

Building a Teaching Effectiveness Network (BTEN)

Coordinating Support and Feedback for Beginning Teachers in AISD Schools





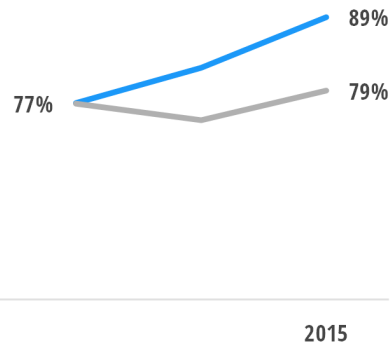
Executive Summary

The BTEN project was a unique opportunity for a group of AISD schools to incorporate the principles and practices of improvement science into their work. Between 2011 and 2015, nineteen AISD schools participated in BTEN and received intensive instruction and support from experts in both educational and improvement science practices as they worked to improve their feedback and support systems for new teachers.

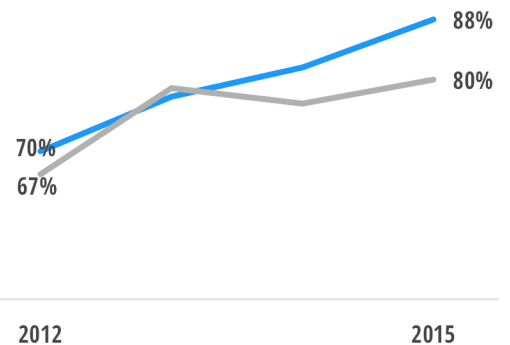
BTEN principals valued the improvement science concepts and tools and the new feedback and support system. Results from interviews with participants and examination of survey data revealed that participating in BTEN had a positive impact on perceptions of leadership at BTEN schools. When compared with similar schools without the program, BTEN schools saw greater improvements in trust and feelings of support between 2012 and 2015.

Over time, TELL AISD results for **BTEN** schools surpassed results for similar schools on key

Teachers at this school trust the principal to make sound professional decisions about instruction.



The school leadership consistently supports teachers.



Source: TELL AISD Survey results, 2012–2015

Note: Schools used for comparison were comparable to BTEN schools demographically and on 2012 TELL AISD results.

Several lessons emerged from the BTEN project, including:

Trust and positive perceptions of leadership can improve when leaders and teachers collaborate for improvement.

New teachers need non-evaluative support from their principal.

Experiences of stress and burnout may be less acute when teachers receive consistent support.

Cooperative, coordinated leadership also benefits leadership teams.

It can be challenging to see the big picture when working small.

Innovation takes time.

Non-traditional reform can feel uncomfortable.

BTEN is the best professional development that I have participated in since I've been in AISD.

—BTEN principal

Table of Contents

Executive summary	i
List of Figures	ii
List of insets	iii
Purpose	1
Background	1
Improvement work began with one principal and three teachers, and grew to 19 schools and 300 teachers	2
AISD focused on implementing and improving a feedback and support process for beginning teachers	3
Improvement team coordination and PDSAs	5
Data for improvement	6
General reception	8
What did we learn from our participation in BTEN?	10
Trust and positive perceptions of leadership can improve when leaders and teachers collaborate for improvement.....	10
New teachers need non-evaluative support from their principal	11
Experiences of stress and burnout may be less acute when teachers receive consistent support	11
Cooperative, coordinated leadership also benefits leadership teams.....	11
It can be challenging to see the big picture when working small	12
Innovation takes time.....	13
Non-traditional reform can feel uncomfortable	13
Conclusion	14
Appendix A	16

List of Figures

Figure 1. Hypothesized Primary and Secondary Drivers of New Teacher Development	1
Figure 2. BTEN Feedback and Support Process Map.....	3
Figure 3. AISD BTEN participants felt the support and professional development associated with the project were valuable	8

Figure 4. Over time, TELL AISD results for BTEN schools surpassed results for similar schools on key leadership indicators	10
Figure 5. Teachers who met with their support team 9 or more times experienced higher levels of engagement and self-efficacy and lower levels of stress and burnout	12

List of Insets

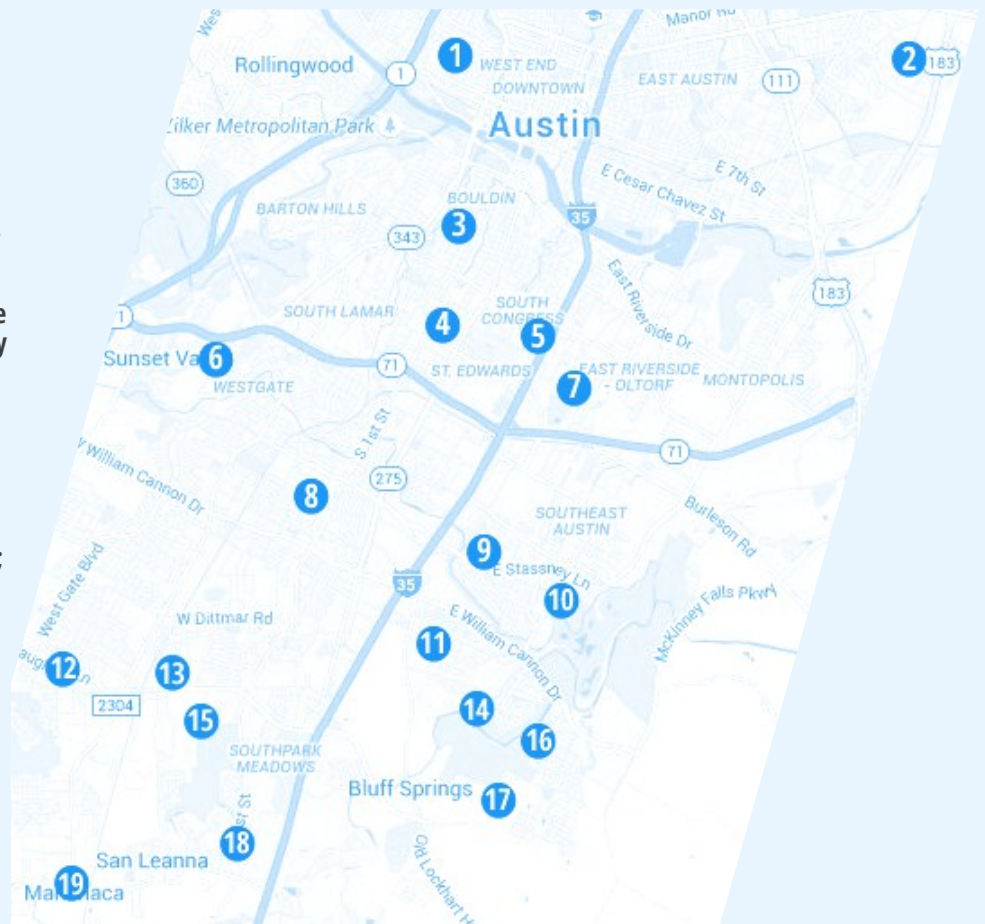
AISD BTEN Schools and Improvement Team	iv
BTEN Conversation Protocols	4
BTEN PDSAs	7
BTEN Ongoing Training and Support	9

AISD BTEN Schools and Improvement Teams

Small grants were made to three school districts to support their participation in the BTEN initiative: AISD, Baltimore City Schools, and New Visions for Public Schools in New York City. Austin's BTEN journey began in 2011 with four teachers and one dedicated principal at Perez Elementary School. Over the next 3 years, BTEN grew to include 19 AISD campuses and more than 300 teachers. By 2013, all principals in the Akins vertical team chose to participate in BTEN based on what they had learned from their colleagues about the benefits of the work.

In addition to the principals and designated staff from the campuses, the AISD BTEN improvement team also included: Jan John, Josie Hughes, and Angela Darby from AISD Educator Quality; Karen Cornetto from AISD Research and Evaluation; Daniel English from AISD Management Information Systems; and Ken Zarafis from Education Austin.

Note: Additional Year 1 improvement team members were Dora Fabelo from AISD Human Resources, Shirley Saryee Dean from Pickle Elementary School, and Rowena Hymer from Akins High School. Laura Baker, formerly of AISD Educator Quality, also was instrumental in initiating and advancing this work.



Elementary Schools

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 1 Mathews | 10 Widen |
| 2 Norman | 11 Langford |
| 3 Becker | 12 Kocurek |
| 4 Dawson | 13 Casey |
| 6 Sunset Valley | 14 Perez |
| 7 Linder | 16 Palm |
| 8 Odom | 17 Blazier |
| 9 Houston | 19 Menchaca |

Secondary Schools

- | |
|---------------|
| 5 Travis HS |
| 15 Paredes MS |
| 18 Akins HS |

19
Campuses

130
Principals, case managers,
and support personnel

304
AISD teachers

Purpose

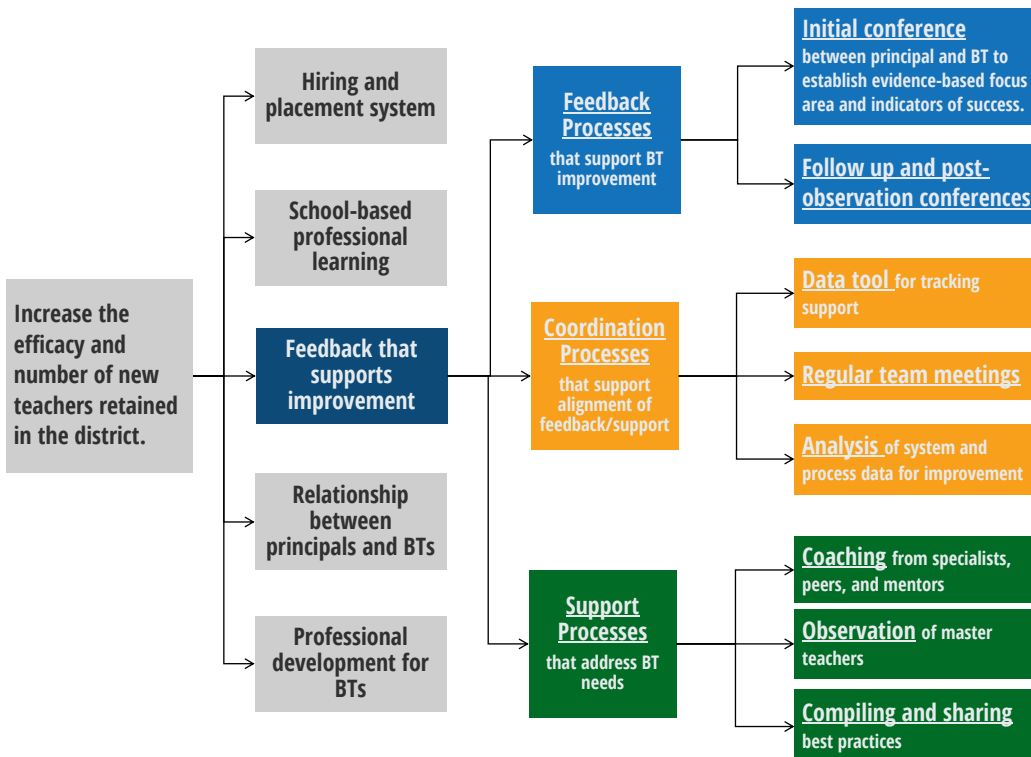
This report is an overview of the Building a Teaching Effectiveness Network (BTEN) project, in which the Austin Independent School District (AISD) participated from 2011 to 2015. The following sections detail the development of a district improvement aim, the implementation and subsequent improvement of a teacher feedback system, and reflections on the positive impact BTEN had on AISD schools. Additionally, the report describes several challenges participants faced as they attempted a new way of thinking about their work.

Background

In 2011, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching launched BTEN in collaboration with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), and the Aspen Institute. The broad BTEN goal was to translate into education the lessons learned in the healthcare community about rapid-cycle improvement, a perspective contrasting with traditional improvement efforts. Traditional school improvement efforts involve adopting interventions developed outside of the specific school context that are designed to teach educators how to do something “better” or “differently” to achieve a particular outcome. BTEN’s improvement work was guided by the principles of improvement science, which aim to accelerate the rate of change by finding a great idea, testing it, implementing it, and spreading it quickly.

The BTEN educational improvement work focused on campus support for beginning teachers (BTs). Most schools focused on teachers in their first 2 years of teaching and a few focused on teachers new to a grade level or new to the school. Figure 1 displays the driver diagram AISD developed with support from Carnegie staff and their partners over

Figure 1.
Hypothesized Primary and Secondary Drivers of New Teacher Development



The Model for Improvement

Setting aims: Aims should be time-specific and measurable, and should define the specific population or other systems that will be affected.

Selecting change ideas: Ideas may come from those who work in the system or by borrowing from the experiences of others who have successfully improved.

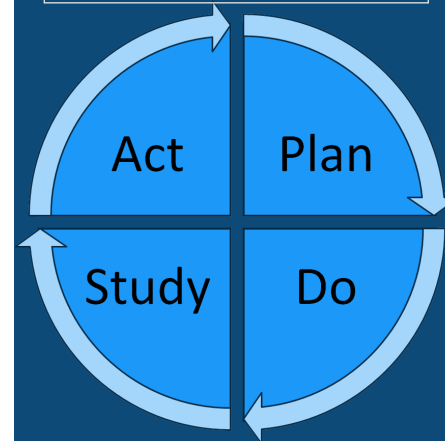
Establishing measures: Use quantitative measures to determine if a specific change actually leads to an improvement

Testing change ideas: The PDSA cycle is the process for testing in the work setting—by planning a change, trying it, observing the results, and acting on what is learned.

What are we trying to accomplish?

How will we know that a change is an improvement?

What change can we make that will result in an improvement?



Implementing change: Learn from tests on a small scale, refine through PDSA cycles, then implement change on a broader scale

Adapted from Langley G.L., Nolan K.M., Nolan T.W., Norman C.L., & Provost L.P. (2009) *The improvement guide: A practical approach to enhancing organizational performance* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.



a period of 2 years. This became the foundation for improvement work in Austin. The AISD improvement team planned to use improvement science to accelerate new teachers' effectiveness by improving the ways they support teachers. Their aim for BTEN was "to increase the efficacy and number of new teachers retained in the district."

Improvement work began with one principal and three teachers, and grew to 19 schools and 300 teachers.



The AISD improvement team narrowed the scope of the project to improving feedback for new teachers. During Year 1, the improvement team focused on identifying best practices for feedback, and testing a conversational protocol that campus support teams would use to ensure that feedback conversations would be consistent and aligned with those best practices. Dr. David Kauffman, principal at Perez Elementary school, worked with the AISD district improvement team to develop and execute Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles designed to test and refine the conversational protocol so that it could be implemented reliably and efficiently.



Year 2. Four additional schools joined BTEN for the 2012-2013 school year: Menchaca, Sunset Valley, Norman, and Akins. The new schools were introduced to the feedback protocol and to the improvement science concepts during a summer improvement institute hosted by the Carnegie Foundation (see page 12 for more information). During Year 2, all five schools implemented the feedback protocol and documented their conversations with beginning teachers using an online data entry tool. Teams also worked throughout the year to explicate a recommended support cycle that included:

- meeting with the principal early in the year to establish a personal connection and determine where the BT felt most in need of support,

- matching BTs with support providers at their school who were best suited to address their area of need, and

- conducting classroom observations targeted at looking for evidence of progress in the specific area of focus.



Post-observation conferences were designed to help teachers reflect on their practice, particularly on the data collected during the observation of the area of focus.

Campus teams were instructed to attempt to meet with their BTs about every 2 weeks.

Years 3 and 4. In 2013–2014, seven additional schools joined BTEN. These included Becker and the remaining six schools in the Akins vertical team: Blazier, Casey, Kocurek, Langford, Palm, and Paredes. In 2014–2015, seven more schools joined BTEN: Travis, Dawson, Houston, Linder, and Widen (all from the Travis vertical team), and Odom and Mathews. All BTEN improvement teams participated in the Carnegie BTEN Summer Institute, where new schools were introduced to the principles of



Supporting new teachers is a practice we have missed for years. BTEN has improved new teacher's experiences and the climate on our campus. It is a tremendous system that positively affects student learning.

—BTEN Principal

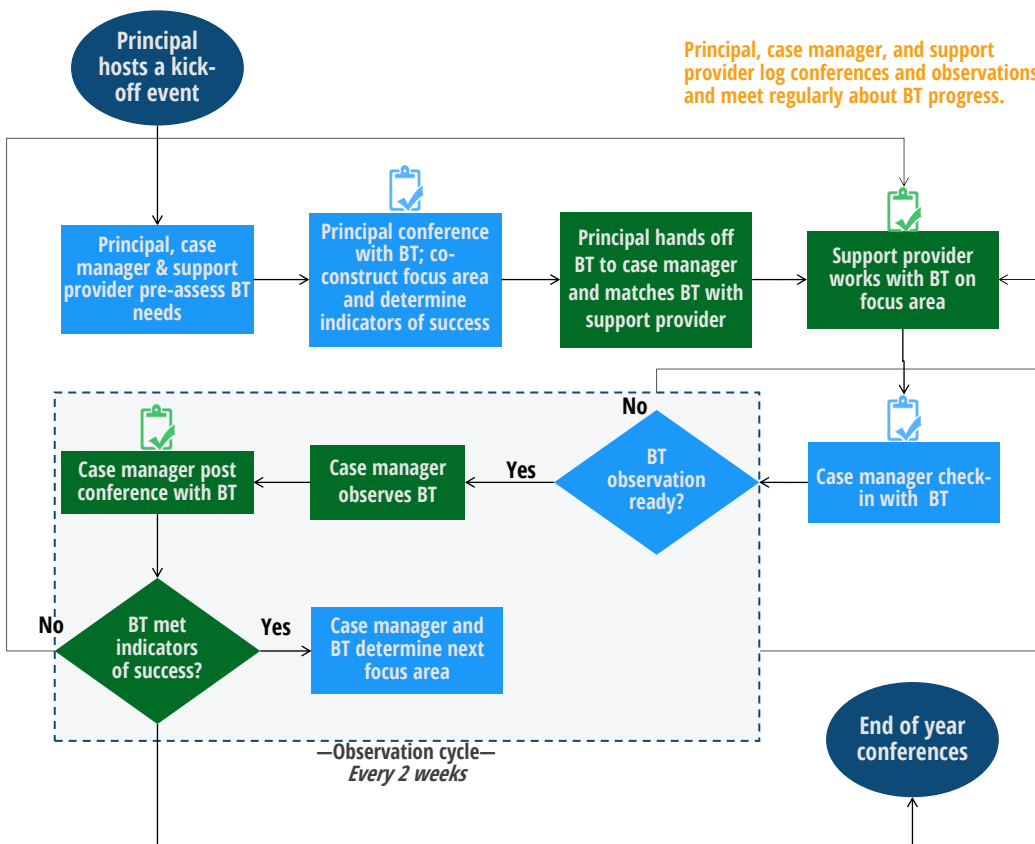
improvement science and experienced schools were given the opportunity to examine their improvement work in greater depth and plan for the following school year.

AISD focused on implementing and improving a feedback and support process for beginning teachers.

The core feedback and support process by BTEN teams used is displayed in Figure 2. The final process map emerged from work during the summer institutes and quarterly meetings. Also, the feedback conversation protocol developed in Year 1 became the foundation for a series of protocols that supported each of the conversational steps in the feedback process.

The process begins with an initial meeting with the principal, wherein the principal and teacher identify an area of need for which the teacher will receive support. Together, they co-construct indicators of success (i.e., “What will your classroom look like when you’ve achieved your goal?”) that describe the end result toward which the teacher is working. This meeting serves three critical functions in the feedback process: a) BTs have the opportunity to connect with the principal and understand that he or she is committed to helping them succeed, b) BTs understand that the support they receive will be coordinated across administrators and support providers, and c) principals have the opportunity to coach teachers in the process of examining their practice.

Figure 2.
BTEN Feedback and Support Process Map



Note: This map represents the basic process developed by the AISD improvement team. Campuses adapted this model to best fit the needs of their school and teachers.

Indicates a step in the process for which a conversational protocol was developed.

Core improvement principle:
“Understanding systems is key to improving performance.”¹

During the BTEN Summer Institute, Carnegie staff guided the experienced campuses in creating process maps that depicted both their current feedback systems and more “ideal” systems. This work resulted in agreement about a core support process, which became the focus of Years 3 and 4.



Campus Improvement Team Roles

Campus facilitator. Improvement team leader who is responsible for coordinating BTEN activities and guiding the team’s PDSA processes

Case manager. Principal, assistant principal, coach, master teacher, etc. responsible for coordinating support and following-up with the teacher. (Case managers also observe the teacher and guide the teacher through the post-observation reflection.)

Support provider. Staff member responsible for working with the teacher to address his or her areas of need

¹Bryk, A., Gomez, L., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America’s schools can get better at getting better.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.



BTEN Conversation Protocols

Good checklists...are precise. They are efficient, to the point, and easy to use even in the most difficult situations. They do not try to spell out everything--a checklist cannot fly a plane. Instead, they provide reminders of only the most critical and important steps--the ones that even the highly skilled professional using them could miss. Good checklists are, above all, practical.

— Atul Gawande, *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*

Checklists can be used to improve the quality, accuracy, and efficiency of complex processes. Instructional support for new teachers is a very complex process, and the BTEN system for sharing responsibility and connecting and aligning all of the most important pieces also meant more potential for errors in execution. Checklists, called *conversational protocols*, were developed as a tool for ensuring that best practices were followed by everyone involved in the process.

Conversational protocols were developed for each of the key meetings between improvement team members and their teachers. The protocols guide the principal, support provider, and/or case manager through a series of objectives for that conversation. After completing a conversation using the protocol, administrators documented their experiences using an online data form.

Conversational protocols were tailored by meeting type, but had **five common objectives**:

Build rapport. Cultivating a sense of trust and respect with BTs is a critical first step to providing high-quality feedback, and building rapport by conveying connection and understanding (i.e. “We are all on the same page, we all have the same goal”) can help. This step should not be skipped as the year progresses.

Discuss teacher’s needs and/or progress. Every meeting should begin with a conversation about what is going well, about the teacher’s area of focus, and the indicators of success set to measure progress in the area of focus. Critical to this step is that the reflection is teacher directed, and that the principal/case manager/support provider uses the opportunity to coach teacher reflection.

Provide reassurance. To help minimize stress, it is important to regularly remind the teacher that everyone is committed to supporting him or her and that support is ongoing, and that you will continue to work together to ensure that the challenges are met.

Discuss next steps. Before you leave, review with the teacher the necessary next steps in the support process. Make time-sensitive decisions, such as when you will meet again and what other potential sources of support are for his or her area of focus.

Thank the teacher for his or her time. Finally, express appreciation for the time the teacher has taken to meet with you and continue his or her commitment to improvement.



Next, the principal deploys support—often in the form of an instructional coach or mentor—and assigns a case manager to the teacher. After the teacher has had sufficient time to work with the support provider to address the area of need the case manager then begins classroom observations.

The goal of the observation cycle is to use classroom observation results to engage in conversation with the teacher about his or her progress in the area of need. Case managers collect data focused on the area of need, then meet with the teacher to invite his or her reflection on the classroom visit and to analyze the data collected. Together, they co-assess the teacher’s progress toward the chosen indicators of success. Like the initial principal meeting, the post-observation conference is another opportunity for a member of the campus improvement team to coach the teacher in reflective practice. When the teacher and case manager are satisfied that the teacher has met the indicators of success, they begin the process again by identifying a new area of focus.

Ideally, the principal steps into the process periodically to maintain rapport, to provide support and coaching, and to remain connected to the process. Although the process recommendation was for principals to cycle in at least once at the middle and end of year, some principals were able to meet much more often with their teachers (and a few, less often).

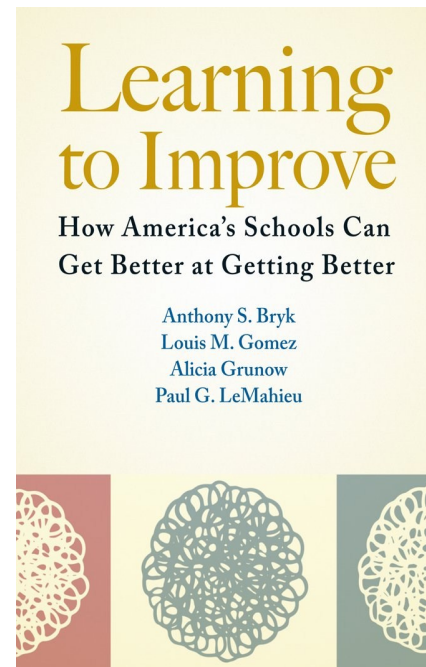
Improvement team coordination and PDSAs

Coordination among the members of the campus improvement team was critical to the success of the feedback and support process. The teams expressed concern about the alignment of feedback for BTs, particularly among the messages that BTs received from the various staff involved in their support process. Additionally, they voiced concern regarding alignment of feedback with the campus goals and priorities. Coordination meetings allowed the teams to discuss BTs and their progress toward focus areas and in turn, team members were able to demonstrate to BTs that they were all on the same page and were all focused on helping the teacher to succeed.

The coordination meetings also provided a venue for discussing PDSAs. The PDSAs primarily centered on tests of change in the logistics of the feedback and support

I think BTEN has kept us in closer contact with our Novice teachers. It has also kept our Instructional Team on the same page and accountable.
—BTEN principal

system. For example, teams tested innovative ways to coordinate support for teachers (e.g., team “huddles”) and to improve the regularity with which teachers received support (e.g., using the district’s email calendar system to reserve time slots). In 2013–2014, improvement team members at Akins High School introduced the PDSA process to their BTs and used the PDSA process to frame work in the area of focus. The BTs planned a strategy that was tied to their area of need; tried it; then debriefed with the case manager, who guided them through the process of deciding what worked and what did not, and what to try next.



AISD’s BTEN work is featured chapter 5 of the Carnegie Foundation’s new educational improvement guide.

Data for improvement

Real-time data were the most important improvement tool. For BTEN, the improvement teams measured their progress with three kinds of data: a PDSA tracker, meeting logs, and on-track surveys.

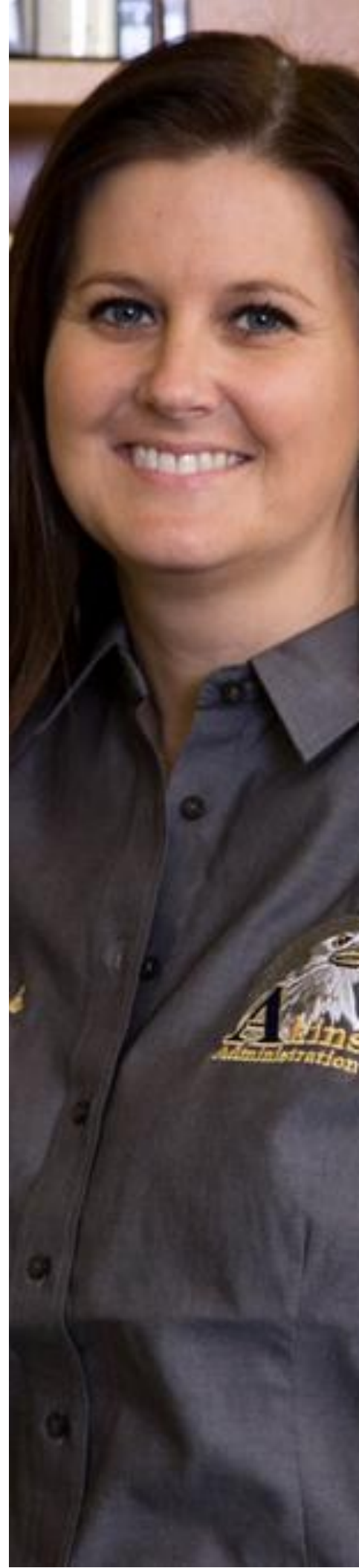
PDSA tracker. Campus facilitators also used a PDSA tracker to enter data about their team’s improvement trials and outcomes. The trackers were intended for teams to document their progress, track their change ideas, monitor their progress, and share successes with teams at other schools.

Meeting logs. Improvement team members logged information about their conferences using an online data system. The process data were intended to inform planning and PDSAs aimed at increasing the quality of the feedback process. These data helped to answer the questions “Are the parts/steps in the system performing as we need them to? Are we improving the system?” Using the meeting logs, campus improvement teams could assess the extent to which they were meeting goals (e.g., how many teachers had met with the principal, case manager, and support provider? how many teachers were waiting more than 2 weeks for their next observation?) and could track the progress of individual teachers. Campus teams also were able to view the information their colleagues had entered about meetings with teachers. This provided another venue beyond coordination meetings for team members to stay aligned and prepared for meeting with teachers.

On-track surveys. Approximately every 6 weeks, teachers answered a short survey about their feelings of engagement and self-efficacy, and of stress and burnout, and about the type and quality of feedback they had received. These on-track surveys were designed to inform improvement teams about the impact their work was having on teachers. In addition, the on-track survey introduced balancing measures that were used to assess the extent to which changes designed to improve one part of the system caused unintended consequences for other parts of the system. For example, teacher stress was included as a balancing measure so that schools could understand the impact all the new meetings might have on teachers’ feelings of burnout.

I like (the data tool) because I can go through and see how many walk-throughs a particular teacher has had. I can also look at what was said and determine patterns of improvements and needs of teachers.

—BTEN assistant principal





BTEN PDSA Cycles

Many BTEN improvement team staff reported they wished they had been able to incorporate even more PDSA cycles into their work during the school year. When asked why they were not able to accomplish PDSAs more regularly, most campus facilitators cited time as the primary obstacle.

In spite of time limitations, there were several schools that managed to incorporate PDSA cycles into their work regularly. One area of need that was identified by several schools emerged from the on-track survey data. Although most schools were consistently seeing teachers, providing feedback, and following the BTEN conversation protocols, the survey results suggested that teachers were not always satisfied with the quality of feedback they received. This prompted a series of PDSAs at several schools.

For example, one school structured its BTEN coordination meetings differently to allow more time for conversations about aligned feedback from all feedback providers. This in turned became a support system for all team members and a way to calibrate their feedback. Another school invited a district feedback and coaching expert to train its team on proven strategies and tools to use for feedback. This school's team then had follow-up conversations during the next several BTEN meetings about their progress while they were testing conversation strategies one at a time. As a result, the team began to see several BTEN teachers engage in much deeper conversations with their case managers. Another team used a series of feedback cards that teachers anonymously completed after each conversation with a BTEN team member. This allowed this team to learn more quickly about which issues to tackle. Yet another team used a custom checklist during conversations with teachers. This allowed this team to calibrate conversations and to support each conversation with teachers as it unfolded.

Sample PDSA tracker entries

PDSA Cycle	Level #	What are we trying to accomplish?	What change can we make that will result in an improvement?	How will we know the change is an improvement?	Plan	What happened when you ran the test?	Study-What can you conclude?	Consideration for future change ideas
A	2	Increase frequency & consistency of F2F meetings to ensure alignment among team	Utilize short huddles	*10min F2F *3 Huddles per wk (M,W,F) *Reduce our stress *Feedback will be better aligned	Wed, Feb 13 our whole team will meet at 3PM by the large tree in front of the school to review day's walk thrus	*Every member of the team was on time *Mtg took 15 min *Discussed walk thrus *Determined support plan * Interrupted frequently by parents & teachers	Team like meeting. It was efficient & productive. It took longer because of interruptions. Fbers felt on the same page.	Common definition/look-fors for checking for understanding
B	2	Increase frequency & consistency of F2F meetings to ensure alignment among team	Utilize short huddles	*10min F2F *3 Huddles per wk (M,W,F) *Reduce our stress *Feedback will be better aligned	Fri, Feb 15 our whole team will meet at 3PM in Amy's room to review walk thrus	*Every member of the team. *Mtg took 10 min but team needed more time *Discussed walk thrus *Determined support plan	Team like meeting, proficient and productive. Fbers felt on the same page. Fbers felt much more confident about their role	
C	2 & 3	Increase frequency & consistency of F2F meetings to ensure alignment among team	Add 30 minute meeting	*30min F2F *1 time per wk *Reduce Fber stress *Fber will be better aligned *In depth discussion about teacher needs	Fri, Feb 22 our whole team will meet from 3-3:30 PM in Amy's room to review walk thrus			

Levels: 1=Learning/Development 2=Testing 3=Implementation 4=Spread

General reception

Participants' enthusiasm for BTEN helped to drive recruitment of the Akins vertical team as well as Travis High School. AISD BTEN participants, particularly principals, spoke positively about their experiences when asked about the project. Akins principal Daniel Girard described his experiences in an article in *Education Week* featuring the BTEN project:²

"The work really forced us to think about the flow of communication that we have with new teachers," Mr. Girard said. "What we used to do was basically, 'Hey, new teacher—good job,' and we did provide feedback but it wasn't targeted; we tried to do everything all at once.

"By focusing on one little thing at a time," Mr. Girard said, "we were able to get a whole lot of bang for the buck," he said.

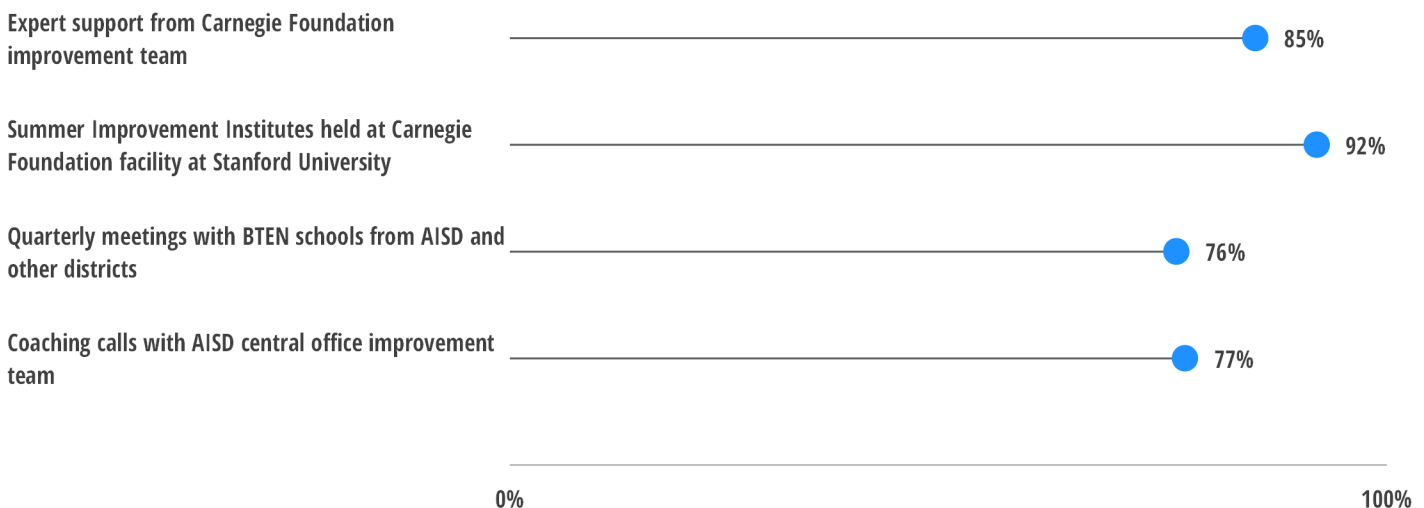
On the 2015 AISD Employee Coordinated Survey in response to the prompt, "Please take a moment to share any lessons you learned from the BTEN project," one principal stated,

BTEN gave my campus the opportunity to discuss new teacher needs on a regular basis. Most importantly, it held support providers and case managers accountable for meeting with the new teachers. The support providers provided valuable mentoring for our new teachers to ensure they had the necessary knowledge and skills to make it through their first year of teaching. Because of this, new teachers knew they had someone they could reach out to for support without fear of evaluation.

The same survey also asked AISD BTEN principals and facilitators to rate the value of support they received for BTEN. Most participants reported that the support and professional development activities associated with BTEN were valuable (Figure 3).

Figure 3.

AISD BTEN participants felt the support and professional development activities (especially the Summer Improvement Institutes at the Carnegie Foundation facility) associated with the project were valuable.



Source. 2015 AISD Employee Coordinated Survey

Note. $n = 39$. Response rate = 72%; percentages indicate ratings of "valuable" or "very valuable."

We can provide support in ways to new teachers that we have not been providing in the past.

—BTEN principal

²Sparks, S. D. (2015, September). Austin School District tests new R&D model with novice teachers. *Education Week*, 34(04), 6.



BTEN Ongoing Training and Support

BTEN was a great program that helped us zero in on new teachers needs. Additionally, the time spent in California where we learned about the science of improvement was amazing and allowed us to implement many systems at our campus.

—BTEN campus facilitator

Principals, campus facilitators, and other members of the campus and district support teams participated in BTEN professional development activities throughout the year, including

BTEN Summer Improvement Institutes at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching at Stanford University. The Carnegie Foundation hosted BTEN Summer Improvement Institutes, where teams were introduced to the improvement process, learned about and practiced with valuable improvement and feedback tools, and had the opportunity to work with other BTEN districts. The Carnegie staff, along with partners from AFT, IHI, the Aspen Institute, and Harvard University provided expert support.

Quarterly network meetings at the BTEN district sites. Twice per year, members of the BTEN network met to engage in conversation about their BTEN experiences, with support and coaching from Carnegie and partners, and to learn about the progress of their peer districts. Meetings were held in Austin and New York.

Campus site visits from the Carnegie team and their partners. Several times throughout the project, Carnegie and partners visited Austin and met with principals and campus facilitators. They learned about the BTEN work and provided on-site coaching and guidance as the campus teams worked to incorporate the feedback and support system and the improvement processes into their daily work.

BTEN coaching calls for AISD district improvement team and campus facilitators. Members of the Carnegie BTEN team phoned the AISD central improvement team weekly. The coaching calls provided an opportunity for the Austin team to share concerns and to provide feedback to the Carnegie team about their progress. These meetings also were used to discuss data, meeting logistics, and opportunities to refine the feedback and support system. In addition, the AISD district improvement team scheduled weekly calls with each campus improvement facilitator that served a similar purpose. The coaching calls were an opportunity to build relationships with campus staff and demonstrate commitment to the project; to provide coaching, support, and guidance through the examination of PDSA and meeting log data; and to provide clarification and additional training on the feedback process and the use of improvement tools.

Facilitator meetings for campus improvement team facilitators. Campus facilitators met periodically, either in person or via webinar, to support learning across schools. The meetings provided an important opportunity for participants to share their experiences with each other. In particular, teams shared their PDSA results with other schools focusing on similar issues.



Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

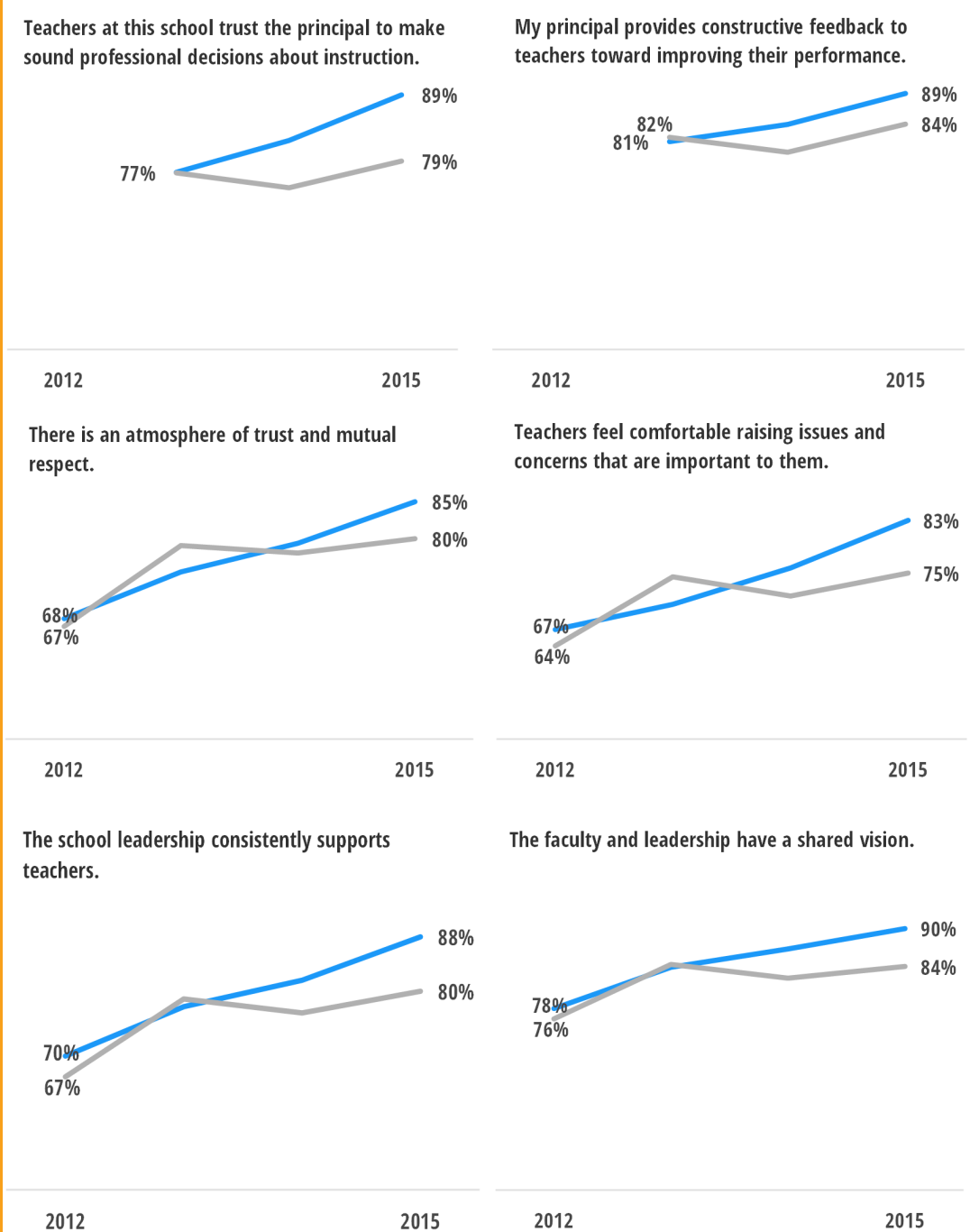


What did we learn from our participation in BTEN?

Trust and positive perceptions of leadership can improve when leaders and teachers collaborate for improvement

Results from the annual Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) AISD survey indicated that BTEN schools surpassed similar non-participating schools on many key leadership and trust indicators during their years in BTEN (Figure 4). The level and kinds of support and engagement required by the BTEN feedback and support system appears to have had a positive impact on the BTEN schools, particularly on principal trust.

Figure 4. Over time, TELL AISD results for BTEN schools surpassed results for similar schools on key



Source: TELL AISD Survey results, 2012–2015

Note: Schools used for comparison were comparable to BTEN schools demographically and on 2012 TELL AISD results.

New teachers need non-evaluative support from their principal.

Improvements in trust and other perceptions of school leadership may be related to BTEN activities in several ways. First, the BTEN principals led the support process by meeting with every participating teacher during the first 6 weeks of school. Although not an uncommon practice, the aims of this initial conversation in the BTEN system were targeted and purposeful: establish rapport and put the teacher at ease, identify an area of need, and assure the teacher that supports are in place to assist him or her. Many BTEN administrators reported a qualitative difference in the way they approached teachers with BTEN and the way they approached teachers before BTEN. One principal said “We (have) academic discussions with teachers in a way that takes the ‘administrator’ part out and shows more of a support role.” The investment in changing the tone went a long way toward building trust and understanding, both for teachers and principals. One principal admitted not always seeing the value in reassurance and “pats on the back” for new teachers or in just trying to make people feel good. But the BTEN work shifted this principal’s thinking in an important way:

I realized that it’s not just about a pat on the back.. ‘oh, you’re doing fine...’ It’s also about the teacher wanting to know if they are doing the right things, teaching in the right way. Should they be doing things differently? Are they forgetting things? Are they focusing on the right things?

Over a period of several years the shift to focused, non-evaluative support seems to have positively impacted many of the BTEN campuses.

Experiences of stress and burnout may be less acute when teachers receive consistent support.

The BTEN feedback and support process also may have led directly to improvements in perceptions of leadership by increasing feelings of engagement/self-efficacy and mitigating feelings of stress and burnout. BTEN teachers reported their feelings of stress and burnout every 6 weeks on the on-track survey, and BTEN improvement team members logged their contact with the BTs. When examined together, the patterns in reports of stress and burnout reported by teachers differed according to the frequency with which they met with their support team. In 2014–2015 teachers who met nine or more times with their support team reported higher levels of engagement and self-efficacy and nine 9 times (Figure 5).

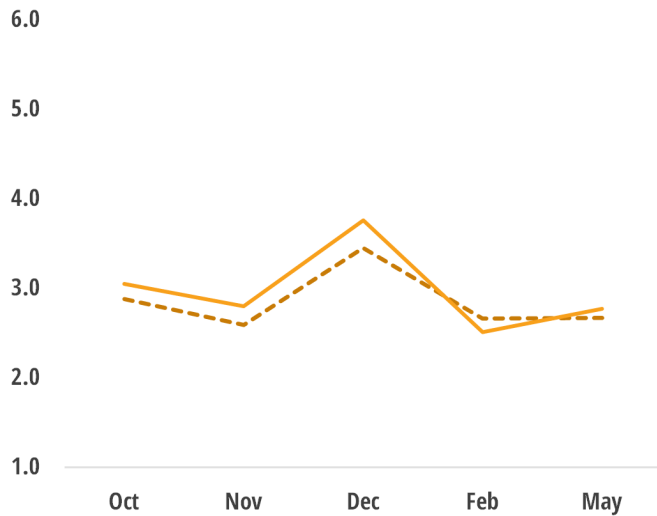
Cooperative, coordinated leadership also benefits leadership teams.

The level of cooperation and coordination required to do this work well also likely influenced feelings of trust, accountability, and engagement among the BTEN improvement team participants. Many campus improvement teams included master teachers, administrators, coaches, and mentors. The teams worked cooperatively to develop and improve a comprehensive, aligned system of support. And in turn, this may have influenced their own work in other ways. For example, one BTEN assistant principal said, “BTEN has helped by providing an opportunity to collaborate with teachers and other staff to improve teaching and learning in ways we haven’t before. It

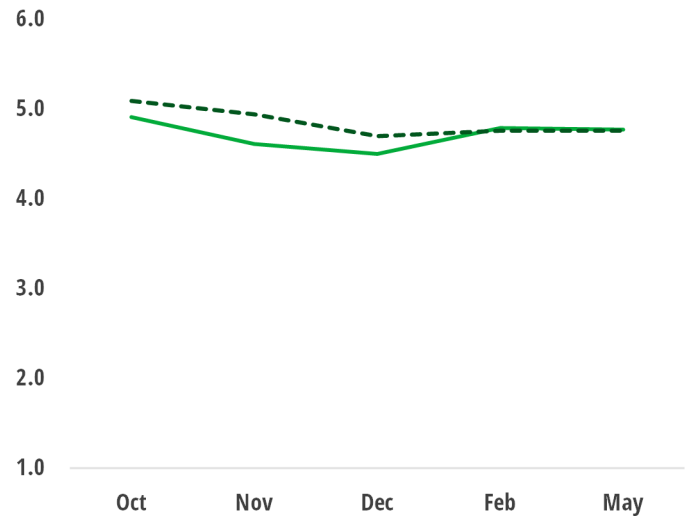
Figure 5.

Teachers who met more often with their support team reported lower levels of stress and burnout and higher levels of engagement and self-efficacy than did teachers who met less often.

Teachers who met with their support team **9 or more times** reported lower levels of stress and burnout than did teachers who met **fewer than 9 times**.



Teachers who met with their support team **9 or more times** reported lower levels of stress and burnout than did teachers who met **fewer than 9 times**.



Source. AISD BTEN Database, 2014–2015; On Track Surveys, 2014–2015.

Notes. A 6-point response scale was used for all items, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Fewer than 9 meetings $n = 87$; more than 9 meetings $n = 52$. A list of items for each construct can be found in Appendix A.

has influenced the way we do business here in so many ways.” A campus facilitator said that the work influenced her perspective more broadly, too: “I learned that you must be positive at all times. You should always seek out the good. People want/need help even if they don’t ask.”

It can be challenging to see the big picture when working small.

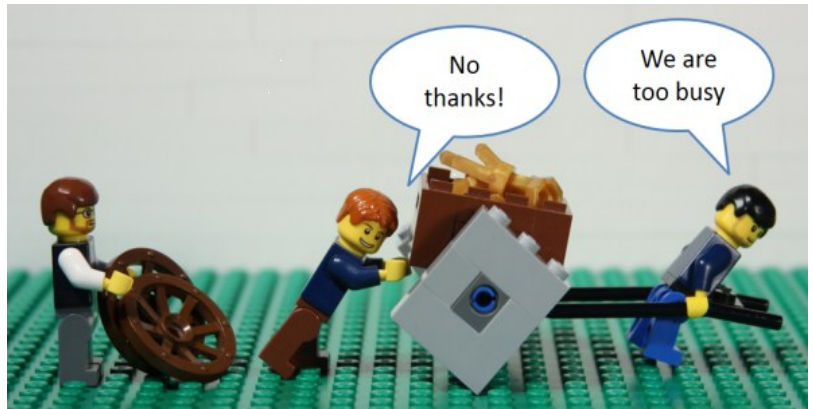
BTEN participants were asked to execute two new initiatives at once: implement a new feedback and support system for BTs at your school, and use the improvement science tools to make it better. One facilitator described the process as “not just building the plane in the air, but fixing it in the air.” Consequently, progress on both was slow at times, and often the improvement work of testing and implementing changes was a low priority as schools concentrated on just getting their systems up and running. The improvement science tools, such as process maps and PDSAs, were used primarily to support implementation and improvement of the system, although it was not uncommon to go for several weeks without running a PDSA.

Spreading change ideas also was limited by the variation across the feedback and support systems within schools. All BTEN campuses implemented the same basic feedback and support process, but each school was able to customize its system to best fit its capacity and individual teachers’ needs. This variation in execution was both an advantage and a challenge. It was advantageous for the schools to have so much flexibility in the way they managed the process. However, it was challenging to draw conclusions about the efficacy of BTEN as a whole knowing that the execution was so different at each school. And, although the purpose of the “network” part of BTEN was to facilitate cross-site learning, individual adaptations made this a very slow and

difficult process at times.

Innovation takes time.

Enthusiasm for BTEN rose and fell over time at somewhat predictable intervals. During and immediately following the summer institutes, participants were energized and optimistic about the work. However, during the long intervals between the quarterly meetings, interest tended to drop off somewhat. Some schools that built on the early enthusiasm were able to sustain it and stay focused, whereas others were not. The level of interest in improvement and documentation of PDSAs waned somewhat in the Spring semesters. After the winter holidays, preparing teachers and students for events such as graduation and end-of-year testing tends to become the primary focus of the work in schools. For some, BTEN became “just one more thing” to do. As one principal put it:



Source: <http://hakanforss.wordpress.com>

It's kind of hard sometimes when you have so many different programs on your campus... [Improvement work] has really made me stop to think, “Okay, which program is really getting us the results?” You know, what can we let go of that we've done enough, and we have enough data to realize it isn't really helping us? And what do we really look at as far as that can help us?

Nontraditional reform can feel uncomfortable.

BTEN participants also had to be comfortable with some uncertainty. The training and support participants received was designed to give participants tools they could use to guide their work. But because this was not a prescriptive program and campus teams were responsible for decisions about what to try next, it was challenging to understand exactly what the work was supposed to look like. Likewise, participants were responsible for deciding whether or not their efforts were successful. One facilitator said:

We did not have enough feedback on whether we on the right track or not. I understand the need to be positive, but I would have loved to have known how we were doing and what area we needed to improve on in comparison with other campuses.



Conclusion

The BTEN partnership with the Carnegie Foundation concluded after the 2013–2014 school year, but AISD chose to support the work for an additional year by providing Office of Educator Quality staff time to support the campus improvement teams. A fall kickoff meeting, one quarterly meeting, and one facilitator meeting were held in Austin, and campus improvement teams had the opportunity to come together and discuss their work.

AISD’s Office of Educator Quality concluded its BTEN work at the district level in 2014–2015, but feedback from the participants suggests that most schools will attempt to continue using the BTEN feedback and support system and the improvement tools on their own. Sixty-three percent of improvement team survey respondents indicated their school will continue using the PDSA process and small tests of change to make campus improvements.

The BTEN participants agreed that including the principal as the first point of contact in the system was critical to establishing a sense of connection for the BTs and buy-in into the process. The improvements in staff perceptions of leadership as measured by the TELL AISD Survey are encouraging and suggest that some of the BTEN activities may have had a positive impact not only on the BTs, but on other staff, including the leadership team, as well.

Any frustration associated with the BTEN project centered largely on uncertainty associated with both implementing a new feedback and support system, and attempting to work within the parameters of a new way of innovating and improving. This is not surprising given that improvement work should feel different from many other campus initiatives because it is not a program but a set of tools that can be used to address any problem. It does take time and commitment to sustain the work long enough to see a real impact and to spread change across an organization, however, and time is one resource that can be very limited in schools.

16/19

Schools plan to continue using the BTEN feedback process next year.

Source. 2015 Employee Coordinated Survey

For more information

AISD Department of Educator Quality <http://www.austinisd.org/edquality>

American Federation of Teachers <http://www.aft.org/>

The Aspen Institute <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/>

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation <http://www.gatesfoundation.org>

Building a Teaching Effectiveness Network—Carnegie Foundation <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/in-action/bten/>

Institute for Healthcare Improvement <http://www.ihl.org>

Bryk, A., Gomez, L., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Langley G. J., Nolan K. M., Nolan T. W., Norman C. L., Provost L. P. (2009). *The improvement guide: A practical approach to enhancing organizational performance* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.



AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Author
Karen M. Cornetto, Ph.D.

AISD Department of Educator Quality Contributor
Josefina A. Hughes, M.Ed.

Department of Research and Evaluation



1111 West 6th Street, Suite D-350 | Austin, TX 78703-5338
512.414.1724 | fax: 512.414.1707
www.austinisd.org/dre | Twitter: @AISD_DRE

June 2015

Publication 14.77

Appendix A

Measures of Engagement/Self-Efficacy and Stress/Burnout

Engagement/Self-Efficacy

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat disagree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly agree

I would recommend this school to parents seeking a place for their child.

I usually look forward to each working day at my school.

I feel energized by my job.

All in all, I am satisfied with my job as a teacher in my school.

I meet the teaching goals that I set for myself.

When I really try, I can get through to the most difficult students.

I feel loyal to my school.

Even where other teachers may get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve a problem I encounter in the classroom.

I am excited about the way in which my work contributes to my school.

If a student in my class becomes disruptive and noisy, I know some techniques to redirect him/her quickly.

I am proud to be part of my school.

Stress/Burnout

Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Once a month or less, 3 = A few times a month, 4 = Once a week, 5 = A few times a week, 6 = Every day

How often, if ever, do you wonder, "Maybe I'm not cut out to be a teacher"?

I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally

Working with students all day is really a strain on me.

I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.

I feel burned out from my work.

I feel frustrated by my job.

Overall, my job feels overwhelming.

I feel emotionally drained from my work.

I feel used up at the end of the work day.

For information about item selection and validation, please contact Sola Takahashi, Improvement Analytics and Measurement Development Associate, at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.