Know Them by Name, Know Them by Need

<div style="text-align:right">**2**</div>

Stults Road Elementary School (PreK–6), Dallas, Texas

> *Your principal, Mr. Spiller . . . created this program because after watching you every day, he noticed something different in you. . . . He noticed that you have what it takes to be a great student, an upstanding young man and a leader here within Stults Road Elementary School. He saw something in you that you may not even see in yourself at the moment . . . but you will in time.*
>
> *Why you? You were chosen because you have what it takes. You have what it takes to do whatever in life you want to do. You have what it takes to be a great student . . . Basically, you have "it," but you might need a little help developing "it." Now, don't get caught up in the fact that someone thinks you need extra help. What we're really saying is that with a little extra help, you can do things you never even thought possible. We think you can be exactly what you have ever dreamed of being. We want to invest in you to help you reach that potential.*
>
> *Source:* Darwin Spiller. Stults Road Elementary Boys' Mentoring Program brochure. Used with permission.

At Stults Road Elementary School (Stults Road), in a working-class, North Dallas neighborhood,[1] several educators noticed that their program to support good behavior was not working for a small group of African American and Latino boys. When educators looked closely at this group, they noticed these boys did not have enough positive male role models at home. Principal Darwin Spiller,[2] himself an African American man, worked with colleagues to shape a plan for these boys. He reached out to

men of color in the community to become mentors. Months later, a parent volunteer who had been supported to build skills and become the school secretary, started a similar group for girls who needed extra supports. That's just how it works at Stults Road. Educators use evidence and good judgment to identify an impediment to learning, and then collaboratively shape a personalized response to student needs. Immediately.

Asked what they're going to be focusing on next year, the leaders say, "We have no idea." Instead of elaborate plans that map out hundreds of action steps, they have high goals all around for every student and educator, and assumptions that everyone will work toward them. They look for solutions and continuously apply themselves to learning new practices, and receive the tools, resources, and time to support learning and implementing solutions. Short-term data cycles help them take the next right step and track progress overall (see Figure 2.1).

In the school's spotless entryway, celebrations of the school's success reflect numerous and varied accomplishments. The walls are studded with accolades for school and individual teacher achievements, as well as photos of students and teachers, student work, and questions for students to ponder. Higher up, a sign heralds the school year's theme: "Know them by name. Know them by need." Children pass by wearing T-shirts that say "Distinguished Student."

IMMERSION IN THE CULTURE OF LEARNING

Crystal Adindu, a campus reading specialist, supports both students and teachers in improving practice. This morning she is coaching a first-year kindergarten teacher, Lauren Trostel. At last week's grade-level team meeting, the novice teacher shared that she wanted to learn more about Writer's Workshop. Another team member offered to model a lesson in the new teacher's classroom. Then she worked with Mrs. Adindu to set it up that week. Using Writer's Workshop, the seasoned teacher demonstrates student engagement techniques that involve movement and Motown: "Stop! In the Name of Love" is sung with new lyrics, "Stop! It's the end of the sentence." She models approaches to student management, and strategies to build academic vocabulary. The first-year teacher and the specialist observe together, sometimes conferring, sometimes taking detailed notes. Later that afternoon, the specialist meets with the first-year teacher to reflect on the observation and help plan the next writing lesson.

A more seasoned resource room teacher, also new to Stults Road, *receives the same variety of professional learning supports* during her first year at the school—opportunities to learn from her grade-level colleagues,

cognitive coaching with a trained mentor, daily interactions with instructional specialists, and mailbox greetings from the school Social Committee. This is the Stults Road welcome to *all teachers.* "The range of supports we offer teachers new to the school models rigor and engagement as the norm. . . . It's not disrespect about what teachers do or do not know. It's reflection on practice . . . both regarding work with individual students and general instructional supports, and doing that in collaboration," comments Darwin Spiller, principal of the school for nine years.

Interdependent and Aligned Teams

In early October, the third-grade team is reviewing reading assessment data, as it does weekly. The school instructional and data specialist, Lin Wall, has prepared a summary document for each child that outlines current and past assessment

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Stults Road Elementary

Demographics and Commendations

Number of Students: 524

Number Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch: 80%

Percentage of Limited English Proficient: 38%

Percentage of Special Education: 12%

Racial/Ethnic Percentages:

- Hispanic: 47%
- Black: 41%
- White: 5%
- Asian/Pacific Island: 4%
- Other: 3%

Sampling of Commendations

- National Title I Distinguished School
- National Demonstration Campus for PLC Implementation
- Texas Education Agency Exemplary School
- Featured in Learning Forward (NSDC) and Laureate/Walden University Professional Development Videos
- National AVID and TRIBES Trainers
- Elementary Administrator of the Year, 2007

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results from formative, progress-monitoring, and benchmark data in every subject, so achievement results are easily available at a glance. At this week's meeting, teachers are reviewing current assessment results to place students into *targeted instruction groups.* Targeted instruction time in literacy takes place for 45 minutes daily to ensure that any student who needs it receives additional time to master agreed-upon learning outcomes. All classroom teachers and learning specialists divide up the students, so they work in small, fluid groups. "We support every teacher to work with every level," Lin Wall comments. "Each student has to know multiple teachers. That gives them a lot of people who care about their learning." That same day, the sixth-grade team shares assessment data. Working with Tonya Mitchell, a campus reading specialist, they group 65 students for targeted instruction. Data grounds the meeting, and

teachers analyze academic and personal information about students and groups: who needs help with engagement; who has trouble with context clues; which high-interest, low reading level materials will appeal to boys in one group; which after-school tutoring strategies have most helped a specific group of English Language Learners. The reading specialist shares new research-based tools she acquired at a district meeting; some will support enrichment for students who have mastered the content. As the 45-minute meeting comes to a close, each teacher creates an action plan with learning goals and instructional resources for their targeted instruction group. (See online resources for materials used to plan targeted instruction.) In addition, Mrs. Mitchell completes a Team Feedback form and e-mails it to the principal, mentioning lingering issues regarding students and team needs.

Figure 2.1 Stults Road Elementary School's State Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) 2006–2011 Whole School Results
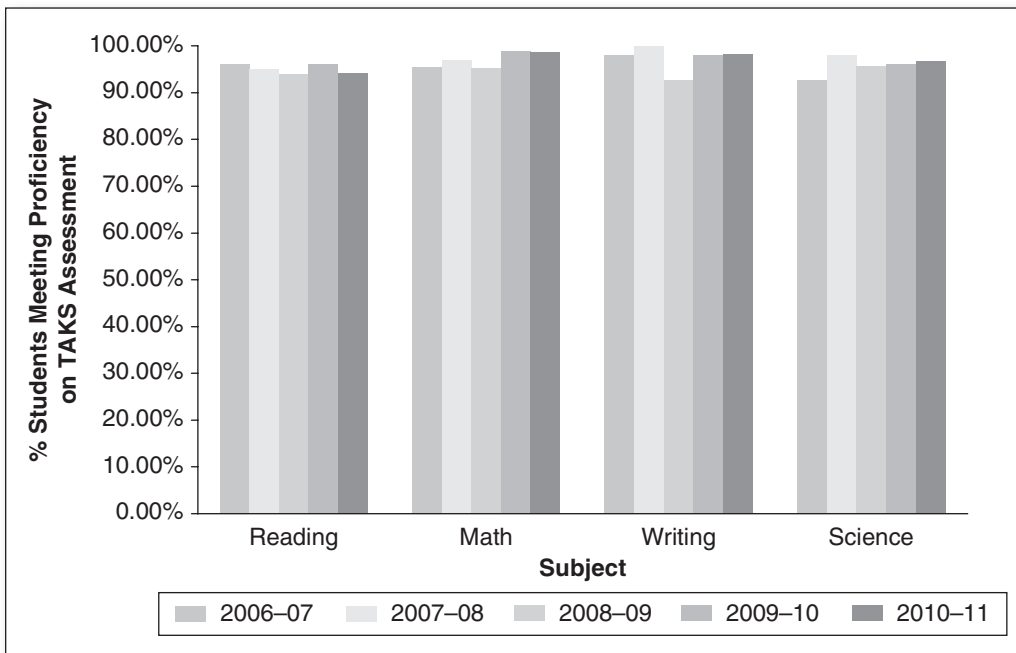
Source: Texas Education Agency, http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2012/campus.srch.html (retrieved September 20, 2012).

As they take their leave, sixth-grade team members discuss this week's vertical team meetings, and one teacher offers a friendly reminder that the KN-6 Vertical Reading Team is developing challenging resources to support students in enrichment groups. Teachers developed these materials after analysis of grade 4–6 student assessment results showed

that students who had met reading benchmark targets showed flat scores over time. Following an action-research model in which they review internal and external resources, vertical teams identified effective instructional practices for internal dissemination. The grade-level representative of the Vertical Reading Team promises to share the new enrichment strategies next week. This is newer territory as they work on helping students make good progress across time.

The next morning, the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), comprised of the principal, assistant principal, instructional specialist, and two campus reading specialists, review the grade-level team meeting feedback forms. Their analysis guides next steps in learning for Stults Road teachers. Based on this week's grade-level and vertical team feedback forms, the ILT notes that teachers have begun discussing strategies for supporting higher-achieving students during targeted instruction and in the classroom. The ILT explores the idea of focusing Monday's weekly professional learning community (PLC) meeting on using enrichment strategies during targeted instruction, which will allow faculty to continue their work to implement new practices that are being reviewed by the vertical and grade-level teams. At Stults Road, PLCs have a unique characteristic, in that they are designed to build schoolwide capacity to implement evidence-based practice.

> ### Thinkers and Texts That Influence Stults Road
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> - Roland Barth, Barbara Eason-Watkins, Michael Fullan, and Lawrence Lezotte, *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities* (2005)
> - Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek, *Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever It Takes* (2010)
> - Tom Dungy and Nathan Whitaker, *The Mentor Leader* (2010)
> - Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis, *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding* (2000)
> - Joellen Killion and Patricia Roy, *Becoming a Learning School* (2009)
> - Ruby Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2005)
> - Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, *Teacher Leader Model Standards* (2010)
> - Paul Tough, *Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America* (2009)

JUST-IN-TIME LEARNING FOR TEACHERS

Heidi Moore is a fourth-grade teacher who, during her first year, sought out support from various sources when classroom-level data did not indicate the degree of student progress she wanted to see. Mrs. Moore talks

about how the opportunity to reflect on her practice and learn new skills helped her improve instruction and helped her students reach agreed-upon learning outcomes. "Last year, I got my second set of district math assessment results. I was panicking because I had a group that was not even close to passing the benchmark. I talked with my team, and I thought I needed even more than that. So I asked to talk with the assistant principal, Amber Leblond, and we came up with a plan. . . . I brought their grades up. All my kids met the benchmark." The plan was the result of analyzing data, finding error patterns, and looking at samples of student work. The heart of the plan had specific learning goals for the teacher, namely knowing how to create and manage small groups, how to ensure time for both review and for keeping pace with the curriculum. Mrs. Leblond made sure that Mrs. Moore had release time to observe successful lessons in this unit, view and reflect on a model lesson given by the instructional specialist, and participate in instructional coaching regarding her own lesson implementation. Principal Spiller reflects, "It just makes sense that if we offer different levels of supports for students, then why not provide them for teachers? . . . Part of the challenge is helping educators ask questions about their own practice. I want to provide a range of data and supports so they can attend to and drive their own learning."

A range of supports is available when teachers ask for them, and even if they don't. In one scenario, the ILT met and analyzed district benchmark data that showed significant low performance in one classroom. They reviewed the data in depth, and discussed current student and teacher needs in light of the findings. Since the classroom teacher did not self-identify as needing advice or support, the team moved into immediate action. They set up next steps for the reading specialist to observe the classroom and discuss the assessment results with the teacher. The ILT also identified a set of specific strategies for student support, including Lunch Buddies, use of Saturday school time (which is optional but can be recommended to families), and after-school tutoring. As Amber Leblond says, "At Stults, we turn the negatives into positives."

ANALYSIS

Over the past nine years, the Stults Road community has dramatically narrowed the achievement gap through changing structures, schedules, routines, practices, culture, and beliefs. This work has been led by a committed principal, a building leadership team, and a staff who share a steadfast commitment to equity. Schoolwide practices that they have implemented include eliminating tracking systems and revamping pull-out programs;

using weekly, short-cycle data for educational decision making and personalizing instruction; re-allocating instructional resources; establishing a responsive and nonpunitive discipline program as part of creating a caring climate; increasing rigor; extending learning time; establishing fluid and flexible student

> **Stults Road Elementary School Mission**
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> At Stults Road Community we are committed to high expectations, appreciation of individuality, and encouragement of lifelong learners who will successfully function in today's global and culturally diverse society.

grouping strategies; and developing effective parent and community outreach programs.[3] They are coordinating and aligning efforts among individual student learning, and grade-level teams, the leadership team, and PLCs. They are moving into work on vertical alignment.

SCHOOL VALUES MADE EXPLICIT AND VISIBLE

It's all about learning. Learning is central to the work of everyone in the school building. People learn from analysis and reflection, from exploring research and best practice, and from trying out new ideas that may or may not be successful at first. Adults model the way, with their interactions setting the tone for students, and showing that real learning takes time, is nonlinear, and requires frequent reflection.

Success for underserved students, and those who educate them, is a given. The journey from *underperforming* to *award winning* at Stults Road has centered on a belief, shared now by most students, families, and faculty: All children can and will improve and achieve at high levels. "It is critical that we all believe that teaching all students and ensuring their success is a given," Principal Spiller asserts. A corollary is that all those who seek to support those students will also experience success. Many school awards confirm these values.

We can do more together than we can do alone. Collaboration is constant in small and large groups, among students and adults alike. It is the way that work of value gets done. This is a focused effort, with collaboration being coherent both within teams and across them, with many adults working together in many ways across the day, and with actionable observations and reflections resulting from undertaking shared work.

Relationships matter. The level and intensity of conversations about improvement reveal a high level of trust and care among educators, a

school characteristic considered to be essential to school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Noddings, 1992). As Lin Wall, instructional specialist, says about Stults Road, "Everything comes from relationships. . . . Continuous improvement of each educator and their ability to grow is the foundation."

Together, these values ground and focus the school community, and frame the resounding theme of the Stults Road case analysis: Ongoing, focused, and iterative professional learning for every educator leads to student success.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOCUSES ON EACH STUDENT AS A PERSON AND A LEARNER

Understanding Student Behavior and Taking Action

The behavior model, for example, encourages children to explore alternative behaviors and provides intrinsic and extrinsic rewards when students are able to follow through with more appropriate behaviors. If an approach does not work as anticipated, teachers and school leaders analyze the data and then determine next steps to refine and deepen practices. For example, when analysis revealed that a group of older boys did not respond positively to the school behavioral model, the principal led the design of a new mentoring program (see introductory quote for this chapter). This supplemented the behavior model, which was effective for most of the students.

Collaboratively check on student learning and behavior every week. When students do well, and when they don't, it is first the charge of the teacher to figure out what his or her students' learning goals are, what will entice students to learn, and what to do when the work is too hard, too easy, or doesn't make sense.

With weekly frequency, teachers track on a range of behavioral indicators as well as academic ones. A range of data is developed, culled, and organized to help teachers understand findings, and focus on translating them into specifications for instruction and support (see Figure 2.2). Additional examples of student tracking forms are available in the supplemental online resources.

Data use, then, is focused on both student intervention (what does this child need next to be successful with this skill/content) and teacher intervention (what do we/I need to do next to be successful with these students, what do I need to learn to be more successful next week). As a daily practice, data drives the professional development necessary for every child to succeed. See Figure 2.3 as an example of how teachers document student academic needs for targeted intervention.

Figure 2.2 Kindergarten Personal and Social Development Report

Student _____

Six Week Period _____

Behavior or Habit	1	2	3	4	5	6
I show self-control by following classroom rules.						
I am responsible for my own behavior and actions.						
I share and cooperate with others.						
I respect myself and others.						
I accept and follow the teacher's directions.						
I clean up.						
I care for my classroom materials.						
I seek only my share of the teacher's attention.						
I can complete my work on time.						
I can work independently and use self-discipline.						

Rating Scale: Most of the time—3 Sometimes—2 Seldom—1

Parent Signatures:

Week 1 _____   Week 2 _____

Week 3 _____   Week 4 _____

Week 5 _____   Week 6 _____

Purpose of the Tool: This kindergarten inventory of behaviors is used to track a set of indicators weekly for student, teacher, and parent review.

Unique Use at Stults Road: This document is shared weekly with parents to facilitate sharing of feedback and conversations with parents and students in a timely manner. While these behaviors are commonly noted at schools, it is the weekly distribution to parents and the fidelity of use over time that makes this practice unique.

Source: Stults Road Elementary Instructional Leadership Team. Used with permission.

Figure 2.3 Targeted Instruction Three-Week Plan Overview

Teacher: Collaborative Teachers

Date: October 12th–14th

Group: Benchmark High Scorers

Complete for each Targeted Instruction group

Students	DIBELS Information		Progress Monitoring November 3 December 1	
	DORF	Retell	Strategic	Strategic & Intensive
Student	160	88		
Student	108	37		
Student	121	54		
Student	90	51		
Student	108	39		
Student	115	Y		

Focus of Group

Week 1: Intro PROBES (Character Study/Traits)

Week 2: Intro Book Club (Cooperative Groups and Reading Comprehension)

Week 3: Continue Book Club discussions and start probing (stick-man, letter to character, advertisement for book/character, video advertisement)

Materials:

- PROBE Book, colored pencils, pencil
- class set of "Chocolate Fever" and/or "Ramona Quimby, Age 8"
- literature bookmarks, response journals

What's Next? Recommendations

Purpose of the Tool: This template displays reading assessment scores of students of a small, three-week, targeted instruction reading group. It captures individual strategies and interventions in the context of the group's goal.

Unique Use at Stults Road: The entire grade-level team makes recommendations about future practice.

Individual teachers track on progress of their small reading groups. Small-group reading strategies are determined by grade teams, and specialists use them regularly to track weekly progress. Note that low, medium, and high scorers all have small-group instruction.

Source: Stults Road Elementary Instructional Leadership Team. Used with permission.

Understanding Students Is Team Business

An individual teacher's first stop with questions about students is the grade-level team. This group, with both classroom teachers and specialists, acts as the brain trust regarding knowledge about students across the grade level. So while the individual teacher tracks evidence using Figure 2.3, it is the grade team that decides who will be in each small, changing, targeted instruction reading group every three weeks, and who recommends the instructional goals and strategies for each group. They also switch off, so teachers teach most or all of the students during the school year. And specialists who work with students for multiple years have a deeper knowledge of students over time. Teams and other adults who know the student and the community—bilingual, ESL, or special education teachers—may participate to share information about recent learning successes and challenges, current family needs, or other important personal concerns of a particular student. This deepens shared understanding to move learning forward and sets the stage for informal check-ins to follow up on specific children as needed.

The Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) is central in this work. As a whole, it makes sure that the schedules, data, and other resources are in play for this understanding of students to progress over time. It also moves in when it sees more global trends, as it did when it created the mentoring program for older boys. And as individuals, the principal, assistant principal, and specialists help teachers reflect on and understand their interests and needs, to take next steps in their own learning, in a range of contexts.

Understanding Students Is Everybody's Business

Building caring relationships and caring students translates into the importance of all the adults knowing and caring about all students in a variety of ways. Educators have increasingly been engaging families as partners in children's learning. Families and teachers now meet long before science fairs so families know how to support students working on their projects at home, so that everyone gets an equal chance at success. The idea for this meeting came from the school's Vertical Science Cadre. And this idea of collective caring and support is not just for educators and families: The year after the boys' community mentoring program started, the school secretary volunteered to organize a similar mentoring model for a group of girls. The attention to knowing and supporting students extends beyond the existing constructs; innovative ideas are sought out and welcomed.

The community-wide focus on understanding students also happens through intentional practices, including a shared responsibility for teaching all students across a grade level, collective analysis of student

data, documenting and sharing students' successes, and all adults rotating dismissal and yard duties. This is no accident, but careful design that seeks to ensure students are known, appreciated, and helped by many adults in the school, the family, and the community.

Understanding and Encouraging the Adults as a Way to Understand and Educate the Students

It seems that an integral part of the work of having students understood at Stults Road is intrinsically understanding and encouraging the grown-ups who work with them. This was not a masterminded plan, as much as it started from "the gut." It made sense, and that has been building and becoming more formal over the years. Staff members throughout the school have been encouraged to develop their capacity, and have risen through the ranks over time, some from teacher to administrator, as both Principal Spiller and Assistant Principal Leblond have, but also those who started as volunteers or visitors and now hold a range of posts. Mr. Spiller, who has hired 93% of the current faculty over the past nine years, has a gift for seeking out and cultivating adults who share his high expectations and focus on equity and continuous improvement, and working with adults to develop their capacity. The talents, passions, and interests of adults are known and contribute to the life of the school in numerous ways. Teachers have multiple opportunities throughout the school year to demonstrate effective practices, participate in learning and apply new techniques and practices, and build their knowledge in an area of interest. Teachers are frequently tapped to lead new initiatives.

The adult learning is powerful modeling for students. Used to seeing a range of adults in the classroom helping each other, students are surrounded by images of learners in action as they, too, are invited to get excited about learning and the possibilities for growth that it brings. Both students and teachers are given opportunities in serious ways that include continuous cycles of inquiry, practice, reflection, and feedback. This makes for mirror images of student and adult learning in the school.

Students also witness parents being encouraged to learn. Several parents have been supported to take on different formal and informal jobs at the schools, and progressively climb the ranks, and courses are offered to parents in general to support their learning.

Professional learning is differentiated to meet the needs of all adult learners. Stults Road educators engage in a range of professional learning as it relates to their individual learning, team learning, and whole school learning (see Table 2.1). Each strategy and experience is planned with consideration to what's needed to improve teaching and learning immediately.

Table 2.1 Individual, Team, and Whole School Learning at Stults Road Elementary School

Individual Learning	Team Learning
Individual Learning Goals Teachers set individual learning goals each year, aligned with schoolwide improvement goals. *Coaching and Modeling* Teachers receive academic coaching when requested, or when student data indicates lower than expected performance on a specific learning outcome. *Peer Observations* Teachers are encouraged and supported to visit classrooms of colleagues to observe successful lessons (lessons that have shown good data-based evidence of improvement). Teachers frequently demonstrate model lessons in other classrooms, while a coach and teacher observe the home teachers' student learning. *Self-Initiated Learning* When teachers learn and hone new instructional strategies, there is a process for sharing across the school.	*Grade-Level Teams* Teams set SMART goals for team learning. Grade-level teams focus on data analysis and planning appropriate next steps for instruction for individual and small groups of students in targeted instruction. Teams provide weekly updates to the Instructional Leadership Team within 48 hours of meeting. *Vertical Teams* Content-based vertical teams develop articulated curriculum and work to deepen teacher content knowledge. Vertical content team meets every two to four weeks, or as needed; they are led by teachers. *PLCs* PLCs attend to common instructional issues raised by grade or vertical teams and/or the ILT over time; they are led by academic coaches, who bring data findings and support team dialogue related to data analysis and instructional actions. *Data Team* The Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) functions as a schoolwide data team. Benchmark data is charted by student and teacher. Teacher learning is, in part, driven by benchmark assessment results. ILT meets at least weekly, and responds immediately to team concerns and issues. *Scheduled Team Time* Grade teams meet at least 45 minutes weekly; PLCs meet weekly after school.

Whole School Learning
• Schoolwide meetings happen weekly. Schoolwide learning goals align with, complement, and frame ongoing professional learning done in grade-level and vertical teams. • Weekly team meeting notes are reviewed from the perspective of whole school and individual teacher learning needs; such needs are most often addressed in whole school sessions. • Successfully implemented action research findings are brought to whole school learning sessions for full-school implementation. • Schoolwide book study groups focus on current research and practice.

LEADERSHIP AND SYSTEMS SUSTAIN EDUCATOR LEARNING

Leadership

team-based learning

focus on individual students

individual learning

schoolwide learning

Systems and Supports
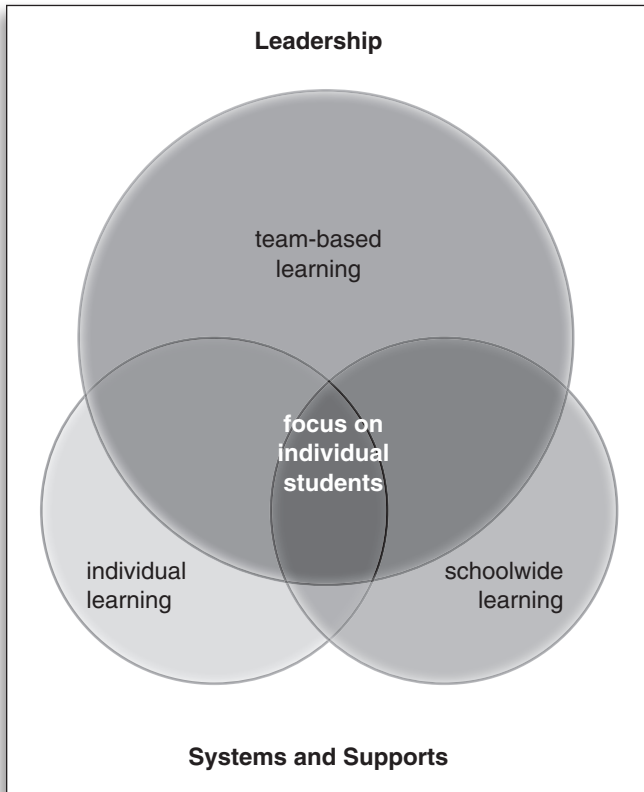
For continuous learning to take place, a complex system of practices, policies, and indicators are organized, layered, and negotiated on a daily basis. Many schools engage a range of the strategies that Stults Road has in place—small-group instruction, coaching, grade team meetings—but very few of them engage this many strategies with frequency and fidelity over time. And still fewer schools get to the place where the range of strategies relate to each other in a way that informs practice in such a public and shared way, freeing the principal from carrying this single-handedly. This is the place where Stults Road stands out, where they show how the ideal of continuous improvement takes form in a traditionally underserved community, and applies to individualizing learning for student and educators. It's useful to consider the aspects of the Stults Road systems in view of their continuity and ongoing self-reflection.

Immediate, continuous feedback loops. The ILT has an important role in this process, as it explicitly models how to employ data to make decisions. In *The Principal as Data-Driven Leader,* the authors name the primary challenge to the principal and school leadership team as showing "that almost every decision, whether large or small, immediate or strategic, is based on input of some kind, and most of that input is in the form of data" (Ontario Principals Council, 2009, p. 39). An expectation at Stults Road is that data will be used every day to inform key decisions and next steps in learning. Data forms the basis of schoolwide, team, and individual decisions, alongside academic decisions. As such, it is at the heart of the school's system of change. The ILT models data-driven decision

making through the use of their feedback loop and through their daily practices of making (and communicating) data-based decisions. At Stults Road the data is compelling, current, and provides guidance that can be put to use, rather than being imposed by an external authority. Since data is analyzed both before and after new practices are implemented and new decisions are made, teachers provide ongoing input into the continuous feedback loop.

A critical component to the Stults Road professional learning model is the use of feedback to guide the work of the ILT and provide coherence to continuous learning (see Figure 2.4, Team Meeting Notes Template). Teams submit feedback forms to the principal, which are then analyzed, along with other data, to determine next steps for teacher learning. ILT data analysis might include review of survey data, behavioral data, observational data, or perceptual data from teachers, students, and families. Next steps in teacher learning might occur in whole group, small group, or individual configurations, depending on the data. ILT members review data continuously. Teacher team meetings are frequently designed to address emergent data trends. A significant body of research substantiates the role of this type of focused reflection in teachers' professional growth.[4]

In this way, the feedback loop at Stults Road becomes the mechanism through which leaders support coherence between individual, team, and organizational learning. Organizational development literature (Argyris, 1990; Argyris & Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990) notes that from ongoing, continuous reflection comes the capacity for individuals to align organizational and individual goals. The combination of continuous use of data, ongoing reflection, and interdependent teams allows for a systemic and coherent approach to support the primary organizational goal of addressing systemic inequities. Over nine years, Stults Road's evolving professional learning aligns with a growing body of research that shows high-performing schools have cultures that support ongoing teacher collaboration and professional inquiry.[5] And Stults Road is part of Learning Forward's network of Learning Schools, which provides professional learning supports and a community of like-minded schools.

> **Reflection:** What are the continuous feedback loops like at your school? How easy is it to apply the feedback to inform practices or create new ones?

Figure 2.4   Team Meeting Notes Template

Team Feedback Sheet: Stults Road

Team: 5th Grade _____   Date: _9/12/2012_____

Team SMART Goal(s):

At least 85% of all student groups passing the Unit 2 Math Test.

At least 90% of all students reaching benchmark level for fall DIBELS
testing (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills).

Team Members Present: Team Members Absent: (NONE)
                             (Include reason for absence)

Shauntel Cox   _Tonya Mitchell (CRS)_
Brandi Hunter
Zana Halight

Meeting Topics/Products/Outcomes:

Teachers will go over information in Goal folders with each student in
their homeroom throughout the next week.

Curriculum Night Topics: Review DIBELS and benchmark criteria-
explain expectations in all academic areas.

New plan for Targeted Instruction Groups

Differentiate instruction based on Math Unit 1 Assessment

Questions/Concerns from Team:

Request for counselor to work on conflict resolution/problem solving
with students.

Administrator: _Ana M Rosa_

Purpose of the Tool: This tool guides quick, efficient note taking of team meetings.

Unique Use at Stults Road: Every team is responsible for submitting notes to the principal within a day of the weekly grade team meeting. The principal shares any issues of concern, or any issues that require attention, with members of the ILT. Supports or intervention take place within the week. It's the immediacy of response and fidelity of use over time that makes this resource effective in supporting professional learning.

Source: Stults Road Elementary Instructional Leadership Team. Used with permission.

An integrated set of varied research-based, non-negotiable, professional learning practices evolves over time. For example, the Stults Road case study articulates nearly all the elements outlined in the Learning Forward Definition of Professional Learning (Hirsh, 2009). The school has a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive team-based approach to learning that mostly occurs at the school in the context of the school day. At Stults Road, professional learning is led by internal leaders using current data to inform ongoing improvements to teaching and learning, and it is supported through coaching and opportunities to practice and transfer new skills. As outlined in Hayes Mizell's introduction to the Learning Forward Standards, Stults Road exemplifies the intent of the standards to have educators "thoroughly review performance data, establish learning goals, implement

evidence-based learning strategies, and assess the effectiveness of their professional learning" (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 4).

At Stults Road, professional learning focused on helping students is intensive and non-negotiable. The unwavering expectation is that inequities are addressed immediately and that they are challenged directly, and in the moment. Professional learning and student outcomes go hand in hand. So whenever student learning data is not showing improvement, teachers must immediately identify what is not working. It is the teacher's responsibility to work within the system to make changes to ensure that strategies, approaches, and resources will be employed to improve the situation. What that means in practice is that adults must respond to achievement or behavioral data quickly, with encouragement and pressure to refine, revise, adapt, or deepen their instructional routines and practices. While the school culture motivates and empowers teachers and supports those who ask for help, when volunteered efforts are not sufficient, teachers receive targeted support to help resolve and address issues with additional guidance from instructional leaders. In this way, professional learning directly meets the needs of students who have traditionally been underserved.

This is in evidence in the description of newcomers to the teaching staff. The combination of high expectations, deep care for everyone in the building, intensive collaboration, and professional learning with a laser focus on achievement is new to most educators who first arrive to work at Stults Road. They receive both formal and informal mentoring and coaching that outlines clear expectations about the schoolwide practices, specific techniques, and specific student needs. Colleagues, specialists, coaches, and the administrators are all an intentional part of supporting the adjustment to the school. This range of supports is not just part of an orientation: It's the way teachers engage with one another all the time. (See Figure 2.5 for strategies used to integrate new teachers into the school.)

> **Reflection:** What are the messages your school gives to newly hired staff? How might your practices reflect your community's aspirations and expectations? Which Stults Road strategies may be helpful in your community?

Interdependent teams. At Stults Road, the work of multiple, integrated, purposeful teams move learning forward in ways that support both individual and whole school learning. Providing professional development at the grade level and school level provides a base of understanding that leads teachers to support each other's improved practice (Darling-Hammond,

Figure 2.5   Strategies for Acclimating Stults Road Teachers to the School Culture

- Transparency about the goal to support every student making at least one year's progress, and organizing all resources and energies to achieve that end
- Clear information about the expertise in the school and expectations for student learning and professional learning
- Structured time for colleagues to offer demonstration lessons in the newcomer's classroom
- Coaching time that focuses on teacher questions, on observing specific students alongside the new teacher, on specific instructional practices that are a focus to the school community
- Expectations that teachers will call on specialists who focus on different content areas, as well as the principal and assistant principal
- Modeling in team meetings regarding data analysis and application to practice, collaboration in support of teaching specific children
- Structured reflection regarding teacher professional goal setting, as it relates to school priorities and individual student goals
- Invitations for new teachers to share a particular practice or expertise during professional learning sessions
- A Social Committee that provides a welcoming atmosphere; sends notes of encouragement during personal, tough times; and opportunities for the community to gather informally

Purpose of the Tool: This checklist offers a range of strategies to support the transition of teachers new to a school.

Unique Use at Stults Road: Leaders employ this range of strategies with intensity to make sure students are receiving the supports they need, to support teachers making the transition to a new community, and to demonstrate the expectations around collaboration to support individual students and teachers.

Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). This type of collective work helps teachers take risks and solve problems to address existing issues in instructional practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Lieberman & Wood, 2002).

This plays out through five major team configurations at Stults Road, with each team tending to adult learning in service of students as part of their work. All educators participate in multiple weekly team meetings. *Grade teams* complete data review and work together weekly to plan next steps in instruction for individuals and groups. Figure 2.6 shows how small-group work is captured for each weekly Targeted Instruction group.

While grade teams are tracking and supporting progress weekly, K–6 *Vertical content teams* identify and address data-driven issues related to specific content, review grade-level expectations, and disseminate best practices.

Figure 2.6   Stults Road Targeted Instruction Week 1 Focus

This Week's Focus	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Group #1 Intro to PROBEing with Character Analysis	**Group #1** M:	**Group #1** M:	**Group #1** M:	**Group #1** M:	**Group #1** M:
Group #2 Intro to PROBEing with Character Analysis	G:	G:	G:	G:	G:
Group #3 Intro to PROBEing with Character Analysis	IP:	IP:	IP:	IP:	IP:
Teacher Notes: • Make sure to go over the rules for going and coming to Targeted Instruction time. • Talk about what will go on during this time.	**Group #2** M: G: IP:	**Group #2** M: G: IP:	**Group #2** M: G: IP:	**Group #2** M: G: IP:	**Group #2** M: G: IP:
	Group #3 M: G: IP:	**Group #3** M: G: IP:	**Group #3** M: G: IP:	**Group #3** M: G: IP:	**Group #3** M: G: IP:
Meeting the Needs of ALL students is not "extra" work . . . it is THE WORK!!!					

Purpose of the Tool: This template promotes communications across teams around learning goals and outcomes. It contextualizes the work in Figure 2.3.

Unique Use at Stults Road: After grade-level teams map out small-group work, this organizer tracks and makes public a week's focus, and clarifies the advice of three specialists as it relates to work with each group.

This form builds mutual understanding and accountability for the grade-level progress; it is updated and shared weekly.

M = Modeling
G = Guided Practice
IP = Independent Practice
TI = Targeted Instruction

Source: Stults Road Elementary Instructional Leadership Team. Used with permission.

In the example illustrated in Figure 2.7, the Vertical Reading Team studied the district reading data that revealed students meeting benchmarks were not making one year's worth of progress—and this was a stated school goal. Their analysis led to articulating SMART (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound) goals—as many teams do—for each grade level. Their work interfaces with the grade-level teams and the ILT.

Figure 2.7   SMART Goals From Vertical Reading Cadre

Stults Road Elementary School

Reading Vertical Cadre, Cycle of Continuous Improvement

Focus—Targeted Instruction for Benchmark Students

October 2011

SMART Goals for the Reading Vertical Team:

Kindergarten—90% of the benchmark students will reach a total of 15 more NWF (nonsense word fluency) in two weeks (by December 3).

First Grade—Increase the number of students achieving 20 words per minute by the next fluency assessment taken every two weeks to 90%.

Second Grade—Through literacy choices, the second-grade team will increase the percentage by 80% of benchmark students scoring a letter grade higher than the previous week on the weekly assessments.

Third Grade—95% of the benchmark students will score 90% and above on the next selection assessment.

Fourth Grade—The fourth-grade team will increase by 50% the number of students achieving a target score of 3 on short-answer questions on the weekly assessment over the next two full weeks by focusing on the skill of text evidence.

Fifth Grade—Benchmark students will be able to comprehend, infer, and make visual corrections, in relation to poetry written within a six-week period, by passing at commended levels on the January District Assessments.

Sixth Grade—Students will research a genre of literature to move them from simply recalling information to producing information and improving their scores on the Reading Profile so that 75% move from a 3 to a 4. The presentation can be delivered either on hard copy or electronically. This will be done in a two-week timeframe and will be assessed based on a teacher-created rubric, which focuses on research, organization, and presentation skills.

Purpose of the Tool: These are goals developed by the Vertical Reading Cadre, in response to data analysis revealing benchmark students were not advancing adequately.

Unique Use at Stults Road: When vertical cadres determine goals, cadre members from each grade take this information to the lead person on each grade-level team; the information is conveyed to grade levels. This is fed into the targeted instruction and other grade team work, and is considered alongside other data analysis. The ILT concurrently tracks on trends related to these benchmark students.

Source: Stults Road Elementary Instructional Leadership Team. Used with permission.

Professional learning teams research, explore, and share best practice related to schoolwide initiatives, such as behavioral planning and sharing new curriculum and instruction. *Vertical cadres* include instructional and noninstructional staff that organize and develop innovative approaches to campuswide events such as science fairs and literacy nights. And the ILT, referenced throughout the case and this analysis, is the constant, making sure that other teams are organized and supported to fulfill their charge, that the learnings of one group transfers to the next, and that new ideas are further developed.

> **Reflection:** At your school, how well and quickly are the efforts and needs of different teams communicated to the people who can support them? To one another?
>
> Are the teams working interdependently toward the same goal? Are there places where there are disconnects, or where they are competing?

Multiple leaders in play. Achievement is not something you attain, but consistently work at, with a constant press for analysis and reflection of next steps. At Stults Road, this is true of the principal, and increasingly true of the ILT, who embodies this commitment and plays it out in many ways, including sustaining professional learning. At the same time,

> If we want our schools to be laboratories of innovation able to tackle the significant challenges they face, school, leaders and teacher leaders must work together to identify, replicate, and scale up programs and practices deemed effective in supporting student learning. (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2010)

The ILT is drawing upon the Teacher Leader Model Standards to help the entire faculty reflect on their leadership in a variety of ways, and to think about how each teacher enlivens and guides systems that seek continuous learning and improvement.

Professional Learning Systems as Organic and Iterative, Flexible and Structured

At Stults Road the nature of the systems are as important as what they organize.

Organic and iterative. Ensuring a system of support for teachers must necessarily involve a range of pathways to increase teacher knowledge and skill. While schools begin this work through many different entry points, ultimately their journey includes ongoing and iterative professional learning practices that support faculty to work together to focus on meeting the needs of underserved students. At Stults Road, the systems of professional learning necessary to support personalization for all learners developed organically over time, through reflection and analysis that originated with the principal, and that grew to include teachers, the ILT, and district leaders. District staff are key resources in the work, naming issues, making data available, and providing key resources in timely ways. Iterative changes to their approach were developed based on examples from other successful schools, shared and ongoing review of research, and analysis of their own practice. Educators at Stults Road support continuous improvement through student inquiry, believing in the need for continued growth to foster ongoing dialogue, reflection, and action-research to deepen and improve instructional practices.

> **Reflection:** At your school, are the shared values shaping the practices and systems or are the systems the driver? Is the implementation of systems the goal, or are student outcomes the goal?

Flexible and structured. Professional learning is flexible in that the daily nature of it is grounded in solving current problems of practice, driven by individual teachers' learning goals, and bound in analysis of current data and trends. At the same time, professional learning is highly structured in that it takes place at specific team times each day, different groups have very specific charges, the flow and timing of different data shape cycles for analysis and reflection, high standards and frameworks guide the work, and varying tools regarding team and school performance are continuously infused into meetings to press for continuous improvement.

Together, these findings point to continuous, complex mechanisms that make for a reflective, yet fast-paced adult learning system. This includes mechanisms for reviewing data weekly and responding to findings immediately to ensure that not a moment of instructional time is wasted. The leadership team has also developed a mechanism to support teachers showcasing instructional practices that have yielded strong results; this happens both during and beyond the school day. Finally, the

leaders also are developing skills of colleagues, parents, and volunteers, and finding ways to integrate those persons, with their new capacities, into the life of the school.

NOTES

1. For profile of the district, see: http://www.risd.org/group/aboutrisd/aboutrisd_main.html (retrieved December 16, 2012).

For school profile, see: http://www.edline.net/pages/Stults_Road_Elementary (retrieved December 16, 2012).

School data from http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/index.html. (retrieved September 20, 2012).

2. Darwin Spiller was principal at the onset of this study in October 2011, and Amber Leblond, who was assistant principal, became principal in June 2012.

3. See Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, and Hibpshman (2005); Ball and Cohen (1999); and Herman et al. (2008) for additional documentation on best practices in school reform.

4. For examples, see Constantino, De Lorenzo, and Kobrinkis (2002), Danielson and McGreal (2000), and Lambert (2003).

5. See Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995); Robbins and Ramos-Pell (2010); Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010); and Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003).