



Creating a Network of Coherence and Shared Goals

The LA BOLD Project

Summer 2018

Background

NIET is partnering with 11 local education agencies across Louisiana to make significant and sustained improvements in high-need schools. They are the parishes of DeSoto, East Feliciana, Madison, Orleans, Rapides and St. John the Baptist as well as New Orleans charters Eisenhower Academy, Landry-Walker High, McDonogh #32 Charter, Fischer Academy and Martin Behrman Academy.

Project Context

The LA BOLD Project provides a diverse group of public school districts and charter schools in Louisiana with support to improve student academic achievement by strengthening classroom instruction. In addition, the grant has helped improve school- and district-level practices.

The number and diversity of the districts led to an approach based on tiers of support for specific needs. Partners include large districts with more resources at the district level, along with smaller districts and charter schools.

Recent work has focused on:

- I. Creating coherence across improvement initiatives;
- II. Insourcing professional learning;
- III. Establishing multiple and interconnected leadership roles, including roles for teacher leaders; and
- IV. Building networked communities to share lessons learned.

I. Creating Coherence Across Improvement Initiatives

In a 2017 *Education Week* survey, a majority of teachers said they have experienced “way too much” or “too much” change in the last couple of years. It is not just the number of changes and new initiatives, but the disconnected way that they are often rolled out to teachers. Teachers receive mixed signals about what is most important and how to meet new demands.

In Louisiana, one of the biggest recent changes has been a state-led initiative to encourage districts to use more high-quality curricula. This shift requires making high-quality instructional materials more broadly accessible and supporting teachers in understanding and using them. The LA BOLD Project is building coherence between district- and school-level systems of support for teachers in implementing a high-quality curriculum.

For example, in a number of districts, the entry point for support will be through the network of teacher leaders, rather than to classroom teachers directly. This approach will enable teacher and school leaders to avoid overloading teachers with multiple competing improvement initiatives.

The expertise of teacher leaders can be used to support teachers in making connections between the expectations in the new standards and curriculum and how to deliver this effectively in their classrooms.

II. Insourcing Professional Learning

Partner schools are finding that building the capacity of their own staff to lead professional learning is leading to greater relevance and impact. Rather than relying primarily on external support, professional learning in LA BOLD schools is driven by teacher leaders in that building—those who really know the challenges and can offer support tiered to each teacher’s context.

This shift has made professional learning ongoing, frequent and relevant. Through this approach, schools are building collaborative structures that support more effective learning.

“NIET has had such a positive impact on our school. Teachers feel supported, and the collaboration among administrators, career, mentor and master teachers is fully visible.”

- Belonda Howard, Mentor Teacher, Rapides Parish

III. Multiple and Interconnected Positions Increase Reach and Impact

LA BOLD schools are creating multiple leadership positions for teachers and connecting them to support their fellow teachers. For example, mentor teacher positions are essential to the success of school-based professional learning communities. Mentors have their own classrooms and are released several hours a week to support peers.

Mentor teachers continue to serve as classroom teachers, enabling them to bring this perspective on the realities of day-to-day teaching to the work of school leadership teams. Master or lead teachers have more release time and are responsible for designing and leading professional learning, in addition to coaching teachers in their classrooms.

Creating multiple and integrated leadership positions provides a pipeline for leadership development by identifying, cultivating, training and advancing future instructional leaders. This approach is particularly important for schools that have greater challenges recruiting new teachers.

As partner districts put teacher leadership roles in place, including master and mentor roles, they are learning more about how to adjust those roles to their own context and goals. The network of partners learns from each individual district’s experience.



IV. Building Community Through Network

By establishing roles for district-level executive master teachers, districts are able to provide on-site coaching to master teachers in schools, and to regularly convene master teachers for their own professional learning communities. This enables master teachers to learn from one another and to share best practices and results.

It also creates a pipeline of highly effective instructional leaders for the principalship. In LA BOLD districts and charter schools, career opportunities and the career ladder ensure that when a leadership position becomes available, there are people at each level ready to step in and move into school- or district-level leadership roles.



Goals for the Coming Year

In the coming year, an important goal of the LA BOLD Project is to support district-level leadership teams in becoming more effective in supporting school leaders in their work. For example, a number of district leadership teams are prioritizing improvements in principal training and support by providing more authentic learning opportunities for principals.

In many districts, these opportunities are first focused on providing opportunities for principals to better understand content standards and what classroom practice aligned to standards looks like in action. This work will help principals to more accurately analyze and identify when standards are not being met in the classroom so they may provide strategic support to individual teachers.

Similar efforts are underway among charter schools as they work to support leadership teams to align educator support systems with other initiatives and priorities. Each partner receives support in determining the most effective way to support school and teacher leaders in meeting the needs of their students and community.