronger foundation for professional learning. To varying degrees, each network designed tools to acquire more regular and immediate information, such as teacher and leader surveys, teacher and leader advisory groups, school site walk-throughs, instructional observations, formative assessments, and more. We found networks' abilities to learn and improve were also dependent, in part, on their organizational maturity. However, even newer organizations moved toward increasingly sophisticated routines for assessing the efficacy of their supports and changing course when necessary, improving their mechanisms for improvement.

## **Conclusion**

These seven lessons highlight strategies for operating networks for school improvement that proved valuable across sectors. Many of these lessons interconnected and overlapped in the day-to-day operations of NSI, underscoring the challenges of leading and managing such networks. We hope this guidebook proves useful as you work to create more robust networks for school improvement, helping you think through different models for designing and managing the complexities of the work at hand.

# INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, networks for school improvement (NSI) are being recognized for their ability to support large-scale improvement in teaching and learning across systems of schools.<sup>1</sup> Typically NSI are organized like a wheel with spokes, with a central hub supporting a set of member schools. Some network hubs have member schools assigned to them by school systems, as is the case with superintendents' offices in New York City. Other NSI feature schools that opt in to a network operated by an external, non-profit provider. Still other network hubs grow their own member schools, like some charter management organizations. Note that NSI have many names in the school reform literature, including school improvement networks,<sup>2</sup> intermediary organizations,<sup>3</sup> inter-organizational networks,<sup>4</sup> and school support organizations (SSOs),<sup>5</sup> among others. See Appendix A for a primer on NSI in our sample.

While the overarching purpose of NSI is to support school improvement, the ways in which hubs support their members and the degree to which they guide schools' instructional practice vary. NSI also assume different roles and responsibilities with their members. Some, for example, provide operational and administrative supports with close monitoring and oversight, while others rely more on persuasion and allow members to opt in to the services they believe they need. Such differences stem in part from alternative governance arrangements, but also reflect distinct visions of professionalism, theories of instructional improvement, and differences in hub capacities and commitments.<sup>6</sup>

This guidebook seeks to provide readers with a deeper understanding of the varying NSI strategies, and bring to the fore common lessons that

providers have taken away from their experiences, as evident by their actions and reflections. This guidebook also discusses some of the challenges and questions that NSI continue to face.

## Using this Guidebook

This guidebook represents the diverse experiences of various NSI seeking to improve teaching and learning in response to rigorous standards. Despite this variation, our conversations uncovered seven lessons hubs learned about how to create designs for school improvement and build strategies to improve and sustain their networks:

- Lesson One: Develop a clear and coherent instructional vision
- Lesson Two: Empower schools to make decisions
- Lesson Three: Create two-way communication
- Lesson Four: Facilitate inter-school collaboration
- Lesson Five: Build trust among member schools
- Lesson Six: Know the landscape
- Lesson Seven: Design for improvement

We hope the lessons presented here prove useful to your work in creating successful networks for school improvement. We suggest you use this guidebook with members of your networks – during a retreat to create effective network structures for the coming year or as part of a strategic planning process to identify priorities. For each lesson, we have included a set of reflection questions readers might use to assess their organization's progress in the core areas identified here.



# LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Researchers from Teachers College, Columbia University and the School of Education at the University of Michigan spent three years between 2015 and 2018 conducting a comparative case study of NSI in New York City. We conducted 71 interviews with 60 individuals, including network staff and personnel at the New York City Department of Education who worked with the networks in our sample. The research team directly observed 27 professional learning (PL) events for teachers and leaders totaling more than 100 hours of observation. The research team also collected artifacts of practice, including organizational charts, network plans, goal statements, sample curricula, slide decks, and others.

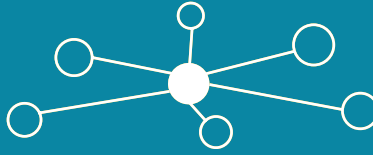
The thirteen networks in our sample represented a range of NSI, consisting of anywhere between 21 and 250 schools. These NSI included superintendents' offices (SOs), field support centers (FSCs), affinity organizations (AOs), and charter management organizations (CMOs). They varied in structure, governance, and the types of supports they offered schools:

- **SOs and FSCs** partnered together to serve as intermediaries between schools and central leadership within the traditional public school system. SOs were primarily responsible for developing school principals and conducting annual whole-school reviews. They worked in tandem with larger FSCs, geographically distributed throughout the city, which provided logistical and operational supports to schools, as well as additional professional supports for teachers.
- **AOs**, independent non-profit organizations, partnered with the district in a contractual

relationship of instructional and operational support. AOs primarily provided curricular and instructional supports to school teachers and leaders, while again relying on a city-wide field support center to provide operational supports to member schools.

- **CMOs** operated autonomously within the parallel charter sector. CMOs were responsible for providing all instructional, operational, and logistic supports to their member schools—a charge requiring substantial expertise in the network hubs.

Despite this variation, all networks in our sample had one common goal: improving the implementation of rigorous college- and career-ready standards in member schools. Our aim was to uncover how these various NSI were coping with this responsibility in the ever-changing political context of New York City. The lessons that follow provide insight into how networks responded to increased demands for curricular and instructional rigor.



# LESSON ONE

## Develop a clear and coherent instructional vision

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*“ My primary goal for teacher professional development at the beginning of the school year is for teachers to have a really clear vision for what classroom instruction should look like in our network. ”*

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**A central aspect of supporting instructional improvement across a network of schools is developing a clear and coherent vision for instruction, and defining and fostering common conceptions of high-quality curriculum, pedagogy, and educational outcomes. Although NSI varied in their visions of instruction, nearly all NSI articulated core beliefs about instructional practice to guide how network members conceptualized teaching and learning. Visions were not**

static, but evolved as NSI were exposed to new ideas, learned about what worked for their schools, or responded to shifts in the organizational environment. In turn, these visions of instruction helped NSI to develop coherent support across their networks and to build shared ideas and identity. Table 1 illustrates some examples of core beliefs among NSI that participated in this study:

Table 1. Visions of Instruction

Examples of Core Beliefs
Cultivating conceptual understandings and building essential content knowledge
Supporting college-ready literacy proficiency
Developing historical thinking skills through inquiry-based instruction
Developing a critical lens, a firm sense of self, and a desire to act in students

### Supporting Visions in Practice

Some NSI supported their instructional visions with a full suite of curriculum, professional learning opportunities, and tools for monitoring and feedback. In these NSI, the network hubs served an instructional design function by creating resources aligned to the visions around which the network as a whole operated. For example, both CMOs integrated the tenets of their instructional visions directly into a set of hub-developed instructional resources. For instance, one CMO identified clear discipline-specific approaches for content area instruction in history. The CMO supported teachers in actualizing this instructional vision by establishing a set of highly-specified instructional resources to build students' historical skills and supporting lesson use through professional learning (PL) for teachers

that emphasized content area pedagogy.

The CMOs' visions for instruction guided the development of their goals for student achievement and their blueprints for measurement of student progress through formative and summative assessments. The CMOs also required teachers to use protocols to familiarize themselves with the lessons and prepare for delivery. Submission of those protocols, combined with weekly observations and coaching sessions, created multiple opportunities for teachers to receive feedback on how well their practice reflected their organization's instructional vision. Mandating the use of the new curricular resources and assessments, structuring PL around them, and creating cycles of feedback also standardized instruction across classrooms and schools throughout the network. One CMO described the development of their standards-aligned lesson materials as a strategy for ensuring a "common floor" of rigorous expectations across classrooms: "*We want to provide the floor for people, and schools can create the ceiling.*"

Another NSI, an affinity organization, built its vision around the use of instructional routines, such as reading and writing protocols, within content-area instruction. This NSI developed a range of curricula and associated instructional supports for teachers in member schools, but schools had discretion over whether and how they would implement these materials. Network supports, such as professional learning and coaching, provided opportunities for teachers and leaders to practice instructional routines and to plan to implement them in their own classrooms. NSI personnel explicitly thought about these PL sessions as a way to share the network's vision:

***My primary goal for teacher***

***professional development at the beginning of the school year is for teachers to have a really clear vision for what classroom instruction should look like in our network. So we create documents to communicate that vision and posted them on the curriculum hub.***

PL and coaching structures supported teachers and leaders in using network-developed curricular materials in ways that aligned to instructional visions. For example, one NSI held a series of summer professional learning sessions for teachers and school leaders to familiarize both groups with key aspects of the instructional vision in each content area for the coming year. New teachers practiced delivering sample lessons provided by the network hub to their peers, received feedback from coaches and peers, experienced the lessons from the perspective of the learners, and developed their own questions and materials to supplement hub-provided lessons.

Another NSI cultivated a core group of lead teachers from all network schools who met regularly with support from hub personnel. These meetings helped steep lead teachers in network routines and common practices, which the teachers could then spread within their own schools. Bringing teachers together to analyze student work and assessment data was another common practice that network leaders saw as a powerful lever for shifting classroom practice. A clear vision of instruction helped NSI to develop coherent support across the network by articulating direction and desired outcomes for instruction.

While some NSI designed complete instructional programs to carry out their visions, others did not. In contrast to the CMOs and the AO

just described, SOs and FSCs did not provide common curriculum or interim assessments to their schools. Notably, SOs and FSCs emphasized capacity building. The development and facilitation of PL opportunities was a primary strategy for realizing their visions for instruction. These NSI used common instructional language and pedagogical approaches to unite school leaders and teachers around a common instructional vision despite variation in curricula. For example, in math, district-based NSI often relied on Randall Charles' "Big Ideas" to provide overarching structures for professional learning and support.<sup>7</sup>

One local superintendent's instructional vision for math included developing routines to support authentic student dialogue in the classroom. Through the help of outside consultants, the superintendent established teacher learning communities, principal learning communities, and model classrooms throughout the district. Each of these professional learning structures focused on developing common instructional routines or practices through modeling, co-planning, and discussion to increase opportunities for student dialogue in math. Still others focused on creating common instructional language across their network. For example, one NSI developed a glossary to ensure all schools across the network held common understandings of approaches to literacy instruction. As described by one superintendent, *"We really spent time together defining our professional language so that it means the same thing to everyone across our schools."* This was particularly important for schools using different curricula in order to build shared understandings of instructional practices.

## **Communicating Visions**

Regardless of whether they specified a

curriculum, the NSI in our sample used a variety of mechanisms to communicate and illustrate visions of instruction across member schools. One such mechanism was the use of videos of exemplar practices. Videos were typically used to norm school leader feedback around practice, to build capacity for instructional coaching, and to support teachers' instruction in coaching and professional learning sessions. For example, leaders in one network watched a video from a particular lesson and discussed how one could coach that teacher to improve.

Some NSI used resources, such as models (e.g., videos of exemplar lessons, sample lesson plans) and protocols for organizing instruction (e.g., jigsawing the text, sentence starters), to convey the network's vision of instruction. Such models and protocols helped member schools to build understandings of network visions of instruction at the school level without direct interaction with the network hub. Still other NSI used rubrics that enabled teachers and leaders to assess the extent to which teachers were living up to each NSI's vision. In one network, the hub even provided leaders with exemplar feedback tied to each element of the rubric. All of the above supports were intended to increase member schools' understanding of the network's vision of instruction, which NSI hoped would help to develop common practices across the network.

### **Specificity in Vision and Support**

Notably, at the outset of our study, not all network hubs had developed a common instructional vision, working instead to support member schools in developing their own school-based visions of instruction. This approach allowed the network to be responsive to unique school needs. However, it also placed a strain on network capacity and resources over time. One

NSI in our sample that had originally taken this approach felt it was not organizationally sustainable. Realizing they did not have sufficient capacity at the hub level to continue to design supports in response to each school's individual visions, by the end of our study this network hub was beginning to develop a common network-wide vision to provide more coherence and increase efficiency.

This was consistent with the trend toward greater specificity in instructional vision and support, particularly in the area of curriculum, observed across our sample. Staff at multiple NSI reported that teachers needed scaffolding in order to meet the higher expectations of the Common Core and that they requested additional resources. For example, one curriculum officer explained how hub staff initially underestimated the degree of specificity that teachers wanted in curricular resources:

***What we discovered, or what we realized, was that if we provide teachers with that foundational material, they can spend their time really thinking about the students in their classroom and adapting the resources.***

Across our sample, NSI had intentionally increased the quantity and specificity of their resources for instruction in recent years in an effort to help teachers and school leaders meet the rigorous expectations of the Common Core standards and aligned state assessments. Teachers wanted more specific resources, materials, and tools to help them meet the demands of the Common Core. NSI across our sample found that specifying an instructional vision and developing accompanying resources for teachers provided a framework in which to ground

improvement efforts. However, all the NSI navigated a tension between providing sufficient instructional guidance and maintaining enough flexibility to foster innovation at their schools and preserve the professional discretion of teachers. NSI grappled with this tension by codifying and specifying instructional supports to varying degrees.

As NSI worked to guide school practices, many saw gaining buy-in from schools as essential to successful implementation of rigorous, standards-driven curriculum and instruction aligned with their visions. One network-level curriculum director stressed this, saying:

***We have scopes and sequences; we have unit plans. They are no good if nobody uses them. And then how do we make sure that our high school teachers and high school leaders are bought into the materials we're providing? We could mandate. We could say you have to. It's much more effective if they want it and they're asking for that resource and they're asking for that support.***

Many NSI empowered schools to make decisions as a key way to secure motivation and buy-in among teachers and principals.

# QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What is our vision of instruction?

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How do we communicate this vision to network members?

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How do we support network members in carrying out this vision in practice?

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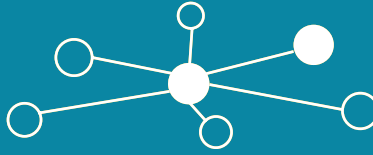
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# LESSON TWO

## Empower schools to make decisions

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**“** We want teachers to make adaptations. We want them to really be thoughtful about who their students are, what they need, what to emphasize, what to not emphasize and how to make those adaptations. **”**

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Many network hubs empowered their member schools by deliberately conferring decision rights over matters such as goal-setting, operations, curriculum use, and professional learning. These hubs found that local empowerment offered many benefits. In general, empowerment of member schools enhanced leader and teacher engagement with and ownership of NSI instructional visions and programs. In some NSI, widespread school autonomy enabled teachers



to tailor programs and supports, including curriculum and instruction, to meet the unique needs of students in their context. In others, schools earned autonomy by demonstrating success; hubs permitted high-performing schools to be more independent, freeing up support capacity that could be directed toward higher needs schools.

## Shared Goal-Setting

In several networks, NSI leaders empowered schools by sharing responsibility for school- and network-level goal-setting with principals. At one AO, instructional support staff in the NSI hub held annual meetings with member schools to review performance data, participation in NSI programs, and plans for the year ahead. This network also convened a group of principals to advise the organization's leadership team on a monthly basis. Although principals did not have final say in decisions relating to plans for the whole network, the leadership team seriously considered their input and used it to inform their decision-making. The advisory structure created a candid environment of transparency and honesty. By approaching principals as thought partners rather than as subordinates, the hub further empowered principals in the network:

***We do not say we are doing x and they say that doesn't work. We come to them to say this is how we are thinking about this.***

***We are seeking their advice because fundamentally they are the constituency we are most accountable to.***

These principals assisted with hiring new leaders at network schools, generating the agenda for monthly network-wide principal meetings,

and shifting the structure of those meetings so that they were more driven by principals' needs. In combination with monthly meetings with the entire group of principals, the advisory role of these principals signaled to the broader community of principals that the hub leaders valued their input. Principal advisors served as boundary spanners who facilitated dialogue between the network hub and its member schools. Hub staff reported that the group of principal advisors helped cultivate trust and loyalty among the leaders of member schools despite their diverse pedagogical philosophies. Further, as principals collaborated in determining the network's vision, there was greater buy-in around the network's instructional goals. Finally, empowering principals made their expertise accessible to hub leaders, giving the hub insight into conditions on the ground in network schools.

Similarly, SOs empowered their principals by working with them to co-create goals and objectives in the community school districts. District superintendents met with principals to analyze annual data and set goals for each school. One superintendent described the process:

***I let them look at the data. I let them mull over it, and I let them talk about what they saw. And then I talked about what it was I'd like to accomplish through them and their respective schools on behalf of the district.***

Rather than just giving principals a list of goals based on the hub's analysis of performance data, superintendents like this one used a collaborative data review process to empower principals to co-create goals. Typically, the school goals developed in these meetings were tied to a broader set of district goals. For example, one high school superintendent described how his

schools were all focused on three primary goals, but each goal had a different series of “action items.” Principals and schools would be tiered to different action items based on their specific needs. Once principals and superintendents agreed on goals and action items, superintendents discussed these goals with FSC personnel to develop appropriate supports.

Many of the other NSI established similar structures for hub personnel to review data with school leaders, but we observed network-level differences in the extent of cross-school variation in goals. Hub personnel faced a tradeoff between empowering school leaders to drive goal-setting and their capacity to manage the diverse needs of schools with myriad goals. Some networks addressed this tradeoff by having school improvement plans encompass network-wide goals in addition to school-specific goals.

Co-construction of goals was particularly important for the FSCs given they worked with multiple SOs and AOs to support schools. Together, FSCs and superintendents agreed on priorities for district improvement and developed a strategy for delivering support that included a clear division of responsibilities. Finally, all FSC directors discussed support plans with the central office to ensure alignment across the system. This highlights how the horizontal and vertical co-creation of goals served not only to cultivate buy-in, but also to enhance the alignment of instructional supports across the district and improve the fit between supports and schools’ needs.

### **Shared Data Analysis**

NSI also used shared data analysis to empower educators to make informed instructional decisions. One AO, in particular, has been a leader

in this area, using an advanced data tool and analysis protocols to support schools in better understanding and planning with data. Using the tool, AO leaders engaged teachers in item analysis of state assessment data. After uncovering patterns in the data, the AO facilitated a collaborative inquiry process in which teachers brainstormed about how their instructional planning could be informed by what they had learned. The data tool was also central to professional learning for school leaders. Principals and assistant principals dove into school assessment data, and the AO supported them in planning to lead data analysis with their school-based teams.<sup>8</sup> By providing member schools with a powerful tool to harness and make sense of data, the AO empowered their schools to make stronger data-based decisions.

### **Supporting Adaptation**

Building knowledge and skills through professional learning further empowered school-level practitioners. Professional learning made teachers and leaders better able to implement network-designed curricular resources on their own. For example, one district superintendent shared their vision of empowering teachers as math content experts with school leaders. Despite budget constraints, the principals partnered with the district to share costs, allocating funds to bring in an outside consultant to develop teachers’ and principals’ math content knowledge and math pedagogical skills. Although this was a significant investment of resources, the SO and school leaders hoped that the work would become self-sustaining over time, with teachers and principals taking over as leaders of math coaching and development at the school level. We saw learning as a mechanism for empowerment across NSI. At one AO, network staff created educative curriculum materials designed to cultivate instructional

expertise. In another example, a CMO trained its principals and teacher leaders to lead network- and school-level professional learning.

Some NSI, particularly the AOs and SOs, also found that making the adoption of instructional supports voluntary enhanced engagement with PL. The AOs and SOs each served a diverse portfolio of schools with a variety of structures, cultures, and educational philosophies. One network's director for curriculum and instruction explained why adoption of their curricular material was voluntary: *"The opt-in is really important because our curriculum materials are grounded in a particular pedagogical stance ... And to be honest in some schools it's just not a good fit."*

In contrast, the CMOs mandated that all schools adopt their curriculum, but the more uniform organizational culture across schools and the fact that the network hub founded most schools made it less likely that there would be a significant mismatch between the pedagogical stance of the materials and the instructional practices in their charter schools.

Regardless of whether schools opted-into a network curriculum or the hub mandated its use, all NSI in our sample valued adaptation and teacher-level instructional decision-making to some degree. As one network leader described, *"We want teachers to make adaptations. We want them to really be thoughtful about who their students are, what they need, what to emphasize, what to not emphasize and how to make those adaptations."* With this intention, this NSI designed their instructional guidance and PL to encourage and facilitate teachers' adaptive use of curriculum materials. For example, they set aside time during professional learning meetings for teachers to adapt lessons together:

***So the very foundation, the very premise is that teachers need to make decisions on what to teach and how to teach. So we started to do more work with teachers around, here's a reading resource that isn't your lesson. What does it mean to take this primary document that has an opening activity, questions, a synthesizing activity, but then turn it into a lesson? That's one of the ways in which we have been helping teachers make sense of the materials we provide and to decide how to enact them in their own schools.***

The networks varied considerably in the extent to which they extended decision rights to their member schools, particularly in the area of instructional guidance. While some NSI believed that preserving a high level of adaptability in their resources was essential to maintaining the professionalism of teachers' practice, the CMOs in our sample prioritized fidelity to the core of practices specified in their resources, giving teachers less authority over the use of instructional materials. The CMOs largely expected teachers to use the resources according to the prescribed sequence and pacing guide without the addition of supplementary materials. Weekly observations and meetings with academic deans serving in a coaching role allowed network staff to monitor teachers' compliance and support the use of instructional materials in practice.

CMO staff did want teachers to personalize their delivery of lessons and adapt them to some degree. For example, network-provided daily lesson resources were coupled with intellectual preparation protocols that encouraged teachers

to annotate lesson plans, develop alternative explanations, and prepare lines of questioning. This scaffolding supported minor adaptation, particularly with respect to delivery, but the CMOs discouraged more substantive changes to the content of lessons, valuing standardization across classrooms and the advantages of weekly shared assessments for tracking student progress and evaluating teachers.

Finally, while all network hubs in our sample recognized the importance of granting decision-rights to member schools, most also recognized that schools and individuals within those schools were at different levels of mastery. Thus, many networks practiced some degree of tiering in their approach to empowerment, whether at the individual teacher, school, or principal level. Many network leaders extended greater freedom and leadership to higher performing schools:

***So in terms of my high flying schools, doing well, my check ins with them are more like—what do you need? Can you give me feedback on this? What do you think this should be next year? What are we missing? So I'm asking them to take more leadership over it. I want you to mentor these other two principals that just started because you know so much at this point. So more using the mentors as thought partners.***

Giving these schools more freedom took pressure off NSI hubs, expanding their capacity to offer a variety of differentiated supports tailored to the diverse needs of the schools in their lowest-performing tier. The hub and struggling

schools also benefited from the expertise of so-called high flyers, especially when the hub intentionally created opportunities for information flow and collaboration among schools in different tiers.

Still other networks awarded teachers increasing decision-rights given demonstrated mastery over time. Both CMOs in our sample believed that while new teachers should largely stick to the script, following hub-provided curricular and pedagogical materials with fidelity, more veteran teachers were encouraged to innovate. Not only did experienced teachers gain more freedom to design their own lesson and unit plans, but they were also granted increased responsibility for supporting the development of new staff. CMOs believed these added responsibilities, which often came with additional salary or other benefits, would increase the likelihood strong teachers would stay with the network. Further, these teachers served to augment hub supports for new teachers. Finally, these master teachers created a pool of candidates that the network could, and often did, tap for more formal leadership positions when the need arose.

# QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How does your network empower school leaders and teachers?

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What routines do you use for shared goal-setting and data analysis?

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To what extent does your network extend decision rights to school-level personnel?  
In which areas?

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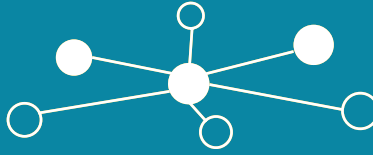
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# LESSON THREE

## Create two-way communication

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*“As things got more complex there needed to be a regular communication channel by which the organization would understand what was happening in our schools and how we could support them.”*

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**NSI benefited from regular two-way communication between the network hub and member schools. This top-down (from the hub to the schools) and bottom-up (from schools to the hub) flow of information assisted hubs in disseminating messages across networks and receiving essential feedback from member schools around design implementation, student progress, and local needs. A challenge for network hubs was to**

spread information to member schools while also learning about school-level practice from teachers and school leaders across the network.

### Formal and Informal Mechanisms for Information Sharing

Information flow, whether formal or informal, helped to coordinate activities, fine-tune programs, and distribute management duties. Formal mechanisms included strategies, such as instructional monitoring, formal data collection, meetings/routine check-ins, and advisory groups, among others. Informal mechanisms, including school-level discourse with practitioners and platforms for sharing problems of practice, allowed information to move quickly within networks, but without more formal channels to ensure regular information exchange and documentation, networks risked losing valuable information. While one CMO showed evidence of a highly-developed two-way communication system, most NSI were in the process of establishing more formal mechanisms for information sharing to increase communication within the network both horizontally and vertically.

One CMO used a range of formal and informal

mechanisms to enable ongoing two-way communication between the hub and member schools, summarized in Table 2 below. To gather information from member schools, the CMO established numerous formal data collection and reporting mechanisms, such as frequent measures of student achievement, teacher and leader observations, and a series of network-wide satisfaction surveys to gather evidence of school-level performance and to learn about local needs. The network also used frequent professional learning and coaching sessions with teachers and leaders to surface problems of practice in the field. The hub disseminated information to member schools through organizational documents, such as goal-setting memos and instructional resources, and through messaging during PL and coaching sessions. Regional superintendents and school leaders functioned as conduits for information sharing between the hub and member schools by sharing pertinent information with school leaders and soliciting feedback around school-level implementation.

Table 2. CMO Design for Two-Way Communication

School-to-Hub Communication	Hub-to-School Communication
Measures of student achievement (e.g., interim assessments, state test results)	Organizational documents about the respective roles of the hub and member schools
Teacher and leader observations	PL and coaching session messaging
Practitioner surveys	Curriculum and instructional materials
PL and coaching session feedback	Reporting requirements for accountability

Other NSI were developing more formal structures for two-way communication in response to changing network conditions. For example, another CMO initially relied heavily on informal processes for information sharing. Early in its history, the NSI leveraged personal relationships with members to gather information and communicate with its small group of schools. Hub informants described many channels through which the network engaged in informal communication, including email, online and video chat, text messaging, Google Hangout, and, more recently, Slack. These various platforms allowed for immediate communication between the hub and schools; however, they relied exclusively on trust and relationships to ensure the exchange of information. As the network grew, they recognized the need for more formal communication so the network was “not just relying on the individual capacity of people and on the relationship between the people.” As a result, the network developed a system of routine check-ins with executive directors who served as liaisons on each campus. One network informant described a multi-layered process in which:

***I’m talking to the executive director; [the CEO is] talking to the executive director. I have weekly check-ins with her. [The CEO] probably has bi-weekly check-ins with her. And in my check-ins, it’s just like, tell me what’s going on at the operations level so that I know whether there’s an issue. Whether it’s transportation or food service or assessments or state reporting, whatever the case may be, so that we can ensure the appropriate supports are being provided by the network.***

This NSI relied on key people at the school level to provide regular updates on school needs so that the network could respond appropriately. Further, network hub personnel regularly visited schools to observe practice and meet with school-level staff in person. Importantly, the CMO believed that communication from schools was not only meant to provide information about school-level processes but also to provide feedback on areas in which the hub could improve. The CMO prioritized quick responses to school needs, and a high-level staffer noted, “If people [at the network hub] aren’t being responsive, I hear about it. I hear very quickly: ‘I’m having an issue with the CMO.’ That usually comes to me, and we fix it because the schools need to know that we’re here for them.”

One affinity organization focused mainly on gathering direct feedback from school-level practitioners. They did so through hub coaches working directly with schools and principal advisory groups meeting regularly with network leaders. However, during our study the network found it necessary to establish more formal processes for information sharing. This included a process for school-level goal-setting where network leaders and school-level personnel met to share beliefs and plans around school improvement for the coming year.

Other NSI struggled to establish clear, two-way lines of communication with member schools. One of the affinity organizations relied less on formal lines of communication between the hub and schools and instead built its design around more informal and voluntary information coming up from the schools. In this network, communication between the hub and member schools typically occurred during professional learning sessions where network leaders actively solicited feedback from teachers through discussions and more formally through end of



session surveys. These sessions also served as the main touchstone for the hub to disseminate messages to member schools.

The affinity organization identified the need for more established structures to communicate with schools and to learn about on-the-ground implementation and school needs, but they struggled to do so given their limited presence in schools. As described by one network leader, *“I think one of the things that we’ve struggled with the most is actually thinking about how to capture implementation because we don’t want to create something that is onerous for teachers and/or that creates data that we simply aren’t going to look at.”* The network is currently contemplating how to establish more robust means of gathering information from the field.

### **Direct Hub-to-School Contact**

While NSI sometimes relied on informal or formal structures to encourage schools to share information about local implementation with the network hub, many hub personnel recognized this data revealed only part of the story. Sometimes it was necessary to go directly to the source. As one superintendent shared:

***That’s why we want to be in your schools...We want to come so we can learn about your schools intimately so we can see things that you may not see and say, ‘Hey I visited and I want to advocate for you and provide you with these things you need.’***

This superintendent and other network leaders recognized the benefit of spending time in schools as school visits revealed information school personnel may not have seen themselves, given the day-to-day demands on their

capacity. In some networks, especially smaller networks, hub personnel spent time nearly every day visiting network schools to keep a pulse on how their schools were progressing.

Frequent school visits were a common tool for information gathering in smaller, more geographically-focused NSI. However, even larger NSI supporting schools across the city found ways to get information about how supports were being implemented without such regular visits. Some NSI used video as a means of ensuring clear, two-way communication. Some hubs used video to observe practice in schools and provide feedback. In one network, the hub used video to provide feedback to aspiring principals. One hub facilitator described how the videos might be used to support new principals around coaching teachers:

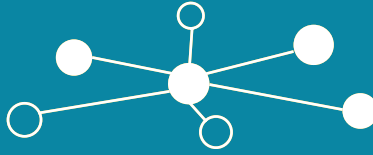
***Let’s say you’re coaching a teacher and you don’t know where to start, either because they are new, and there’s so many places to start or it’s a master teacher...Sometimes the school sends their feedback with the clip as well so I can see what was going on and see their feedback to say, ‘Ok. This is strong. This isn’t. This is where you need to be clearer. I don’t know why you’re pushing this. Explain it more.’***

By asking teachers or, in this case, new or aspiring principals, to share videos with the network hub for review and feedback, the hub was able to assess how practitioners were developing on the ground without having to visit every school weekly. Further, video provided important information to the network hub about ways their lesson materials could be revised. Importantly,

videos did not replace school visits. Rather, they supplemented the information gathered during in-person visits, which was a particularly useful tool for networks supporting a large number of diffuse member schools.

Evidence across the NSI pointed to a need for networks to establish ongoing two-way communication between the hub and member schools. In particular, established lines of communication helped hubs to learn about the needs and challenges faced by schools in order to better support members across the network. Established lines of communication also helped the hub to disseminate messages about their instructional design to members. This was particularly important for networks that spanned geographic regions.





# LESSON FOUR

## Facilitate inter-school collaboration

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*“ And so now we’re able to really move forward with the vision... really building collaboration across the district and utilizing each other as resources. ”*

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**One goal of the NSI studied here was to encourage and facilitate collaboration between member schools to promote knowledge sharing, accelerate network-wide learning and innovation, and strengthen the bonds of network trust. Facilitating inter-school collaboration allowed network members to leverage their collective expertise by surfacing critical challenges facing schools.**

## Formal Structures for Network-Wide Collaboration

One mechanism for building inter-school collaboration was PL opportunities. Many network hubs fostered formal opportunities for principals and others in leadership positions in member schools to meet and collaborate. For example, a high school superintendent allowed school leaders to opt into work groups around different district goals. Principals in these groups focused on that goal (e.g., leadership or academic rigor) over the course of a school year. The group shared readings, conducted inter-visitations, had discussions, and planned school-wide professional learning. Together these principals supported each other and increased network bonds and expertise: *“Despite the fact that sometimes our schools are very different... they have chosen a common lever, and in that area of focus... there’s an opportunity to find common ground.”* This practice helped the SO cultivate network buy-in, an important aspect of empowerment, as principals self-selected into these focus groups. Further, the SO found that self-selection into groups by interest enhanced principals’ investment in collaborating.

Another network in our sample supported principal collaboration through weekly principal meetings. While it can be difficult to bring school leaders together regularly, this network hub prioritized principal meetings believing the benefits of regular collaboration outweighed the drawbacks of time away from their schools. One principal in the network described what he gained during a typical meeting:

***Principals meet every week, and there is a rotating schedule...where we engage in both skill-building, norming, and resource sharing. So***

***this morning, all of us...met to align our vision of rapid feedback. We all shared videos of teachers across our schools, and we normed on the scores we would give them on a rapid feedback rubric. We next aligned on an action step we gave them to improve their practice. And then we’ll often share our professional learning plans with each other.***

Not only did these meetings provide school leaders with a sense of community and support, but they also served as a means of establishing greater coherence and alignment across network schools. By ensuring regular collaboration among school leaders, hubs could increase the likelihood that the network was both vertically and horizontally aligned, tightening network cohesion. This strategy was particularly important among expanding networks, such as this CMO, as regular principal collaboration and norming helped align new principals to the network vision.

Other networks focused collaborative opportunities at the teacher level, often within professional learning sessions. For example, one network fostered a series of PL meetings targeted specifically at teacher leaders across network schools. These sessions were, in part, opportunities for hub facilitators to norm their teacher leaders and provide common supports across schools. Further, the facilitators reserved significant time for teacher leaders to work with each other to share best practices and brainstorm solutions to common challenges. These teacher leader meetings provided an opportunity for individuals who might feel somewhat isolated within their own building, given their position between the teacher and administrator levels, to

build relationships and troubleshoot challenges with colleagues in the same role.

### **Leveraging Exemplars to Spread Strong Practice**

Another mechanism for facilitating inter-school collaboration was identifying principals and schools as network-wide exemplars of best practices. In these networks, principals with common problems of practice were encouraged to visit and work with exemplar principals to share expertise. As one network leader described:

***We have a school that...we're training to be a model DataWise school...The principal has been to Harvard, and she's also done the training, and they've come to support her at her school...As a part of my feedback, if I feel like [another] principal [in our district] warrants that level of support, I've been recommending that they then go and visit and interact with her. And then even across the summer, she's already told me that she's already scheduled follow-ups in the field with principals who want to assess more of how she's doing this data work.***

Many networks in our sample had designated teachers, principals, or schools to serve as lab sites that others in the network could visit to observe first-hand in order to build their own capacity. These lab sites were particularly powerful as they provided member schools an opportunity to see how similar schools were successfully implementing select practices.

Networks employing lab sites believed it would increase visiting schools' beliefs that they too could implement the practices with their own students.

### **Providing Opportunities for Informal Collaboration**

Many of the opportunities for collaboration described thus far have been formal and highly structured. Network hubs often provided protocols to guide collaboration, and hub facilitators played a key role in promoting efficient exchanges. However, some circumstances led networks to take a more loosely-structured approach to draw teachers together and inspire teamwork. One network described a less formal "planning forum" for teachers during the summer:

***We put out an open invitation...and we said, 'Come plan with us. Come do your planning. Don't go to Starbucks. Come to us. And if you don't need us, come enjoy the A/C and a nice classroom.' We created these communities where most people thought they were going to come and do their own thing, but by day two... they're educators. They can't help themselves. So for the privilege of air conditioning and per session and a beautiful space to work in, you give us the right to be nosey and the right to say, 'Hey you're both working on the same thing, why don't you go sit with each other for a few minutes and see what happens!'***

These forums provided an opportunity for

teachers who would have likely been planning individually during the summer months to work with others in similar subject or grade areas. Additionally, the hub provided instructional specialists to lend support. These loosely structured sessions may not have reached the pedagogical depth of more formal opportunities we observed. However, this hub's less formal approach successfully enticed teachers to dedicate some of their time to network-wide co-planning.

In other cases, collaborative practices that began as more structured, hub-fostered events became so popular among member schools that school-level personnel began organizing similar collaborative opportunities on their own. One network leader prioritized intervisitations as a way for schools to learn about best practices across the network. Over time, school leaders came to value these visits so much that they began scheduling them without hub personnel:

***They make school visits by themselves away from us, away from me. They now collaborate amongst themselves...I get emails when they are going out of the building like, 'I'm going to X school to watch, to look at this, to do this...' That is a solid testimony to the kind of intentionality that we have fostered in terms of collaborating.***

### **Fostering Collaboration in Networks Large and Small**

Nearly every NSI in our sample prioritized inter-school collaboration to some extent, recognizing its potential to foster growth and learning in any network. However, NSI with smaller

schools viewed such collaborative opportunities as particularly important to teacher development. As one hub respondent in such a network shared:

***I think one of the real weaknesses... of the [small] size schools that we [support] is that in a content area like math where things can get so specific, every teacher was a solo teacher. There was no one else in their school who taught their material. There was no one else they could talk to...If we ever want our teachers to get better, if we ever want our teachers to develop real content knowledge, they're going to have to have somebody to talk to about it, and it was rarely, if ever, a school leader who had that background. They needed someone who taught their content.***

Networks serving small middle schools and high schools emphasized creating communities of practices in which these teachers could engage with peers over deep content-focused learning. Often, these communities met during network-wide content-specific professional learning sessions. Hub personnel facilitating these PL sessions would ensure time for teachers to collaborate to discuss problems of practice, share tips and strategies, and serve as a general sounding board for ideas. Network leaders described these content-specific approaches to collaboration as particularly effective because *"it's not the entire math department looking at things, and you've got an Algebra 2 teacher saying this doesn't really apply. These are all geometry teachers, these are all algebra teachers who are struggling with the same things."* These communities were marked by especially

high levels of teacher buy-in and engagement.

Larger and/or more geographically diffuse NSI faced additional challenges to fostering regular opportunities for cross-school collaboration. While these networks offered opportunities for principals or teachers to come together at a central location, such meetings were few and far between. These larger, more dispersed networks tended to rely more on technology and strategic partnerships to foster more consistent collaboration. For example, one charter network with schools across multiple boroughs and, more recently, multiple states, provided opportunities for video meetings and created an online platform for sharing information and tools.

While part of the power of networks is the increased capacity and expertise that results from bringing multiple organizations together, it is critical for the hub to use their birds-eye view of the network to identify “best practices” in network schools and point member schools in the right direction. One network leader who recognized the importance of facilitating such connections described herself as a “conduit,” using her purview of “*the global picture of things*” to “*share good things from one school to another.*” Hub personnel in other NSI spoke of strategically partnering principals who could learn from each other’s relative strengths. Thus, even networks that struggled to forge strong connections among all schools could work strategically to connect small groups of schools within the network to leverage critical school-level expertise.



# QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What formal or informal opportunities have you created for teachers and principals to collaborate with other practitioners across the network?

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How are you leveraging the expertise in individual classrooms or schools to strengthen the network overall?

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How do you account for your network's size when designing opportunities for collaboration?

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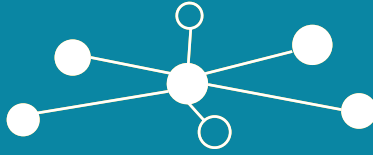
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# LESSON FIVE

**Build trust among member schools**

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**“** *We have this extraordinary asset in this network of schools, where there are relationships of trust, some common beliefs, and also a lot of variability. So, if you visited some of our schools – we have some project-based schools, we have some other traditional schools – and yet we come together around certain belief systems, and a commitment to equity and justice.* **”**

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**While NSI connect hubs and member schools, the strength and resilience of those organizational connections are predicated on human relationships. As one hub respondent**

noted:

***You need to establish enough of a presence that people on the ground feel comfortable coming to you for support...you need a personal relationship...to develop this or principals and teachers are just going to try to go it alone.***

Because of this, NSI stability and sustainability largely depend on relational trust. Trust enables individuals in member schools to feel comfortable acknowledging challenges and accepting the benefits of others' expertise. Further, trust is integral to a network's ability to communicate, learn, and ultimately improve as trust surfaces information about problems of practice that monitoring and evaluation may not. Finally, trust helps networks to manage turnover at the school and hub levels and better withstand inevitable changes in the political environment. In effect, trust moves the network from all member schools solving problems of practice on their own to working with other schools to fashion solutions which can be adopted across the network.

Arguments for the importance of trust in efforts to improve schools are not new. Perhaps most famously, Tony Bryk and Barbara Schneider argued that trust was the "connective tissue" that bounds individuals seeking to improve student outcomes in Chicago Schools.<sup>9</sup> While the arguments for trust may be well known, network trust can be difficult to establish and even more difficult to maintain. This is particularly true given the high stakes attached to improving student outcomes. However, NSI in our sample recognized trust was a key antecedent to the rest of their work. As one respondent summarized, "*I think in general...there's just so much urgency around how are we going to move these kids...*

*but we're missing the human element often, and that impacts the quality of work. You need to have trust.*" Trust is particularly important as efforts to improve schools require teachers and school leaders to be open to risk-taking so they can collectively learn: "*When you are trying to facilitate adult development, and you are trying to help people get better at something, the first thing to do is to build that relationship and have trust.*" There is no single formula for establishing network trust. However, networks in our sample that were successful in building and maintaining trust shared a number of structures, routines, and beliefs that were essential to their theories of change.

### **Network Structures that Aimed to Facilitate Trust**

A number of structures, such as formal meetings, advisory groups, school intervisitations, and retreats helped to build trust across many of the networks in our sample. These knowledge-sharing structures served to open up and demystify what was occurring in individual member schools. Many NSI used principal meetings or conferences as a means of building relationships with and among principals. Hub facilitators encouraged vulnerability by positioning themselves as learners, sharing their own moments of struggle or problems of practice. By creating a culture of openness and honesty in which everyone in the meeting was a learner, hub facilitators helped principals feel comfortable sharing problems of practice. This in turn provided hub leaders better insight into what was happening at the school level and allowed them to provide appropriate supports.

Another common structure used to develop trust across many NSI in our sample were school intervisitations. Sometimes referred to as learning walks, school intervisitations typically involved a

team of principals and hub facilitators visiting a network school with a particular instructional or organizational lens. These visits served both as a means of spreading best practices and of providing critical suggestions to the host principal on ways to improve. While at first hubs typically selected schools to host learning walks, principals began volunteering as they became more comfortable with the process and the level of trust increased.

***We've moved to a point where I no longer have to select, principals volunteer, which is great because we have crafted [learning walks] in a way where we want principals to say 'I want my colleagues to come because they will provide me with the feedback I will need in order for me to get better at the work that I'm doing.'***

In some NSI, principals eventually took it upon themselves to visit other district schools as critical friends. The willingness of principals to visit and accept visitors from other schools further exemplified the trust networks developed among principals through intervisitations and learning walks.

### **Routines to Deepen Network Trust**

Regular meetings and intervisitations were useful in fostering and deepening trust in many NSI in our sample, but others found these structures were insufficient. In networks that struggled to develop deep relationships, hub personnel reflected this was often because member schools were being forced out of “10 to 12 years of silo activity. I want to ease you out of that and into a place where you are going to now be part of a larger community that requires trust, sharing, reciprocal action, honesty, transparency.” To

overcome more entrenched barriers to trust, some networks relied on longer, network-wide retreats. Retreats provided opportunities to discuss issues that were difficult to tackle in shorter, more formal meeting settings. As one district informant shared:

***We were given permission to plan this retreat. And we wanted to focus on the performance of Black and Latino males...I think going to those conversations and really peeling back the onion about why people do their work and how hard it is and giving them the opportunity to start to learn...that really started to make a difference...It's not like, 'Today we're going to talk about race! These are the rules for talking about race.' It's more like, 'How do we create real and authentic opportunities for people to talk about things that are hard?'***

Retreats varied in length and structure; however, they all provided a forum for individuals from member schools to come together away from the everyday demands of work in schools. They explicitly carved out time for relationship building and deep, meaningful conversations that were difficult to address in more routine monthly meetings. Often retreats were one of the main structures network hubs used to overcome histories of distrust or misunderstandings among member schools.

One NSI that had developed especially strong trust across the network relied on protocols to routinize potentially vulnerable exchanges. For example, they developed a protocol to aid teacher leaders in sharing problems of practice with their peers from across the network. The

goal of the activity was not to “solve” the problem of practice, but to raise new ideas and help the group to reflect on their approaches to problem solving. Importantly, this same NSI used protocols to help teachers from member schools discuss and analyze successes. In this way, the network carved out time and offered guidance, allowing teachers to share their strengths and weaknesses, successes and problems – honoring the full range of member experiences to develop strong trust across member schools.

### **Speaking the Language of Trust**

Finally, in networks with high levels of trust, members at all levels regularly expressed their belief in transparency and described their network colleagues as a “family” or a “community.” While such language is unlikely to foster trust on its own, it does signal a set of beliefs underlying how hub and member schools interact within the network. Together, with the routines and structures mentioned above, such language suggested a network-wide commitment to maintaining trust and transparency.

The family dynamic was particularly prevalent in some of the smaller networks in our sample. For example, in one AO, hub facilitators made visible efforts to cultivate and respect relationships, and meetings were driven by practitioner needs. At the PL sessions we observed, principals and teachers appeared to feel safe sharing their struggles with staff from the AO. They also appeared to really value the input of network staff. Importantly, this trust did not only extend between schools and the network hub but also across member schools, who saw themselves as members of a learning community:

***For them I think it was really important that they continued with***

***this community of principals and schools they have. They all feel very connected to each other in terms of the work that they are all engaged in, and because the schools have grown out of one organization, we have a set of shared beliefs that all of our schools have signed on to.***

This community connection helped this AO withstand significant environmental turbulence, though some NSI in our sample needed to be more deliberate about fostering trust during periods of transition.

### **Attending to Trust During Times of Change**

Many of the NSI in our sample acknowledged that while it was especially important to build trust when they were launching their network or facing periods of radical transition or change, the work was never finished. At times, networks that were previously high in trust recognized relational strains due to changes in the network’s instructional vision, communication, balance of authority, or the external political environment. However, networks that were able to acknowledge and normalize periods of occasional uncertainty by giving member schools freedom and support to fail were successful in re-establishing trust despite periods of transition. For example, one superintendent shared:

***I want principals in a risk-taking environment. So, if you are in a risk-taking milieu, you are now able to expand, grow, develop. What you should understand is that I am pushing to that milieu, there is indeed a safety-net, maybe 20 feet below where you are, but you can’t expect***

***not to have issues, risk-taking.***

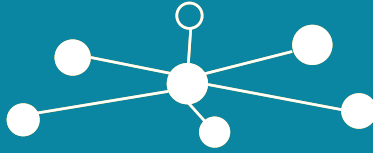
By reassuring the schools, there was a safety net to catch them if they failed. This superintendent helped member schools feel comfortable moving beyond their comfort zones and struggling with new learning. Similarly, another superintendent described how their team had embraced imperfection as part of their learning process:

***I think for us you have to get comfortable with knowing there's going to be discomfort and some of the waters are going to be muddy. And people sometimes have difficulty dealing with that. They want to have perfection right from the start. So you have to get comfortable with knowing we're not going to perfect this.***

In both cases, by ensuring hub personnel took the stance that learning was messy and imperfect, these superintendents sent a message to schools that they would be protected if they took risks and pushed themselves to try something new.

Across our study, we found that trust was integral to many of the other lessons in this guidebook. Whether it was investing in a common instructional vision, fostering inter-school collaboration, or supporting two-way information flow, trust strengthened the abilities of NSI in each of the other lessons we discuss. Perhaps this is because, ultimately, NSI seek to establish a community of educators who are willing to grow and learn together: communities built on trust.





# LESSON SIX

## Know the landscape

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*“ I want to demonstrate that we can operate in [different] environments...that really hold us accountable and assess whether we’re adding value to our system ...[W]e operate in a political system, and if we’re going to be here for the next 25 years, then we’ll probably have [district leaders] that fall along a range. ”*

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**Changes in the larger environment had a significant impact on the ways that NSI designed their instructional visions and supports, and carried major implications for NSI resources and sustainability. NSI needed to be mindful of such shifts and their position in the political**



and institutional environment to effectively adapt and strengthen their work.

Dramatic changes in the regulatory environment of NYC in 2015 brought this point into sharp relief. At that time, the NYCDOE engaged in a major restructuring that weakened the market mechanisms undergirding the system in which most NSI engaged.<sup>10</sup> For example, before the overhaul all individual school leaders were empowered to contract directly with the support network of their choice and had the option to change after a year; the central district office and local superintendents had little to no control over these arrangements. In 2015, using a more traditional governance structure, NYCDOE decided to geographical reassign the majority of schools to receive supports and direction from a regional field support center and a local superintendent.

A large group of high schools were given the option to continue associating with a few remaining AO networks of their choice, but they were also overseen by an assigned superintendent and supported by an affinity field support center (AFSC). In contrast to the past, the DOE determined AO contract renewals, and the timeline was extended to every three years. And, rather than school leaders using their own criteria to judge satisfaction with AO services, the AFSC planned to formally assess these networks based on measured contributions to school improvement. In addition, the AOs had tighter budgets for their services, and the DOE narrowed AOs' responsibilities in supporting schools.

### **New Demands and New Challenges**

The implications of this shift away from school-driven AO selection are complex, inserting new challenges but also positive

opportunities. In terms of challenges, AOs became accountable to the demands and criteria set forth by district actors on top of their primary responsibilities to serve the requests of their member schools. These district actors have leaned on these AO networks, pressing at times for additional services, for coordination with other district support organizations and offices, or for supports to non-member schools, among other things. AOs had to attend to and navigate an expanded group of clients; district dissatisfaction could mean the ultimate demise of the AO's contract. The reduced budget had a consequence for AO staffing and range and frequency of school supports, particularly for the smaller AO that operated with fewer schools and a less diverse range of funding sources.

### **New Designs and Expanded Opportunities**

While these external shifts were challenging and required adaptations, the district restructuring also presented NSI with new opportunities and ways to strengthen their operations. For example, the three-year contract with the district rather than annual renewal and negotiations with member schools enabled AO leaders to set longer-term goals and generated more stability. Rather than respond to each and every request of their members, AOs leveraged these new contractual conditions to improve strategic planning, create a more focused set of supports and staffing, and generate deeper discussions about more effective ways to build specific school capacities.

Both AOs scanned the environment for new ventures that fit their mission and that would bolster their financial positions. For example, the smaller AO expanded their Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools, an area recently incentivized in the state regulatory and resource environment that aligned with their

vision of postsecondary readiness. Further, this AO launched a pilot to disseminate a strong program they had developed to schools in other states, giving them an opportunity to expand their reach and secure the potential for further growth.

The central office granted responsibility for additional district schools to the larger AO during the restructuring, fortifying their position. In addition to financial gain, they accumulated considerable political capital from their development of portable, open-access instructional resources, data tools, and data strategies that were widely used by teachers and schools outside their core member network.

### **Navigating New Relationships and Responsibilities**

The restructuring also signaled a dramatic shift for SOs and FSCs. While superintendents existed under the previous regime, they exercised minimal power within the district. In the new structure, superintendents were given expanded operating budgets, a larger team to support their work, and clear authority over their member schools. Additionally, many superintendents were replaced or shifted during the restructuring, eliminating any political or social capital the superintendents had established with schools under the previous administration.

FSCs were an entirely new and untested element in the structure. Given all the new roles, responsibilities, and personalities, the initial restructuring proved to be a period of substantial uncertainty for SOs and FSCs. Both had to prove themselves to member schools, establishing or re-establishing community ties and building the social capital necessary to advance their missions.

In many cases, SOs and FSCs engaged in practices we have already discussed. They developed clear visions for school improvement and systems to allow for consistent communication between their offices and member schools. They developed and disseminated common instructional guidance but ensured that school leaders maintained some of the decision rights around curriculum and PL that they had gained under the previous administration. To soften pushback against the tightening of central oversight, SO and FSC hub leaders created opportunities for schools to share best practices with each other, setting the norm that expertise was available, and should be accessed, laterally throughout the network – not just from the hub offices. Finally, they focused on cultivating strong relational trust with key school personnel, including principals and APs, teacher leaders, and even Family-Teacher Associations. NSI entering a new or altered landscape can engender social and political capital by taking the time to understand the history of their new context and gaining buy-in from local members.

### **Expanded Internet Coordination**

The restructuring also prompted increased coordination and collaboration across the many NSI in the district. This web of control and interdependence strengthened communication and working relationships across the AOs, superintendent offices, and new FSCs, augmenting the capacity of each to provide support. For example, through regular AFSC meetings, NSI shared and learned about best practices in other organizations. Some network hubs delivered supports directly to schools in other NSI, providing their schools with expertise that their own hub organizations lacked. The AFSC also built trackers to coordinate hub-school interactions across NSI to make sure each school was receiving consistent and coherent support. One

high school superintendent relied on its AO to keep his or her team informed about work in the schools. Since AOs had longer, more well-established relationships with their schools, they could provide SOs with valuable knowledge about school-level processes and help broker relationships that would have been difficult for newly empowered SOs to initiate. As one AO respondent described:

***We have a lot of information about assistant principals at our schools, because we've got a team that is much bigger than [the SO's team]. So, we can be in those schools more than [the SO] can. We have a bigger team, and we have fewer schools. So, [the SO] sees us as an asset.***

Similarly, rather than compete with the new superintendent over the schools, the AO strove to immediately establish a collaborative partnership, seeing the superintendent “as part of a web in the DOE as opposed to...you know, ‘We want to be the boss of the school; no, you want to be the boss of the school’. This sort of back and forth. We’ve got to think much more from a sharing of practice perspective.”

On the one hand, sharing practice and ensuring coordination represented a new line of work for the AOs that generated complexity and was not without challenges. However, collectively these organizations formed a sort of super-network, comprised of multiple network hubs that benefited from each others’ knowledge of schools and unique compendium of supports. Through coordination, NSI were able to offer more robust supports than any would have been able to provide on their own. As one NSI respondent reflected:

***They are really collaborative. They offer some support to schools, we offer some support to schools. For example APs, assistant principals, are people we haven’t touched much, nor had [the AFSC]. I mean they were sort of a forgotten group we learned this year. So we are talking to both the superintendent and the Affinity folks about better supporting our assistant principals. Part of it is just figuring out how to be really clear about what they do for schools and what we do for schools, and no one seems too turf. No one has enough staff to do it all.***

NSI operating in an environment with a diverse variety of network hubs mapped assets and sought opportunities to build cross-network collaborations to support learning and improvement. While such collaborations and partnerships can be complex to manage, doing so can improve the coherence and consistency of supports their schools receive, expand opportunities for the NSI, and mitigate some of the negative political and operational consequences of a shifting environment.

# QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Can you identify the regulatory risks and opportunities in your operating environment?

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Do you anticipate major shifts, and if so, what will this changing landscape mean for your improvement designs and resource stability?

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Have you made efforts to coordinate your work with other NSI?

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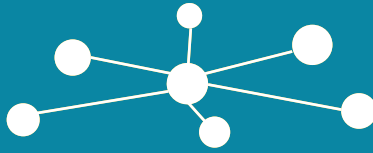
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# LESSON SEVEN

## Design for improvement

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**“** *[What I learned] from my visits to schools, especially with the shift to the Common Core, was the need to deepen content, our teachers’ knowledge of the content, the need to deepen the conversations that were happening in classrooms.* **”**

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For many years, designers of school improvement centered their efforts on developing a polished set of interventions and sought ways to implement them with fidelity. They viewed deviations from hub guidance about practice as a core explanation for failure. This approach focused more on solving problems of fidelity by teachers

and school leaders implementing instructional programs than on understanding variations and seeing them as a primary source of information to improve the quality and efficacy of the interventions.<sup>11</sup> More recent paradigms critique this “one and done” research and development strategy as a simplistic view of the problems of educational practice. In its place, some propose the development of systems and processes for acquiring knowledge and evidence to help designers recalibrate their supports, and follow a cycle of continuous improvement.<sup>12</sup> The NSI in our study hewed much more closely to the second approach, viewing their supports as works in progress and deploying mechanisms to gather data and other evidence to build and modify them.

The New York State Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and results from more aligned state assessments produced seismic shifts in how NSI hubs judged the quality of their instructional guidance and supports. Weak and uneven results from once-successful networks led them to a profound reassessment of the work, and, in some cases, stimulated demands from teachers and leaders to produce resources that could better prepare them for the complex changes in practice that the CCLS required. The power of the CCLS (and aligned assessments) to change the work of these organizations cannot be overstated. As we described above, it led them to design more specific and comprehensive instructional materials and set base-level expectations for classroom practice. The latter, in turn, led to a cascade of other changes to NSI supports for teachers and school leaders, and to the indicators hubs used to gather information about and make improvements to this work. Both of the AOs, for example, shifted a significant share of their resources and planning into cross-site professional development around their new instructional designs, away from the

kind of individual teacher coaching that had once been more central to their work.

### **The Groundwork for Improvement**

NSI found that more specific and codified resources produced a stronger foundation for professional dialogue and learning, enabling them to better plan for and focus their supports for school improvement. As one leader said:

***There’s something to ground your engagement with schools that’s on the student level, that serves as an organizer for conversations, and also a check on the tendency to push and pull schools in a million directions with no eye toward how many things can be tended to and in what sequence or order or combination those things should be tended to.***

Moreover, identifying base-level practices and common expectations helped NSI build systems they could use to improve this work. What elements of their design were most critical and non-negotiable for student learning? What were the gaps and problems that their designs missed? Were there any adjustments or additions educators made to their designs, and if so were they effective at solving unforeseen challenges? With planned study around such questions, NSI learned from their members about what it takes to solidify support for the implementation of instructional practices, and to incorporate promising innovation.

### **Contingencies in Measuring Instructional Design and School Improvement Processes**

While all of the NSI used state test results as an

important gauge of the efficacy of their instructional resources, such measures alone could not supply sufficient feedback for this developmental learning task. To varying degrees, each built other indicators to acquire more regular and immediate information, such as teacher and leader surveys, teacher and leader advisory groups, school site walkthroughs, instructional observations, formative assessments of student learning, and more. Some established structured routines to analyze the evidence and incorporated lessons learned into their instructional resources.

But there were key differences in the approaches that these NSI used to improve their work that stemmed, in part, from their varying governance arrangements. With more direct authority over member schools, the CMOs were in a position to more readily develop and require a comprehensive set of resources and processes at the school level, such as regular, school-based PL sessions and monitoring tied directly to the instructional practices they wanted to inculcate. One CMO created a robust series of hub- and school-level mechanisms to support and gather evidence about those who had successfully mastered instructional practices. Proficient practitioners were given leeway to experiment with adaptations or additions to the design. Each year this CMO would use released state test results to identify high performing schools and teachers, and over the course of a month hub leaders would interview and even videotape innovative practices to distribute as a resource for others, or to revise their central design.

The second CMO had similarly comprehensive instructional resources and mechanisms to secure and gauge fidelity to instructional practices. However, while this CMO articulated the desire for teacher adaptation and thoughtful use of their resources, hub leaders had not created

any processes to nurture and support experimentation, or to gather information about and incorporate positive changes. Hub leaders recognized that they needed to establish more deliberate strategies for innovation and redesign.

The context for AOs and FSCs placed some constraints on their ability to develop a similar hub learning strategy. With a more powerful set of district superintendents pressing in on schools, and without their own power to mandate practice, AOs were reluctant to adopt new and intensive measures to gather information on the implementation of their instructional designs by those who had opted to use them. And, although they had formative assessments directly aligned to their instructional resources, these were similarly optional for teachers to use and thus not a reliable source of feedback on the work. Instead, these NSI relied much more on advisory groups and surveys of participants in their professional learning as a primary source of information about their design. They also gauged their success by the numbers of clients regularly participating in their professional learning.

FSCs, too, were reliant on member districts and schools opting in to their services. Here client participation was also a key source of feedback about whether FSC supports were satisfying member needs. This fairly simple measure led to significant changes in what the hubs provided. For example, during its first two years in operation, one FSC created borough-wide PL sessions based on their own analysis of what the majority of district clients needed. This process led to a search for common ground across a diverse array of instructional designs, and, ultimately, a fairly generic set of sessions. These PL events were poorly attended and were not getting strong traction within schools. In their third year, this FSC shifted the content and

delivery of PL so it was located in individual districts and tied to the more specific instructional initiatives in which these districts were engaged. Superintendents then reinforced this content in their own leadership meetings with principals. With improved coordination and alignment across levels of the system, teacher attendance and enthusiasm for the FSC professional learning sessions increased.

Networks' abilities to learn and improve were also dependent, in part, on their organizational maturity. Both CMOs in our sample had been operating for at least a decade, giving them ample time to develop information systems, evaluative routines, and communication mechanisms that together provided a relatively complete picture of their networks' status over time. Similarly, the AOs in our sample had been operating in the district for some time despite the new pressures that the recent restructuring had placed on their organizational visions and procedures. Not only did both AOs collect substantial information about school progress throughout the year, but they also regularly analyzed this data alongside school leaders to ensure support plans were appropriate to meet schools' shifting needs.

On the other hand, SOs in their current form and FSCs were new players on the scene. They spent much of their first year or two figuring out the logistics of forming a support network. One FSC director we spoke with in February of year one had just hired the individuals necessary to provide instructional professional learning sessions to schools. Thus, it was not surprising that many of these teams used somewhat crude measures of network success in the early years; simply being able to offer professional learning and seeing teachers show up and appreciate those offerings was an improvement. However, as these organizations evolved, they too began moving toward more sophisticated means of

assessing their impact. FSC personnel spoke of using student work samples to determine the extent to which instruction had improved over the course of a professional learning cycle. One FSC director summarized this shift to more sophisticated reflection as follows:

***In year one, our impact report was all about participation and participant feedback, and this year I said to them, for year two, I'm not interested in participants saying that they enjoyed our PL, because if they didn't, you guys wouldn't have jobs. So their challenge was to create a story, like show me—I don't need to know that every teacher that came to our PLs did everything we wanted them to do. I want a story. And they can be different teachers, but I want to see if each division can tell a story of how they impacted adults who work with kids.***

Thus, we found some evidence suggesting these newer organizations were moving toward increasingly sophisticated routines for assessing the efficacy of their supports and changing course when necessary – improving their mechanisms for improvement.

In sum, the type of NSI and its mode of instructional oversight and engagement mattered for the type of indicators they needed and felt able to deploy to gauge the quality and efficacy of their supports. In addition, the maturity of the improvement design and of the NSI itself influenced which measures were appropriate to use.





# CONCLUSION

The seven lessons presented here, synthesized from the results of our three-year study of a diverse sample of organizations, highlight strategies for operating networks for school improvement that proved valuable across sectors. Despite variation in their sizes and positions in the broader policy environment, all of the NSI we studied shared a common goal: to improve the implementation of rigorous college- and career-ready standards in their member schools.

We observed a number of ways network hubs worked to keep member schools aligned with their priorities. Of utmost concern was how NSI balanced power between and among central hubs and member schools. On the one hand, member schools needed to exercise autonomy over their education program in order to feel a sense of buy-in and ownership. On the other hand, the hub needed to facilitate network coherence with regard to curriculum and instruction. As illustrated in this guidebook, there was no one way to balance power between the hub and its member schools. Rather the aim was to spread the instructional vision throughout member schools in order to provide clarity and coherence across the network. Member schools need to both receive information from the hub and feed information back to the hub. Member schools need to communicate with others in their network such that the network begins to operate as a spider web with bidirectional channels of communication flowing in all directions.

We also observed networks tended to adopt organization-wide processes of continuous improvement, as discussed in Lesson 7. When continuous improvement is done well, the variability that emerges during implementation can be a powerful source for hub and teacher

learning. This idea rests on the notion that if organizations are clear about their expectations for practice and changes that will result, networks for school improvement can learn and improve by studying positive and negative discrepancies between expectations and results.

We hope the lessons presented in this guidebook prove useful as you work to create more robust networks for school improvement, and help you think through different models for designing and managing the complexities of the work at hand. If we have been successful, you will be able to learn and adapt the experiences of networks in this study to build and sustain improvements in your own context.

# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Wohlstetter, P. & Lyle, A. G. (2019). Inter-organizational networks in education. Chapter 12 in Connolly, M., Eddy-Spicer, D. H., James, C. & Kruse, S. D. (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of School Organization*, pp. 195-209. London: Sage Publications.

<sup>2</sup> Barletta, B., Comes, D., Perkal, J., Shumaker, R., Wallenstein, J., & Yang, B. (2018). *Networks for School Improvement: A Review of the Literature*. New York, NY: Columbia University Center for Public Research and Leadership; Peurach, D. J. & Glazer, J. (2012). School improvement networks as a strategy for large-scale education reform: The role of educational environments. *Educational Policy*, 27(4), 676-710; Peurach, D. J., Glazer, J. L. & Lenhoff, S. W. (2016). The developmental evaluation of school improvement networks. *Educational Policy*, 30(4), 606-648.

<sup>3</sup> Honig, M. I. (2004). The new middle management: Intermediary organizations in education policy implementation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26(1), 65-87.

<sup>4</sup> Wohlstetter & Lyle, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Portin, B. S. & Knapp, M. S. (2011). Leadership and the challenges to supporting learning in urban schools. Chapter 29 in Townsend, T. & MacBeath, J., (Eds.), *International Handbook of Leadership for Learning*. New York, NY: Springer; Scott, J. & DiMartino, C. (2009). Public education under new management: A typology of educational privatization applied to New York City's restructuring. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 84(3), 432-452.

<sup>6</sup> Massell, D., Lyle, A.G., & Duff, M. (forthcoming). Improving networks for school improvement: The relationship of organizational characteristics to designs for learning (working title).

<sup>7</sup> Charles, R. I. (2005). Big ideas and understandings as the foundation for elementary and middle school mathematics. *Journal of Mathematics Education Leadership*, 7(3), 9-24.

<sup>8</sup> Bambrick-Santoyo's *Driven by data: A practical guide to improve instruction* (2010) inspired many of the network's data routines.

<sup>9</sup> Bryk, A. S. & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

<sup>10</sup> The CMOs were an exception. Although the new political regime was unfriendly to charters and made expansion in New York City difficult, the district did not directly intrude on their daily instructional operations. As we described earlier, what impacted the NSI instructional design most was the state testing regime, with its underlying orientation to the Common Core.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>11</sup> McLaughlin, M. M. (1990). The RAND change agent study revisited: Macro perspectives and micro realities. *Educational Researcher*, 19(9), 11-16.

<sup>12</sup>Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & Lemahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press; Peurach, Glazer & Lenhoff, 2016

# APPENDIX

## A Primer on NSI in Our Study: What They Do and Who They Are

All networks in our sample had one common goal: improving the implementation of rigorous college- and career-ready standards in member

schools. However, they varied in terms of the types of supports they provided, their staffing, and their network structures.

Table 1A illustrates different supports offered by each type of network in this study:

Table 1A. Responsibilities of Each Network Hub

Type of network	School reviews	Curricular/ instruction support for principals	Curricular/ instruction support for teachers	Community liaison	Operations	HR & Budget	Legal
SOs	✓	✓		✓			
FSCs			✓		✓	✓	✓
AOs		✓	✓				
CMOs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

While some NSI were responsible for a full range of school supports, others were more targeted in their supports. At times, this required NSI to work collaboratively to ensure member schools received a full range of coherent supports.

### How Are NSI Staffed?

All network hubs had a few staffing commonalities. All NSI had individuals focused on curricular and instructional supports. Some, like coaches, worked directly with teachers and leaders to

develop instructional expertise. Others, like curriculum and assessment developers, focused on creating network-wide materials and tools to support instruction. In some networks, the same individuals fulfilled both roles. Curricular and instructional experts were often former teachers, teacher leaders, or school-level instructional deans or coaches. While classroom teachers possessed relevant instructional expertise, some hubs found the need to support their skills around adult development and learning.

Additionally, all hubs had a leader or leadership team. These directors, CEOs, or superintendents were integral to the hubs' missions and visions. In larger networks, leaders focused more on overseeing hub staff who interacted with member schools, while in smaller networks, hub leaders both oversaw their own staff and worked directly with member schools. Many hub leaders had substantial prior educational experience, often exceeding 20 years of classroom, school, and/or coaching experience. While some leaders were brought up from within the ranks of their own network, others were brought in from outside their network or even the New York context, given a demonstrated record of education leadership in another context.

Finally, there were many positions that were unique to certain network hubs. For example, some hubs employed data experts who were able to gather, analyze, and produce

user-friendly reports on school- and network-level progress to inform decision-making. Some employed HR experts who supported the hiring process in member schools. While some hubs were so large, and their service providers so diverse, that they resembled smaller versions of the NYC central district office, others were far leaner operations, focusing on a limited range of supports.

### How Are NSI Structured?

While some networks were more centralized with the hub exercising direct accountability over member schools, others were more decentralized with schools opting into the network or various levels of network services. These structural variations had implications for the ways in which network hubs approached their work. Table 2A, below, highlights some of the main structural characteristics of the various NSI in our sample:

Table 2A. Structural Characteristics Across NSI

Type of network hub	Network formation	Accountability over schools	Relationship to district central office	Curriculum and instructional decisions
<b>Local superintendents (SOs)</b>	Schools assigned by geographic region	<b>Strong:</b> SOs are primary rating officers for all traditional public schools.	<b>Directly accountable:</b> SOs report to district chancellor.	<b>Decentralized:</b> SOs recommend curriculum and instructional supports.
<b>Field support centers (FSCs)</b>	Schools assigned by geographic region	<b>Weak:</b> FSCs have no authority over the schools in their network; SOs have all authority.	<b>Indirectly accountable:</b> FSCs report to central office.	<b>Decentralized:</b> FSCs provide optional instructional supports.
<b>Affinity Organizations (AOs)</b>	Schools opt-in a-geographically; some schools started by AOs	<b>Weak:</b> AOs have no authority over the schools in their network; SOs have all authority.	<b>Directly accountable:</b> AOs contract with central office and report to Affinity FSC.	<b>Decentralized:</b> AOs provide optional curriculum and instructional support.
<b>Charter management organizations (CMOs)</b>	Schools grown or taken over by CMOs	<b>Strong:</b> CMOs have direct authority over their schools; charter authorizers are primary rating officers of charter schools.	<b>Not accountable:</b> CMOs operate parallel to the district; they are instead accountable to charter authorizers.	<b>Centralized:</b> CMOs mandate the use of common curriculum and instructional supports.

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## Managing Networks for School Improvement: Seven Lessons from the Field

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