

Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union

A Collaborative Approach to Reinventing Professional Learning

Boston Public Schools is one of the highest performing urban public school systems in the country. In order to continue to improve, we are committed to supporting our educators and administrators, and like school systems across the country, we have found that our systems of support and professional learning need to be updated. This theory of action articulates the shared beliefs of the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union of what actions and systems might address these challenges and allow us to create a system of professional learning that meets the needs of our educators and students, and serves as a bright spot in the national movement to reinvent professional learning.

The Challenge

Though we have many examples of outstanding professional learning in BPS, our system suffers from a number of challenges that prevent us from reaching our full potential. These challenges include:

- an absence of a system for assessing learning needs at the individual, school, and system level
- the inability of educators to consistently access relevant professional learning,
- a lack of clarity about the responsibilities of various stakeholders for planning, providing, accessing, and engaging in professional learning, and
- an absence of a shared understanding of the common elements of meaningful professional learning

We begin with the premise that no single system can do everything, that systems should be clear about what they do and don't do, that individuals within a system should know their responsibilities, and that a high functioning system embraces and leverages the tension between individual and collective needs and desires, and those services are provided through complementary systems.

Theory of Action:

If we use a collaborative labor-management approach to continuously and authentically engage BPS community voices in the creation, maintenance, and continuous innovation of a system of professional learning that:

- Assesses individual, team, school and district learning needs;
- Identifies individual, team, school and district learning priorities;
- Is easy to navigate;
- Consistently successfully matches educators with relevant PL inside the district (and outside where appropriate);
- Provides leaders of PL with a consistent set of structures or building blocks to design and implement high quality professional learning experiences
- Builds flexible capacity for continuous improvement in all areas of a coherent system

We can create a system that:

- Improves student learning and well-being;
- Improves teacher practice individually and at scale;
- Improves the way teams work and learn together
- Drives school and district-wide improvement
- Promotes the successful induction and retention of teachers;
- Helps all educators make sustainable improvements in practice;
- Fosters, celebrates, and disseminates success and innovation; and
- Promotes educator satisfaction, morale, and retention.