

WINTER 2020

Don't Give People Things, Give Them Each Other



How Improvement Leads across the country are going above and beyond to seek problem-solving partners in the service of our Aim: to make dramatic gains for Black, Latinx, and low-income students with disabilities.

This October, as the initial rush from back-to-school settled down, former colleagues **Krystle Menduke** from **STRIVE Preparatory Schools** and **Mary Maher** from **STEM Preparatory Schools** found themselves working alongside one another again in the **Charter Students with Disabilities Pilot Community**, a networked improvement community of 10 charter management organizations nationwide that came together to make dramatic gains for Black, Latinx, and low-income students with disabilities. Both Improvement Leads were grappling with the same challenge: co-teaching in the virtual setting.

PLANNING FOR REMOTE CO-TEACHING

In STEM Prep's classrooms, Mary noticed that co-teaching pairs struggled to make time for productive collaboration. She brought that problem to a Cross-Network Consultancy as part of the pilot community so that she could understand how others across our 10-CMO network were approaching sustainable co-teaching this year.

Over at STRIVE Prep, Krystle knew the challenge of making time for co-teaching collaboration all too well. Together, Mary and Krystle identified which parts of the co-planning process were most essential for effective lesson delivery at both charter networks. Krystle also shared **a co-teaching tool** that STRIVE Prep had created to support teachers in the co-planning process.

"It's nice to know we're not alone as a result of the challenges we are facing because of the pandemic. When we're deep in the work, we don't always take the time to pause and reflect on what is going well and what we should celebrate. I enjoy this [Cross-Network Collaboration] space because we take the time to reflect and celebrate what's going well."

—Mary Maher
STEM Preparatory Schools

After reviewing STRIVE Prep's co-planning tool, Mary was relieved to see that her own network's co-teaching planning protocol had in fact accounted for many of the same procedures and processes that support effective collaboration and co-planning, such as (a) reviewing student data, (b) discussing IEP accommodations at the beginning of planning, and (c) assigning action items for both co-teachers at the end of every meeting to ensure clarity with next steps.

Further, STRIVE Prep's co-planning resource helped Mary ground her thinking around the most essential outcomes she would hope for STEM Prep teachers to get out of their co-planning time. Reflecting on conversations with Krystle on remote co-teaching, Mary recognized she was able to "reflect on our own process for supporting teachers to identify what they are bringing to each of these meetings. How can we elevate [teachers'] expertise? How can they collaborate to make data-based decisions focused on individual student needs?"

Above all, Mary was inspired to see other school networks innovating on collaboration protocols to best serve their learning communities.



In a year marked by twists and turns, celebrating small wins and sharing initial successes are critical to building lasting engines of improvement at every school. This engine of improvement ensures students with disabilities will receive lasting support for generations of learners to come.

ENGAGING STUDENTS FROM HOME

Meanwhile in Redwood City, Improvement Lead **Max Beach** of **Summit Public Schools** noticed a dreaded fatigue was settling in among students and teachers as virtual school continued into the Fall. Kids were logging into the classroom from a wide range of home environments—that is, when they were logging in at all. Teachers felt disheartened by challenges in student engagement, and were constantly exhausted by the sheer energy that went into leading virtual class sessions.

In early November, the pilot community held its fourth Cross-Network Collaboration to facilitate introductions between school networks. After learning

that teachers at **Green Dot Public Schools** were facing similar challenges around student engagement, teacher collaboration, and teacher fatigue, Max reached out to **Glynis Shulters** from Green Dot. Both Improvement Leads noted the need for General Education and Special Education collaboration—as well as the extra importance of doing so in the virtual setting—as a key driver of student engagement.

“The conversation was very energizing because it reinforced that these challenges are not just felt by one organization.”

—Max Beach
Summit Public Schools

As a direct outcome of their conversation, the pair of Improvement Leads were able to share practical and timely resources that each school was using to address student engagement for diverse learners. From Green Dot’s library of resources, Glynis equipped Max with an **Accessibility in Distant Learning** tool for teachers, with actionable strategies to drive student accessibility in the online setting. Glynis also shared her extensive expertise of Nearpod, an online learning platform that provides educators the ability to share content and interactive learning activities directly to student devices in real-time.

In the weeks and months ahead, Max will be adapting Green Dot’s accessibility tool alongside Summit’s Diverse Learners Team and is busy getting Nearpod’s platform into the hands of Summit teachers.

Walking away from the collaboration experience, Max recognizes he gained not only an immediate tool for implementation, but also a new channel for ongoing thought partnership.

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR ENDURING CHANGE

Reflecting on these recent developments across our pilot community, we as Improvement Advisors are encouraged by early signs of organic collaboration beyond organized network events. These organic collaborations—between STEM Prep and STRIVE Prep, between Summit and Green Dot—are the hallmark of long-lasting, enduring change.

Our role as Improvement Advisors is to create the capacity, opportunities, and structures for individual change agents to find one another. The programs, tools, and rubrics that are being developed in this pilot community are merely a symptom of what’s working: that people are finding one another. Well after the lifetime of our pilot community, tools and rubrics will not be the most valuable asset we will have built. It will have been the relationships and continuous-improvement mindsets that enable lasting change to take hold. ■

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