



# Accelerating Learning Through Prioritizing Teacher Support

**T**he impact of the pandemic on student learning was significant, as it widened pre-existing achievement gaps for historically disadvantaged students. Yet some districts serving large numbers of high-need students were more able to achieve notable learning gains, or substantially lower learning losses, than comparable districts.

This requires significant skill on the part of the classroom teacher, along with high-quality instructional materials that engage all students in grade-level learning. Interventions such as high-dosage tutoring, extending the school year, and

summer sessions are important supplements for students with the greatest learning needs; however, we must increase our focus on ensuring that all classroom teachers are equipped to support learning acceleration strategies during core classroom instruction. This requires a systemic approach to improving classroom teaching and learning.

Building systems and structures that strengthen core instruction to accelerate learning and close equity gaps has been the center of our work with district partners for over two decades. Three core strategies drive their success.

## **STRATEGY #1**

**Strengthen professional learning and instructional leadership teams by engaging teacher leaders.**

Expanding the school leadership team to include teacher leaders builds instructional leadership capacity and creates opportunities to strengthen collaborative professional learning. Weekly professional learning and classroom coaching follow cycles of improvement that address specific student learning needs.

## STRATEGY #2

### **Prioritize the use of high-quality instructional materials and a plan for training teachers to use those materials effectively.**

A high-quality curriculum is a key foundation for teachers as they engage students in grade-level work, and it provides resources to help teachers address learning gaps. District and school leaders play an important role in creating opportunities for teachers to learn how to maximize their high-quality curriculum and instructional materials to meet individual student learning needs.

## STRATEGY #3

### **Focus interventions on students most in need and minimize the amount of time students are out of the classroom.**

Supporting teachers to utilize interventions within the classroom setting increases student access to

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grade-level learning. Using data to inform additional interventions targets those students most in need and makes connections to classroom learning.

Investing in stronger classroom teaching and learning — where students spend the majority of their time — must be the primary focus of our efforts to accelerate learning if we want to close equity gaps. Districts with systems in place to support classroom teachers to deliver

effective instruction when disruptions or challenges are thrown in their path are more successful in maintaining and accelerating student learning. By keeping their focus on effective classroom teaching and learning, training teachers to use high-quality instructional materials to support all students with grade-level learning, and aligning intervention for students with the greatest needs to classroom data and learning goals, districts are accelerating student learning growth.

## Learning Acceleration in San Felipe Del Rio Consolidated Independent School District

All too often, we hear that students who missed critical learning will catch up in summer school, Saturday camp, or after-school tutoring. San Felipe Del Rio Consolidated Independent School District, located about three hours west of San Antonio near the border of Texas and Mexico, is finding new ways to accelerate learning in the classroom. Two years ago, San Felipe Del Rio renewed its focus on high-quality instruction to strengthen the quality of daily classroom teaching.

To start, the district completely revamped its schedule to include concentrated three-hour learning blocks for teachers each week and adopted a 10-day cycle for instructional improvement. During the learning blocks, teachers meet in small groups that are led by a trained administrator or teacher leader. The groups follow a protocol to diagnose where students are on the path to grade-level learning, identify content and skills that each student needs to master, plan lessons that

anticipate where students might struggle, deliver instruction with support to address those needs, and monitor student progress to identify next steps.

San Felipe Del Rio is prioritizing the use of high-quality instructional materials and providing training for teachers to use those materials effectively. “We started with an intensive focus on in-classroom change and supplemented that with outside-the-classroom support for students with the greatest needs,” said Superintendent Dr. Carlos Rios. “Our belief was that if teachers learn the curriculum, they can implement it at a deeper level and plan for the supports or strategies they will need to support lower-performing students to access the lesson the first time.”

By creating extended time for teacher collaborative learning, establishing teacher leadership roles, providing professional learning for school leaders, and supporting principals through district coaching, San Felipe Del Rio has created systems and structures that build capacity in teachers to grow students.

Although these changes were made in response to learning disruption caused by the pandemic, San Felipe Del Rio plans to sustain these systems and structures moving forward. These changes will strengthen educator effectiveness and improve student outcomes for years to come.