Head & Heart: A report on integrating social, emotional and academic learnings in educational environments during the Pandemic Era

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Introduction

Research over the past few decades in the educational and developmental sciences has demonstrated that social, emotional, and academic learning are inherently intertwined.[1] While these three dimensions of learning are often treated as distinct in both the design and provision of educational opportunities, learning happens everywhere, all the time, both in school and out-of-school contexts,[2] through integrated psychological, social-emotional, and cognitive processes.[3] A key implication for educators is that

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>
> Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron, & Osher, 2020

in order to best support student learning, educational environments need to be responsive to all of these dimensions of young people's development.[4] However, creating academic learning experiences that meaningfully integrate social and emotional strengths and learning remains a significant challenge. This is particularly true both across and within schools for students marginalized on the basis of their race, ethnicity, immigration status, English language proficiency, gender identity, and neurodiversity, leading to vast inequities in experiences, opportunities, and outcomes.[5]

Given this current and historical context, one of the pressing questions facing school leaders and educators is how to cultivate equity-centered, whole child approaches to teaching and learning. While schools are increasingly expected to support the social, emotional, and academic growth of all students,[6] school leaders and educators are rarely provided with the support and training to

realize this ambition. Over the past three years, as schools have striven to support young people and adults through the COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice, and heightened societal polarization, this goal has become increasingly important but remains elusive. To better support schools in responding to these challenges, the Achievement Network (ANet) and Transforming Education (TransformEd), two educational non-profit organizations, formed a partnership.

About The Achievement Network (ANet)

ANet is an expert partner helping educational leaders seed equity throughout their unique learning environments. ANet collaborates with school leaders to strategically implement assessments, leadership coaching and data and instructional tools that build a shared educational practice grounded in equity and lead to breakthrough results for students. Our work is grounded in anti-racism and anti-oppressive practices. By understanding the overarching, interconnected conditions that drive instructional equity at each level, we make it easy for districts to grow a strong ecosystem where everyone understands both the why and how of equitable education and creating empowering learning environments where every student can thrive.

About Transforming Education (TransformEd)

TransformEd believes that every young person deserves support in developing their whole self. TransformEd works with systems and schools to identify the priorities and assets of their community, set a strategy for promoting antiracist whole child and whole adult development, and support implementation in a way that is responsive to districts' and schools' unique contexts. TransformEd's support for whole child and whole adult development aligns with research that frames culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy and culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies to nurture identity-safe schools and classrooms. Our aim is to assist educators in reflecting on how they make decisions at the district and school level and develop culturally and linguistically responsive approaches to leading, teaching and learning centered on the needs and strengths of the students in their care.

About the Partnership

Our partnership began in the midst of the school closures during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring of 2020 as schools faced increasingly urgent and mounting challenges meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of their students. Leaders in both organizations recognized the potential power in bringing together ANet's expertise in leadership coaching and academic instruction grounded in equity and TransformEd's cutting-edge antiracist, whole child development approach. With support from a grant from the Gates Foundation, we co-developed a coaching and professional learning model to test our integrated approach to academics, equity, and whole child development.
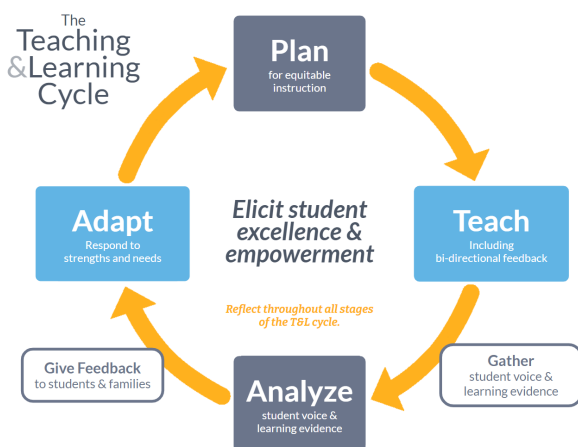
In the first year of the partnership (2020-2021), we focused on cross-organizational learning, sharing our respective experience and knowledge around academic and social-emotional learning. We then adapted ANet's traditional coaching model and designed accompanying resources with the goal of better supporting schools to integrate academic and social-emotional learning (SEL) to support more equitable learning experiences for students. In the 2021-2022 school year, we

partnered with five schools to pilot the adapted coaching model. This report presents preliminary learnings from this partnership.

Our approach[7]

Our intention was first to support schools to meet the pressing short-term need driven by the unique challenges schools, educators, and students faced in the immediate return to school following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and second to prepare schools to address the more chronic need across the education system to better merge the key elements of whole child development for more equitable student outcomes across social, emotional, and academic domains. ANet and TransformEd have a long history of expertise in academic and social-emotional learning support, respectively, so at the outset of our partnership we invested time in cross-organizational learning with the goal of deepening and expanding our organizational expertise around whole child learning and development. In 2020, TransformEd worked with leaders from ANet's service delivery team to develop a series of workshops for ANet's Directors of School Support ("coaches") with the dual goals of (a) preparing ANet's coaching team with the lens, language, and tools to help schools identify opportunities to support students' and teachers' social-emotional needs through regular coaching meetings, and (b) developing ANet coaches' knowledge of evidence-based strategies for fostering relationships, building positive learning environments, and using trauma-informed approaches.

FIGURE 1.
ANet's School Coaching Model

The Teaching & Learning Cycle

Plan
for equitable instruction

Teach
Including bi-directional feedback

Analyze
student voice & learning evidence

Adapt
Respond to strengths and needs

Elicit student excellence & empowerment

Reflect throughout all stages of the T&L cycle.

Give Feedback
to students & families

Gather
student voice & learning evidence

Support school leaders as they lead instructional improvement by:

- Creating an environment of growth via 3-4 instructional change cycles

- Developing high impact instructional leadership practices to support strong implementation of the school's academic strategy and accelerate instructional improvement

After preparing ANet coaches with the resources and foundational knowledge needed to help schools understand and begin to address the social-emotional needs of their students, ANet and TransformEd focused on more deeply integrating and applying our work. We identified five ANet partner schools that expressed interest in or were already engaged in integrating social-emotional and academic learning to pilot leadership coaching that facilitated the integration of academic and whole child instructional practices. Leveraging ANet's school coaching model (Figure 1), coaches supported school leaders in the pilot schools to identify both academic goals for the year and a whole child practice aligned with those goals. Throughout the year, ANet coaches facilitated teaching and learning cycles focused on the integration of the goals and the whole child practice.

Our Approach to coaching the pilot schools

ANet's standard school improvement model is focused on instructional leadership development as the primary driver through which equitable instruction for all students is made possible. ANet coaches work alongside school leaders to achieve their vision for equitable instruction by developing strong teaching and learning cycles that are driven by data, promote informed instructional shifts, and support teams in deepening and extending their knowledge of content standards. ANet school coaching partnerships typically include twenty coaching interactions over the course of the school year

Student-Led Discussions as a Whole Child Practice

Four out of five pilot schools chose to implement student-led discussion protocols as their whole child practice that supports multiple instructional priorities.

Academics. Learning is made more meaningful through collaboration and conversation. Students are able to engage in higher-level thinking skills when they are asked open-ended questions that push their thinking. In addition to this, students gain a deeper understanding about topics by listening to their peers' varying perspectives. Student-led discussion protocols elicit student ownership, deep thinking, critical questioning, academic vocabulary usage, and a rooted sense of community.

SEL. Students who are more self-aware and confident about their learning capacities try harder and persist in the face of challenges.[8] Student-led discussions build empathy, mindfulness, and social & self awareness. Overall, it builds a healthy classroom community which will lead to more students willing to share and open to feedback.

Anti-Racism. Student-led protocols validate and build upon the learning styles that students bring to school which, when suppressed or discouraged, lead to disengagement and classroom management issues. Our upbringings and personal experiences deeply influence our lives. These experiences shape our perspectives, actions, values, and beliefs. Discussions provide space to hear from different perspectives and to become exposed to different experiences.

Student-Led Discussion Resources:
- Think-Pair-Share - The Teacher Toolkit
- Using Think-Pair-Share in the Classroom
- 3rd Grade Stronger and Clearer Array Activity
- Mathematical Language Routines

that are organized around (a) asset-mapping and goal-setting, wherein coaches and instructional leadership teams (ILTs) analyze data from multiple sources to identify a focus area for the year and name a set of yearlong outcomes for school leaders, teachers, and students aligned to the focus area, and (b) 3-4 instructional change cycles wherein coaches and ILTs identify and work toward interim outcomes for school leaders, teachers, and students in service of their yearlong outcomes. Coaches and ILTs monitor their progress on cycle and yearlong outcomes through the analysis of data from multiple sources, which may include assessments, focus groups and interviews, student experience surveys, and classroom and coaching observations.

In fall 2021, the five pilot schools identified academic focus areas in math and reading, such as supporting foundational skills (e.g., phonological awareness and phonics), implementing high-quality aligned instructional materials, and increasing student cognitive lift. They also identified a whole child practice to integrate in support of their academic goals for the year; four of the five pilot schools chose to implement student-led discussion protocols and one school focused on reflecting and developing readers' identity through metacognitive skills and self-assessment. Over the course of the school year, the ILTs and coaches engaged in quarterly planning and reflection to advance and monitor their progress toward the end-of-year

Reader Identity and Metacognitive Practice

One school chose to implement practices on reflecting and developing readers' identity through metacognitive skills and self-assessment.

Academics. Self-assessment helps guide students in identifying glows (what they're doing well, headed towards, or have already mastered) and areas of growth (places where there's opportunity to learn and practice more)—a key practice in supporting students in building a Reader's Identity. Teaching metacognitive strategies supports student agency and sense of purpose, facilitating the formation of student centered classroom environments where students are able to self-assess their learning and build their identity.

SEL. Facilitation of building academic identity promotes agency and ownership over learning, supports executive function and independent decision making, and encourages persistence in challenging tasks. It helps students develop their purpose for learning and supports the development of growth mindset and motivation.[2]

Anti-Racism. Self-assessment and metacognitive practices empower students when the practices are socially and culturally informed. Reflection of our histories, interests, and assets influence reflections of successes and challenges. Personal contexts also inform future strategies and decisions).[10]

Consistently and collaboratively assessing one's own behaviors, beliefs, and ways of being from an antiracist lens can support an increased awareness of bias in decision making, culturally responsive pedagogy, stronger relationships, and affirming environments.

Reader Identity Resources:
- Reading Identity And Why It Matters by Jennifer Scoggin And Hannah Schneewind
- Gholdy Muhamad's (2020) book Cultivating Genius: An equity framework for Culturally Responsive and Historically Responsive Literacy

goals. (See Figure 2 for an example of one school's cycle and yearlong outcomes.) ANet and TransformEd worked together to develop a flexible framework and guiding questions for holistic data collection and review to support planning and progress monitoring. TransformEd and ANet met on a bi-weekly basis to develop professional learning experiences for ANet coaches and partners in the pilot.

FIGURE 2.
Example Cycle and End-of-Year Leader, Instructional, and Student Outcomes

Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4	EOY
School Leader Outcomes				
Use baseline student data (including climate and culture data) and BOY observations to determine a student-level inequity of focus and identify key outcomes and evidence of change they'll look for at student, teacher, and leader levels	Build leader's knowledge of Whole Child Practices and share knowledge with APs; leader and APs build knowledge of rigorous and relevant math instruction, familiarizing students with SMP, and three shifts	Introduction to WC content and student led discussion protocols PL with WC team; observes classrooms and gives feedback on aspects of rigor and student led discussion protocols.	Leader facilitates teachers through at least one teaching and learning cycle in PLCs, including analyzing student work and reflection; conducts observations and lesson reviews with feedback	Leaders observe classrooms and facilitate PL that leads to **Illustrative mathematics being implemented in a way that elevates student voice and critical thinking throughout each lesson.**
Instructional Outcomes				
n/a	n/a	Teachers' lesson plans show an intentional planning for aspects of rigor and student discussion protocols. Teachers are increasing their DOK questions to students with intention.	A group of math teachers are regularly making opportunities for students to productively struggle and explain their thinking when appropriate; a group of math teachers are intentionally planning for student-led discussions	Teachers pose questions and problems that prompt students to explain their thinking about the content of the lesson; teachers create the conditions for student conversations where students are encouraged to talk about each other's thinking.
Student Outcomes				
n/a	n/a	Students are engaging in tasks that match the aspects of rigor; students are using opportunities to share their thinking with peers.	Students are regularly persevering in solving problems in the face of initial difficulty; students are regularly talking and asking questions about each other's thinking to clarify or improve their own understanding	Students are carrying the cognitive lift throughout instruction; student work and discussions demonstrate growing strengths in making sense of problems and persevere in solving them, and making sense of and appreciating the reasoning of others.

Note. Cycles 1 and 2 focused on foundational work with school leaders; specific instructional and student outcomes were set starting in Cycle 3.

Definitions:
AP: Assistant Principal
BOY: Beginning of year
DOK: Depth of knowledge
PL: Professional learning
PLC: Professional learning community
SMP: Standards for mathematical practice
WC: Whole child

> **"** I think our teachers do a pretty good job of [caring for students]. We have a lot of students with histories of trauma, and there is a lot of empathy for all of us going through a year of being apart and coming back together and being a community. Our teachers have concern and compassion and curiosity for students. They want to be supportive, but we don't have good systems in place to put that support into action. Teachers are really compassionate and over the past couple of years did a nice job of having those systems in place, but then the pandemic happened, we lost folks, and we lost a lot of those systems, and we are trying to rebuild those systems but it is still a ways away.
>
> **OAK ELEMENTARY INSTRUCTIONAL COACH**

Our learning

The COVID-19 pandemic made the work of this pilot simultaneously more urgent and challenging. Some studies estimate that teachers and principals experienced twice the normal job-related stress during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when compared to the general working population.[11] Our pilot school leaders and their teachers were faced with supporting their communities through traumatic loss, anxiety, depression, and grief while also handling additional workloads as school personnel either needed to be out for extended periods of time or left their jobs permanently. As one ANet coach explained, *"These losses and high levels of trauma have also resulted in changes happening within the pandemic that have leadership team members and administration covering classes, and there are restrictions among the teacher union for a limited amount of instructional planning times."*

Faced with these challenges, leaders and teachers struggled to build or rebuild the necessary systems of support to respond adequately to student needs. Our pilot was designed both as an opportunity to lean in together and meet the incredibly challenging and complex needs our schools were facing as well as a learning experience for the five pilot schools and both organizations. The heightened demands on administrators' and teachers' time as a result of the pandemic meant that we had to be very flexible in our approach and expectations for the implementation of the planned pilot timeline and activities. One ANet coach shared, *"Our biggest*

challenge so far is time, time, time. [The school leaders] are constantly responding to COVID-related challenges which has led us to cancel/reschedule interactions." Another ANet coach shared that it was challenging to *"keep the team focused and on-message with the priority, as opposed to the metaphorical fires that need to be put out. Often those fires are actually connected to the priority, but are being viewed as fires, not as part of what they are already working to solve for."*

The waves of trauma, limited resources, and resultant sense of overwhelm that schools experienced during the 2020 and 2021 school years meant that administrators were understandably cautious about adding anything new for teachers. A recent national survey reported that rather than focus on incorporating new strategies and initiatives over the past two years, educators wanted to focus on their core job responsibilities as a way to alleviate the increased stress of pandemic-era teaching.[12] In our pilot schools, there was a similar desire to handle adding "extra" things judiciously. While the school leaders understood the importance of introducing whole child practices to create more supportive environments for their teachers and students, they also expressed some hesitation to add anything more to their teachers' increasingly heavy load. One school administrator at Birch Middle School shared:

> **"**
> I think one of our biggest challenges has been where our teachers are at because of the pandemic and their being at their capacity. And everything's new, including behavior we're not used to in middle school - seeing elementary school behavior in middle school bodies - so everything's new every day all day. Adding a new strategy or a new way of thinking - while it will lighten the load once we learn it - can feel just so daunting and overwhelming. So how do we help our teachers continue to grow and gain these very specific strategies that have been targeted for our current specific situation or specific school to help us without losing them? I think that's probably been our biggest challenge.
>
> **BIRCH MIDDLE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR**

An ANet coach shared a similar reflection:

> "One thing I've heard repeatedly is "I need to see the whole picture before I can commit to it."...They really want the "whole picture;" they need to walk through and experience it, experience the different interactions, and the professional learning opportunities. [School leaders] are trying to attend to the well-being of the adults, and for this to be successful there needs to be systems and structures in place otherwise it is going to be more harmful than helpful.
>
> **ANET COACH**

Before introducing what may have seemed like a new approach to teachers, administrators wanted to start with building their own understanding of how all the pieces fit together. Understanding the "whole picture" allowed administrators to align and integrate whole child approaches within work already underway in their schools. In order to support school leaders to do this with their ILTs, ANet coaches and TransformEd invested time in building a shared understanding of the relationship between academic, cognitive, social, emotional, and identity development through a whole child approach so that school leaders weren't tasked with developing that framing and rationale on their own. Then, ANet coaches were able to work with the ILTs to introduce these concepts to teachers in a way that highlighted the interconnectedness of the whole child strategy and contextualize it within the work they do every day with students. This approach is consistent with research into comprehensive school improvement efforts that suggest coherence or alignment among various school initiatives as well as support for those initiatives from school leadership are critical to the success of school improvement efforts.[13]

Given the necessity for flexibility and prioritization of the needs of our schools, the majority of the data gathered and analyzed throughout the year was descriptive in nature. We identified a set of learning questions at the outset of the pilot that we returned to throughout the year. Participant experiences were captured both as part of structured group step-back conversations as well as through observation and analysis of recorded coach-partner interactions. The questions and answers that follow represent our distillation of these observations and reflections.

In what ways did the pilot schools collect, learn from, and act on multiple sources of data?

The coaching model used in the pilot schools emphasized the integration of academic and whole child supports. Likewise, the teaching and learning cycles needed to be supported with data sources that would lend insight into both academic and whole child practices and progress toward goals. As part of the pilot planning phase, ANet and TransformEd worked together to develop a flexible framework and guiding questions for holistic data collection and review. Coaches then worked with individual school leadership teams to identify what forms of data they were already collecting, identify gaps, and support schools in adopting more student-centered data gathering and learning structures based on the specific instructional practices they were implementing. All five schools in the pilot used interim assessment data, culture and climate surveys, and SEL data (collected via focus groups, student work or conversations, and videos) which provided the opportunity to ground learning in the academic progress of the students as well as in the voices of students and educators.

The opportunity to learn from student work in combination with other data sources, such as school surveys and focus groups, provided schools with a richer, more comprehensive view of their current state and ultimately allowed them to track the impact of their efforts on measurable outcomes. At Aspen Elementary, for example, there were a number of new data sources to examine (including Panorama survey data for both parents and students, focus group data for parents, students, and teachers as well as PEAR data) alongside interim assessments, classwork samples, and video artifacts of student-led discussions, in support of understanding progress toward academic goals for the year, and examining outcomes of the school's anti-bullying campaign. One ANet coach observed some very intentional shifts toward making connections between whole child practices and academics through the integration of multiple data sources. The ANet coach shared,

> In the most recent data triangulation we looked at Panorama, classroom observation, and math assessment data. The team had incredible insights into the connections between all three - student self-regulation, relationships with peers, and acting under pressure felt directly related to students' comfort level sharing during a classroom discussion, which may have limited their opportunity to learn about math from their peers. From this data triangulation, we set up the next cycle of inquiry around using stronger, clearer feedback and math data to determine new learnings.
>
> **ANET COACH**

At Birch Middle School, one school administrator reflected on the specific purpose for gathering student survey data and qualitative feedback on academic pressure in the school:

> [The partnership helped us to] focus on the intentionality of looking at our Panorama data and harnessing on the aspect of pressure, and how does pressure connect to academic discourse, and how can we move forward with asking students, "what does that mean to you?" We have student feedback on their definitions of "pressure" and we're making progress in terms of narrowing in on our Panorama data and how that can help us with looking at the whole child and how our focus on academic discourse is helping with that. They've given us suggestions of what skills and strategies they use to help when they're feeling pressure and help themselves regulate so that we can then take that and distill it down to determine what additional skills we are going to teach our kiddos between now and the end of the year to help with that.
>
> **BIRCH MIDDLE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR**

In addition to collecting multiple forms of data, school leaders also engaged multiple stakeholders, including students in the data analysis. *"Birch is trying to get kids involved in helping make sense of that data, being transparent about why they are doing the practices they are based on the data [Panorama survey]. They are really wanting the kids to be very involved in making that meaning."* This collaborative learning allowed for students to have increased agency over their learning environments and

allowed for adults to check their understanding and value students as vital partners in the learning process.

Another ANet coach shared that some teachers had used classroom videos with their own students to provide opportunities for processing and reflection, as well as to build shared understanding of what they were doing and why. The ANet coach shared that "*they had discussions with their students about what THEY [students] noticed in those conversations. They are celebrating student voice and helping students feel empowered in what they are doing. They are setting them up for success.*"

What structures or rhythms were particularly valuable for introducing the whole child practice to classrooms?

In acknowledgement of the complexity of this work and the desire to minimize the lift for educators, each pilot school focused on a single whole child instructional practice that would be implemented across classrooms combined with extensive coaching and professional learning for educators to support increased comfort and opportunities for shared learning. ANet coaches alongside ILTs invested significant time at the beginning of the year supporting structures and processes, like professional learning communities (PLCs), that would create recurrent learning opportunities for adults to build a shared understanding around both the practices and expectations for how those practices would support student learning. One ANet coach shared,

> In the focus groups at the beginning of the year there was some hesitancy around introducing a whole child practice. They talked about being in different places and not needing the same information, but this [PLC] structure has allowed everyone to enter into a meaningful learning space because everyone can learn from each other and use this same space to practice. It is that tight goal and flexible means that allowed for all teachers to engage and buy in. Our next step is working on exposing the architecture, and having the teachers themselves have those metacognitive moments and trace to the leader moves that are supporting those learning moments.
>
> **ANET COACH**

Early on, PLCs provided teachers an ongoing opportunity to learn about the whole child practice and clarify their understanding of how and where they might implement it, as well as rehearse with their colleagues before bringing the practice into their classroom. Later, teachers were encouraged to bring videos of their classrooms to review and talk through their implementation of the whole child practice and support their colleagues in engaging in learning and reflection from the videos. One ANet coach shared that from the perspective of the school ILT, the video reflection in particular has been instrumental in building investment and engagement in the work:

> [The ILT shared] that this is the most invested and engaged teachers have been because they have videos of their kids, the kids are at the center, because it is a collaborative conversation, their teacher voices are the center of the PLC in ways that are a big difference from the direct instruction that has previously characterized the PLC. Now it is very collaborative - everyone is bringing videos of their student conversations, and now everyone is recording and bringing those videos, and because of the limits of visiting other classrooms, bringing in those real moments from classrooms has really generated a lot of buy-in and engagement.
>
> **ANET COACH**

Support from leaders was particularly critical to empowering teachers to share their practice with colleagues. One ANet coach said, *"It is the culture that sets that tone. The very first [PLC meeting with teachers] the instructional coach shared their own practice - they brought in their own videos and that set a culture of vulnerability and reflection, set a foundation for others to bring their own work and be vulnerable - it was that leadership modeling that helped."*

In what ways did the integration of the whole child practice lead to shifts in teaching and learning practices? What did participants notice about the effects on classroom environments and/or student learning?

During the pilot, coaches supported school leadership teams in identifying and implementing an instructional practice for use across classrooms. These practices, like student-led discussions and supporting students to build their identity as a reader, were selected because of their potential to create increased opportunities for student voice, student agency over learning, and more equitable and holistic learning experiences. Over the course of the year, support for piloting these instructional approaches in classrooms combined with reflection allowed teachers to start to make connections between implementation and impact. One school leader reflected on the learning journeys they witnessed this year from teachers this way:

> As I spend time in teachers' classrooms, as I hear teachers explain to their students what self-assessment is and the purpose behind it, and as teachers use those strategies more, they are being more reflective about where those strategies are effective - why and why not. Our teachers are trying so hard...they are making those connections little by little from strategy to purpose to reflection.
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> **MAPLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR**

At another school where they implemented student-led discussions to support student ownership of their learning, the school leader described the connections between the underlying purpose behind this instructional approach, the shifts that they witnessed in teachers' instructional planning, and effects on student learning. Ultimately, implementation of this approach resulted in students having increased ability to own and explain their learning, and as a result allowed for teachers to plan more student-centered instruction:

> We have spent a good portion of the year moving from "I do, you do, we do" to shifting the cognitive load to students and having them be the learners that are exploring and making sense. Shifting from being the dispensers of knowledge to making students the experts in their learning and synthesizing what they are bringing... [It is] exciting to hear that they have made some exciting instructional decisions about really understanding the day's learning target and where kids are at and tailoring instruction based on that.
>
> **OAK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR**

Another school leader reflected that the whole child approach to teaching and learning helped to center students in their own learning process which helped them see themselves as "co-facilitators" of their own learning. She explains, *"when students are engaged and seen as co-facilitators in their own learning, it has led to greater growth - not just academic growth but social and emotional growth."* Similarly, another leader described what they saw as "co-ownership," or "*students owning what they are learning so that their learning goes up, but we are also creating a safe environment for them to feel they can speak to why they are doing what they are doing.*"

In reflecting across all pilot schools, one coach explained the shift that has taken place across sites. While at the beginning of the year a lot of the coaching and professional learning was focused on building understanding and introducing whole child practices, by the end of the year school leaders were beginning to integrate these understandings into their instructional designs and schoolwide approaches to teaching and learning. One ANet coach shared, *"During interactions, I hear leaders making connections on their own to whole child practices and academics. They are beginning to plan with these concepts in mind and to have more integration instead of separation."*

While implementation was sometimes challenging given the demands placed on educators and school leaders this year, each school leadership team displayed increased understanding of the interconnectedness between social, emotional, and academic learning. This increased understanding, combined with implementation support for school leaders and teachers, created a foundation where teachers were able to try out new instructional strategies, and both teachers and leaders noticed areas of learning and growth in themselves and in students. When asked what

they noticed about the effect of the pilot on students, one instructional coach described how they noticed increased examples of joy in math classrooms in their school:

> " I see that there are people talking about joy in mathematics, which hasn't happened probably for most of my career… there seems to be actual joy during math which is pretty cool... those entry tasks, a lot of teachers are feeling similar. We're finding our pacing soft because every kid can access [the introductory tasks] they're really terrific for getting even your most struggling learners ... to participate and be part of the classroom conversation, so it feels like that warm fuzzy story time together of math
>
> **OAK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INSTRUCTIONAL COACH**

One school leader at Aspen Elementary explained how in their observations they noticed teachers shifting to offering support and guidance rather than lengthy explanations and didactic instruction. This shift helped support students' independence and engagement:

> " I've noticed real shifts in expectation around productive struggle. Teachers are requiring more independence from kids. They were doing this math activity, and the instructions were very complex - there were two pages of instructions so you could engage in the activity. And instead of the teacher reading the instructions, she set a timer and they were given time to read and talk about it in their teams, she didn't over-explain, she clarified a few things after. I see examples like that all the time... instead of reading a word problem teachers will give the students a minute to read first. Little subtle shifts like that I see a lot of.
>
> **ASPEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR**

Another school leader at Oak Elementary described observing authentic risk-taking and productive struggle:

> " The students -they're willing to take risks, and contribute to that discussion, even if they know they might not have the right answer. You know, for example when we're manipulating phonemes and words, I see a lot of kids who are excited about trying it out. And when they get it wrong like 'okay, well hang on! Give it to me again. Tell me again what the first four are and what you want me to do to it.' So just that excitement and willing to be challenged. They just kind of show you throughout the day that they're picking up things that they've learned in their applying it.
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> **OAK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR**

Summary of learnings

- *Center student voice:* Gathering student perspectives, ideas, and strategies about a particular priority, such as moving the cognitive lift from teachers to students or choosing a new curriculum, allows for student agency and ownership of their learning which leads to environments that empower and where students can thrive.

- *A comprehensive picture*: Student work in combination with other data sources provided schools with a richer, more comprehensive view of the current state and progress toward goals for meeting students' social, emotional, and academic learning.

- *Vulnerability and reflection:* A culture of vulnerability and reflection was the most critical element in supporting adults and students in strengthening the SEL competencies.

- *Less is more.* Focusing more intentionally on one primary whole-child practice and understanding its connection to SEL, academics, and anti-racism allowed for supportive implementation and integration for students and adults. This tight cycle of inquiry led to learnings and practices that could be codified and expanded into other content areas and/or grade levels.

Next steps for our work

The opportunity to learn alongside our school partners in this work allowed us to be first-hand observers of schools' sensemaking and insights. Through the reflections of our coaches and partners, we learned that building a foundation of whole child learning and practices and then narrowing the focus to a single instructional practice that emerged from the schools' strengths, needs, and goals allowed for leaders and teachers to have a more concrete understanding of implementation steps. And even when implemented slowly, there were intentional opportunities for teachers to be vulnerable and engage in communal learning that centered students and teachers in learning spaces.

We also learned that as the pilot schools maintained a strong focus on academic goals, the introduction of a more holistic data approach as well as the implementation of the whole child practice encouraged teachers to look for areas of success in new places (like students speaking more, different students engaging in new ways, increased ability to grapple with complex work), and to notice the impact of their teaching in different ways (like designing for more student talk, designing tasks that allow for multiple entry points for students, designing lessons with social and emotional goals in addition to academic ones, etc.) This work also prompted leaders to recognize the shifts that teachers were making and connect those shifts to student growth—not just academically but socially and emotionally.

In the next phase of this work, we look forward to continuing our learning alongside our partners in three key ways:

- Further deepening our antiracist lens alongside partners as they implement a whole child approach and understanding the implications of this lens on our actions and decisions to better integrate social, emotional, and academic learning.
- Center our work to define academically rich and empowering learning environments and articulate how we can support schools to create the right conditions for…
- Simultaneously prioritize the SEL development of staff as well as students. Supporting adults to reflect on their SEL skills and ways of being *brings* compassion and care for the adults and creates more space to enter interactions with students through an assets-based lens.

About the Pilot Schools

Oak Elementary is located in a mid-sized city and serves approximately 300 students grades pre-k through 5; more than half qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. At Oak, the end of year goal for students in literacy was to see an increase in mastery of phonological awareness skills. For math, the goal was an increased volume of student work on high quality tasks that reflect the major work of the grade. In support of these goals, the Oak leadership team incorporated student-led discussion protocols to support students' regularly talking and asking questions about each other's thinking in order to clarify or improve their understanding of the content.

Maple Elementary is located in a large suburban community and serves approximately 500 students in grades pre-k through 5; over ⅓ of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. At Maple, the end of year goals for students were to increase mastery of phonological awareness skills and increase mastery of phonics/word recognition skills. In support of these goals, Maple implemented routines for developing student identity through the use of metacognitive skills in self-reflection, self-assessment.

Elm Elementary is located in a large suburban community and serves approximately 500 students in grades pre-k through 4; over 90% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. At Elm, the end of year goals for students were an increase in overall reading comprehension as a result of a focus on foundational skills as well as an increase in phonics/word recognition skills. The Elm leadership team also incorporated student-led discussions to enhance learning.

Aspen Elementary is located in a large suburban community and serves over 700 students in grades 1 through 5; over 80% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. At Aspen, the end of year math goal for students was that student work and discussions would demonstrate growing strengths in making sense of problems and persevere in solving them, and making sense of and appreciating the reasoning of others . In support of these goals, the Aspen leadership team incorporated student-led discussion protocols.

Birch Middle School is located in a mid-sized city and serves over 1,000 students in grades 6 through 8; about 60% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. At Birch, the end of year goals for students in math was that students would be carrying the cognitive lift throughout instruction and that student work and discussions would demonstrate growing strengths in making sense of problems and persevere in solving them, and making sense of and appreciating the reasoning of others. In support of these goals, the Birch leadership team incorporated student-led discussion protocols.

Endnotes

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