What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

"*Schools on the Move* details how leaders can create clarity, develop collective expertise, and promote continuous improvement, all aimed at taking action to achieve equitable growth in student learning. You feel the momentum, you want to get on board, and the examples show how to get schools moving."

—**John Hattie**, Emeritus Laureate Professor at Melbourne Graduate School of Education and Chair, Board of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

"*Schools on the Move* provides a clear and compelling portrait of what it takes to move schools toward continuous improvement. Westover and Steinhauser offer insights into how to overcome problems of practice that too often thwart improvement efforts. This will be an invaluable resource for how to bring about genuine and sustainable change."

—**Pedro A. Noguera**, Dean of USC Rossier School of Education

"*Schools on the Move* presents a framework for improvement and equity embedded in the ongoing work of educators. You will find tools designed to help develop the clarity of focus, shared leadership, collective expertise, and continuous improvement culture, but it is through the real-life examples of specific schools and districts that the framework comes alive."

—**Jennifer O'Day**, Institute Fellow at the American Institutes for Research

"Jay Westover and Chris Steinhauser provide a clear and practical roadmap to address inequitable student learning and reimagine schools for the next decades. Filled with thoughtful analysis, case studies, and practical tips and tools this book is a powerful call to collaborative and precise action for all educators—a must-read reference to guide current and future work in our schools."

—**Mary Jean Gallagher**, Chief Student Achievement Officer and Assistant Deputy Minister (retired), Ministry of Education for Ontario, Canada

"With keen insights and clear prose, Jay Westover and Chris Steinhauser show leaders how to frame improvement initiatives as dynamic theories of action engaging staff members in collective reflection of their current practice, shared identification of opportunities to adopt and adapt better practices, and taking collective action to develop precision without prescription. *Schools on the Move* is a must-read guide for school and district leaders who understand that success is not a destination, but a journey."

—**Bryan Goodwin**, President & CEO at McREL International

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"Jay Westover and Chris Steinhauser have done an excellent job in their design of a concrete framework for school improvement. These compelling examples will help readers in understanding that, despite challenging circumstances, they too can achieve equitable outcomes for students."

—**Jenni Donohoo**, bestselling author and education consultant

"Westover and Steinhauser provide leaders a road map for building the collective efficacy needed to transform learning outcomes for millions of students. Their findings are clear, actionable, and powerful."

—**Joseph F. Johnson, Jr.**, Executive Director, National Center for Urban School Transformation and Emeritus Dean and Professor, College of Education San Diego State University

"I was not surprised to see Jay Westover and Chris Steinhauser collaborating. Jay's 'On the Move' work has been utilized by superintendents across the country to focus on key drivers and to intentionally improve their districts. Steinhauser had historic tenure and influence at one of the largest school districts in the country in the battle against systemic inequities and the liberation of students. This is a necessary resource for site, district, and county educators."

—**Wesley Smith**, Superintendent of Newport-Mesa Unified School District and former Executive Director, Association of California School Administrators

"Equity and justice are long overdue in school systems. Westover and Steinhauser have provided a roadmap based on the idea of eliminating the variances between classrooms, schools, and districts so that every student, no matter where they are located, will get whatever they need to be successful."

—**David Cash**, Professor of Clinical Education and EDL Program Governance Chair at USC Rossier School of Education

"When Chris Steinhauser, one of the most successful and respected urban superintendents, joins forces with Jay Westover, a highly experienced and impactful education consultant, the result is a book worth reading by all education leaders. Our students deserve an education that reduces inequities and accelerates learning for all, and *Schools on the Move* is an invaluable resource for making this promise a reality."

—**Paul Gothold**, Superintendent of San Diego County Office of Education

"Steinhauser and Westover offer an approach for improvement based on factors that educators can control – climate, culture, capacity, and coherence. They put the educators in the driver's seat and give them a roadmap for continuous improvement that ensures all students receive high-quality educational opportunities."

—**Laura Schwalm**, former Superintendent of Garden Grove Unified School District

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"Chris Steinhauser has long been considered a maven among his peers and a stalwart advocate for urban education. This insightful compilation of strategies is a must-read for school and district leaders. We must not miss this opportunity to reimagine public education."

—**Barbara Jenkins**, Superintendent of Orange County Public Schools

"This is the right book at the right time. Westover and Steinhauser brilliantly adapted *Schools on the Move* for this moment in time as we attempt to fight a global pandemic and the devastating impact it's having on our students, schools, and districts. I found dozens of ideas that I'll immediately be using because of this important work."

—**Rick Miller**, CEO of CORE Districts and former Deputy State Superintendent, California Department of Education

"Merging Westover's transformational work over the past 20 years helping school and district teams achieve equitable growth in student learning with Steinhauser's leadership and lessons learned in Long Beach USD, education leaders are provided clear and specific examples with tools, resources, and vignettes grounded in collective efficacy and continuous improvement."

—**Tom Armelino**, Executive Director (retired), California Collaborative for Educational Excellence

"We all need this book to understand the complexities of transforming climate, developing culture, building capacity, and creating coherence in our schools. Jay Westover and Chris Steinhauser show us how to recognize the potential in people and ideas and shape a common mindset. *Schools on the Move* is a pragmatic and reflective leadership guide using collaborative inquiry as a process to develop collective teacher efficacy. Being part of *Schools on the Move* has uniquely positioned our district during this time of rapid change to address and advance student learning."

—**Vivian Ekchian**, Superintendent of Glendale Unified School District

"*Schools on the Move* is a practical road map for school and district leaders to create cycles of collective inquiry, allowing for coherent improvement of student learning experiences. The storytelling is very effective, allowing us to see our own schools, districts, and leadership through this model."

—**Stefanie Phillips**, former Superintendent of Santa Ana Unified School District; CEO of Chamberlin Education Foundation

"A must-read for all those interested in transforming our systems to benefit all students and help them reach their fullest potential. Jay Westover and Chris Steinhauser use case studies to get to the heart of how to create coherent systems of continuous improvement focused on equitable growth in student learning. The attention to student learning variability and what to do with data shows us how these transformations are achievable."

—**Jorge Aguilar**, Superintendent of Sacramento City Unified School District

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"Jay Westover and Chris Steinhauser identify and prioritize action steps to positively impact student outcomes. The combination of research studies, theory, practical applications, and success stories makes this book a must-read for all educational leaders!"

—**Don Austin**, Superintendent of Palo Alto Unified School District

"This timely book is filled with proven organizational principles, intentional practices, and frameworks for school leaders who are serious about building long-lasting sustainable success, and a culture of championship behaviors. Jay Westover and Chris Steinhauser share personal insights and examples from successful leaders, schools, and districts which continually seek clarity, collective inquiry, and build capacity to tackle the complex issues we face in our schools."

—**Sam Buenrostro**, Superintendent of Corona-Norco Unified School District

"School improvement is the most critical factor for student equity, access, and achievement. Jay Westover and Chris Steinhauser provide great examples of how this is successfully being done within various schools. This is a must-read for any educational leader who is serious about school improvement that leads to focused, continuous, and long-term growth in student learning."

—**Bill Crean**, Superintendent of Little Lake City School District

"Jay Westover and Chris Steinhauser outline how to leverage climate and culture to build shared leadership resulting in stronger collective teacher efficacy, increased student achievement, and greater equity. This isn't about a program or a silver bullet, it's about robust collaborative inquiry and dialogue system-wide that centers on evidence of impact for all students; it's about creating a true professional learning organization."

—**Dave Olney**, Superintendent of Hesperia Unified School District

"The thoughtfulness of this text is a refreshing approach. *Schools on the Move* reinforces the importance of taking time to see and analyze the problem and the associated systems prior to implementing a change idea. I have great appreciation for the strategy of inclusivity among those closest to the work."

—**Christi Barrett**, Superintendent of Hemet Unified School District

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Schools on the Move

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We dedicate this book to the education community for their resolve, resilience, and resourcefulness in navigating this next normal in education.

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Schools on the Move

Leading Coherence for Equitable Growth

Jay Westover
and
Christopher Steinhauser

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Foreword

by Michael Fullan

Take one of the longest-serving successful superintendents since the turn of the century (Chris Steinhauser) and an engaged, effective external consultant to schools and districts (Jay Westover) during that same 20+ years. Then partner them and find out what they have learned and now recommend to schools for moving forward in the 2020s decade. What you get is clear, powerful analysis and advice set for action. Most of all the ideas are clear, comprehensive, and loaded with tips and tools for action in every chapter.

The concepts are well defined, deep, and nestled with other insights that simultaneously set up comprehensive understanding and immediate action. The foundation chapter consists of four Cs: climate (beliefs), capacity (efficacy), culture (behaviors), and coherence (shared depth of understanding). They start with root causes of variance—under what conditions schools succeed and fail—and readily identify why achievers (like Steinhauser and his team) succeed.

The authors use a small number of organizing schema that guide the reader through understanding and action, such as the key drivers: clarity of focus, shared leadership, continuous improvement, and collective expertise. In all cases they get into detail: what to do and how to do it. They use hypothetical districts that feel like real cases because they are based on districts that Westover and his team worked with or examples from Steinhauser's Long Beach Unified, which he led successfully for 18 years. We encounter a series of key issues and the sequence that results in solutions: who are the students who are struggling, what are the root cause of inequity, how can we collectively seek out and apply practices that improve learning, and how can we apply these proven practices to achieve growth for all students?

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They then capture and take us through the steps and actions related to what they call "navigating a coherent path of school improvement." The steps have the appropriate degree of complexity as it becomes evident that the actions are not straightforward. For me the analysis and advice have just the right degree of understanding and doubt. The reader understands that there are many things to contend with but gets a good sense about what needs to be done because the core concepts provide particular support in terms of each concept itself and show appropriate connection to other key factors.

There are also a lot of feedback loops: How does evidence of impact guide design? How does evidence of impact link to refining achievement efforts? How do you refine recurring collaborative inquiry cycles? Great attention is paid to how to begin, doubling back to continually refine clarity of purpose, and using end points to clarify how to get increased inputs. I found it also valuable to have specific insights into how Long Beach sustained improvement efforts. We see the role of a powerful five-part graduate profile that encompassed five elements, including adaptive and productive citizenship, innovative problem-solving, and the like.

The book is full of posing difficult challenges and directional solutions, such as how you get coherence while avoiding prescription, how collaboration and coherence can go together, and how to zero in on assessing impact. Frameworks are provided as guidelines to action, and then they are applied to case examples of the factors in practice, including results obtained. In each chapter there are tips and tools for action that include: guiding principles, student learning priorities, short-term actionable plans, and collaborative inquiry cycles that show the action as it occurs through a sequence of analyze, design, implement, and refine—complete with success indicators, supports, evidence of learning, and timeframes.

Like my own work (exemplified in the case studies of the book *Nuance* (Corwin 2019)), Westover and Steinhauser show that complex success can be accomplished only through joint determination and related to shared leadership at the school and the district levels. Mobilizing ongoing, focused, cumulative, collaborative improvement is the essence of success. For these authors, collective impact is the test. In all of this work the authors attempt to be clear and specific as well as reflective. They center on collaborative culture, leadership capacity, and impact on school improvement—accompanied by questions to be considered. Then we see different examples of schools engaged in

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the path of progress as they play out in different contexts. After several case studies the authors review the lessons learned under the rubric of tips and tools for taking action including a planning template.

All and all *Schools on the Move* is devoted to developing cultures of collective expertise within schools and districts and their interactions. They discuss and portray successes and failures: what to do when groups are compliant, resistant, or fragmented and ultimately how to cultivate cultures of instructional coherence. Particularly valuable is the case study of Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) with its 84 schools that built a culture of sustained coherence with Steinhauser as superintendent over a period of 18 years. We see the internal dynamics of LBUSD as it went about building, fostering, and sustaining a robust culture of collaborative inquiry linked to continuing results. Carefully documented is what the authors call "visible evidence of student learning" along with details of the paths of progress in particular schools. We see clearly how LBUSD created instructional coherence across its schools with in-depth case accounts in several individual schools.

In sum this is a book whose authors, together, are clearly comfortable cycling back and forth between the macro and micro levels and their interconnections. In the best books on school systems, practice drives theory as much as the other way around. We are in the hands of two authors who have distilled their knowledge from the last 20 years of intense improvement work and have given the best of their insights. It is practical and theoretical and provides heaps of help for those on or about to journey into the unknown of school system change.

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Preface

The writing of *Schools on the Move* began in the fall of 2019 to address the underlying factors that influence the impact of school improvement efforts. *Districts on the Move* had previously been written to assist school districts with leading systemic improvement by shaping culture, building capacity, and creating coherence. However, district improvement efforts do not always account for the variances in climate, culture, capacity, and coherence that exist within and among school sites. For this reason, *Schools on the Move* was to be a resource for school leaders to navigate a coherent path of improvement for achieving equitable growth in student learning. However, in March 2020 the education community was faced with the greatest challenge of our lifetime: the COVID-19 pandemic. Within a short period of time almost all schools in the United States were closed, and then most reemerged in a distance learning modality. The concept of moving school sites forward in support of equitable growth in student learning needed to be reframed in light of this massive disruption to the education system.

At this time, Jay refocused his efforts on the urgent topic of "navigating the next normal in education." An approach for school district and site leaders to guide improvement efforts during the pandemic was shaped as phases that emulated the guidance for business leaders provided by McKinsey: resolve, resilience, return, reimagination, and reculturing (Sneader & Singhal, 2020). Figure 0.1 depicts these five phases for educators to navigate a path of progress in this new normal. As the pandemic progressed, teachers adapted to supporting student learning through new modalities, and leaders adjusted improvement strategies to meet the demands of a different context for supporting teaching and learning. For many school districts and sites, the chaos and disruption brought on by the pandemic was seen as an opportunity to reimagine education for the betterment of all students and re-culture schools to embrace more innovative approaches for overcoming student equity issues and deepening student learning.

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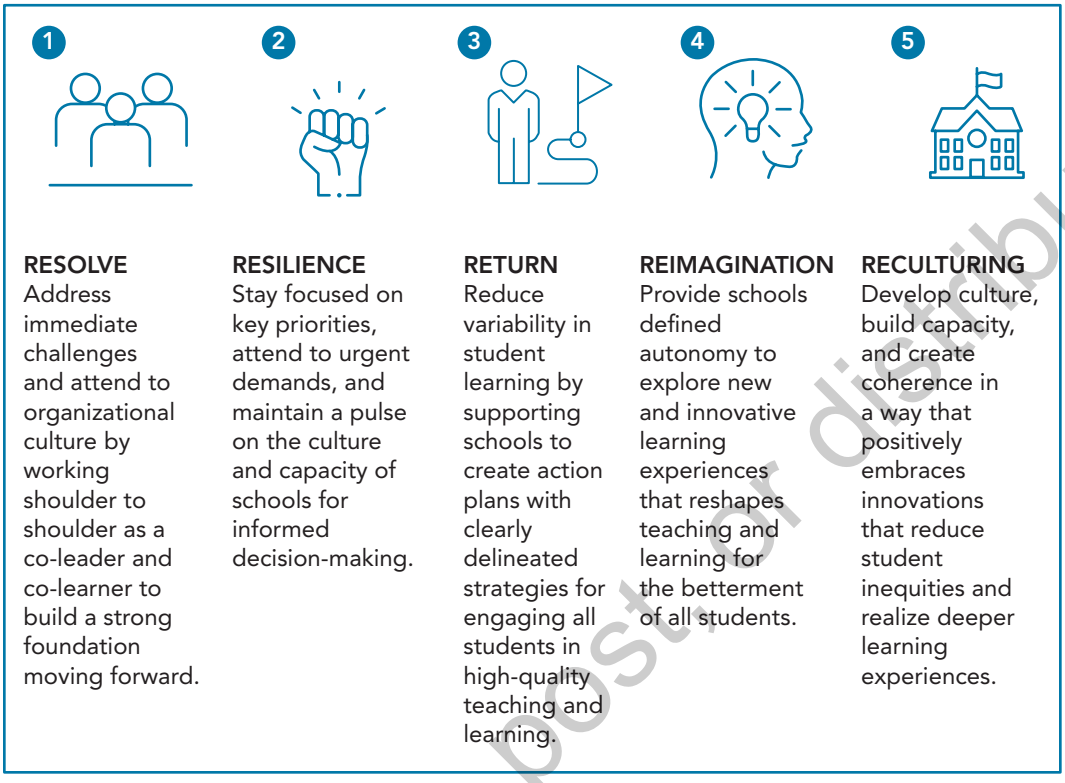
Figure 0.1 The Five Phases for Navigating the Next Normal in Education



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In February 2021, Jay and Chris met to discuss how the book could be written to best serve educators in light of the pandemic. The once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for reimagining and re-culturing education to overcome the prevailing, and now intensified, student equity issues became a moral imperative for the writing of this book. Chris had recently retired after serving as superintendent of LBUSD for 18 years. During his tenure the district had been recognized for sustainable and systemic improvement that achieved equitable growth in student learning within all school sites. His depth of knowledge and experience with leading systemic improvement to close student equity gaps is unparalleled among education leaders. And so the research and practices from the work that Jay had undertaken in partnership with school districts were merged with the long-term success and deep impact of the work Chris led in Long Beach to create a framework for schools to be on the move.

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The concept of schools on the move should be considered as the way in which teachers and leaders transform climate, shape culture, build capacity, and create coherence to achieve equitable growth in student learning. Prior to the pandemic, the four key drivers of school improvement had been framed as clarity of focus, shared leadership, collective expertise, and continuous improvement. And now, almost 2 years after the pandemic unfolded, these four key drivers are of even greater importance for teachers and leaders to guide school improvement efforts. As education is reimagined for the betterment of all students and schools are re-cultured to embrace innovative approaches for accelerating student learning, our hope is that *Schools on the Move* serves as a valuable resource for navigating this next normal.

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Acknowledgments

The inspiration for writing this book was two decades in the making as the years of supporting systemic district improvement have revealed that school districts cannot be "on the move" if school sites within them do not have the climate, culture, capacity, or coherence needed to sustain the equitable growth in student learning. Over this period of time I have had the pleasure of partnering with school districts that aspired to be a district on the move as well as individual schools whose staff desired to be part of a school on the move. The common theme that has emerged from this collaborative work is that to be on the move requires clarity of focus, shared leadership, collective expertise, and continuous improvement. It is rare to see these four key drivers in action within a school district or site, and so, I want to recognize and commend the education systems that have navigated the complexities of systemic improvement. These are Local District Northwest in Los Angeles Unified School District, Corona-Norco USD, Hesperia USD, Santa Monica-Malibu USD, Santa Barbara USD, Norwalk USD, Rialto USD, Palmdale USD, Moreno Valley USD, Ukiah USD, Desert Sands USD, Santa Rosa City Schools, Gateway Community Charter Schools, Arvin School District, Rosedale School District, Little Lake City School District, La Habra City Schools, and Kern County Office of Education. Because this work requires a village of deep expertise, much has been learned along the way by collaborating with the exceptional team at InnovateEd, Michael Fullan, Mary Jean Gallagher, Joanne Quinn, the Association of California School Administrators, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, and Kansas MTSS and Alignment. I would be remiss not to thank Ariel Curry for her astute ability as an editor to guide Chris and me in shaping the book to become a valuable resource for educators. Last, this book was put on hiatus as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, and its resurgence—and completion—was made possible when Chris Steinhauser agreed to be my co-author. Chris is

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recognized as one of the most successful, knowledgeable, and humble education leaders in the nation. His keen insights and practical experience brought this book to life so that the "Long Beach Way" can serve as a north star for navigating the next normal in education. His collaboration and friendship are greatly appreciated.

—Jay Westover

There are so many people to thank for supporting me on my educational journey and the opportunity to co-author this book with Jay Westover. First and foremost my parents for giving me the love of learning and instilling in me that anything is possible if I worked hard enough to achieve it. To my wife Alida, my son Edward and his wife Haley, my daughter Patricia and her husband Dan and their two children CJ and Ava, thank you for all the love, support, and encouragement you have given me over the years to be an equity champion for our most vulnerable students. To my LBUSD family, thank you for what you do each and every day to ensure that every youth in your care is given the tools they need to be college and career ready upon graduation. Your commitment to equity and closing achievement and opportunity gaps is beyond reproach. You have shown the nation and the world that urban school districts can be models of excellence when meeting the needs of our most vulnerable students and their families. To the Board of Education members that hired me in 2002 and supported me as their superintendent for 18 years, thank you for believing in me and demonstrating to the nation what effective board–superintendent governance looks like. A special thank you to Lori Grady, Juan Guiterrez, Tammy Lavelle, Connie Magee, and Alejandro Vega for sharing your stories of how you use the collaborative inquiry process to transform your schools into models of excellence in meeting the needs of the whole child. To all the equity leaders in our nation (especially my LBUSD colleagues), thank you for keeping the moral imperative and civil rights issue of this century alive and well in your school systems and schools. Last but not least, I cannot thank Jay Westover enough for pushing me out of my comfort zone to assist him in writing *Schools on the Move*. Jay, I have learned so much from you and am blessed to have you as a colleague and friend.

—Christopher Steinhauser

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About the Authors

Jay Westover has provided leadership training and school improvement consulting in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education, state departments of education, colleges, educational service centers, and school districts across North America. Over the past 20 years, his work has focused on developing the capacity of school systems to close student equity and learning and performance gaps. Creating coherent systems of continuous improvement has been a central aspect of statewide, regional, and local partnerships that have supported more than 250 school districts nationwide. Jay's role at InnovateEd is lead advisor for client partnerships, and he also serves as an executive leadership coach. His passion is working alongside leaders to simplify the complexities of shaping culture, developing capacity, and creating coherence for sustainable improvement.

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Christopher Steinhauser served as superintendent of the LBUSD from 2002 to 2020, the fourth-largest school district in California serving approximately 70,000 students. With more than 39 years of experience in the diverse Long Beach school system, Chris has earned a national reputation for improving student achievement and closing achievement and opportunity gaps. To ensure that there were equitable outcomes for all students in the school system, Chris implemented a continuous improvement process known as The Collaborative Inquiry Process/Quarterly Visits, in which teams of educators from different schools would visit each other's sites to review student outcome data and observe teaching and learning. The purpose of this process was to make real-time changes based on formative assessment data to better meet the diverse academic and social-emotional needs of the students in the system. These site visits would occur three to four times per year. Under his leadership, Long Beach earned the national Broad Prize for Urban Education and qualified as a finalist for the award five times. A 2010 report by McKinsey & Company named Long Beach as one of the world's 20 leading school systems—and one of the top 3 in the United States in terms of sustained and significant improvements. The school district was later listed among the world's top five school systems by the nonprofit Battelle for Kids organization.

Long Beach students, 70% of whom receive free and reduced-price lunches, annually earn more than $100 million in college scholarships. Thirteen Long Beach high schools were named in 2020 to be among the top 12% in the United States by *U.S. News and World Report*. Under Chris's leadership, the Long Beach College Promise was developed, which became a model for the State of California and the nation on providing 2 years of free college to every student who enrolled in a community college upon graduating from high school. Since the implementation of the Long Beach College Promise, the college-going rate for students in LBUSD has been consistently higher than the State of California and the nation. To ensure that all students were college and career ready upon graduation from high school, Chris implemented industry-based pathways system-wide through the Linked Learning approach to ensure equitable outcomes for all high school students.

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1 The Pursuit of Equitable Growth in Student Learning

The diverse perspectives that exist among school staff, site leaders, district personnel, and community members create a compelling challenge when shaping a long-term vision of success. The simple question "What is our common vision for student success?" opens the flood gates and releases a deluge of opinions, beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions, which in turn can lead to a multitude of goals and initiatives with vague understanding and lack of commitment for the work at hand: achieving equitable growth in learning for all students. Under these circumstances, the famous phrase of Steve Jobs, "simplify and focus," rings true (Isaacson, 2011). An example of simplicity of focus in action was observed in working with Vivian Ekchian, superintendent of Glendale USD and former interim superintendent of Los Angeles USD, as evidenced by her compelling statement, "The work at hand is to identify the most struggling students in our schools, collectively determine how best to accelerate their learning, and apply these proven practices to achieve growth in learning for all students." Let's break this phrase down further into the most critical questions:

1. Who are the students in our schools who struggle most with learning?
2. What are the root causes of this inequity and underperformance among students?
3. How do we collectively seek out and learn from practices that improve student learning?
4. How can we apply these proven practices to achieve growth in learning for all students?

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What if these four questions guided a commonly agreed-upon process that clarified student learning priorities and defined the collaborative work among all schools in a district? This certainly would shift the focus away from overarching goals and initiatives toward a focus driven by the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Because the needs of students are unique to every school, such a process would provide defined autonomy coupled with accountability for student learning. Ultimately the outcome would be that every school site has created a clear and coherent path to attain growth in learning for all students. However, the quandary would be whether the leaders and teachers within each school have the shared depth of understanding and precision of practices to navigate such a path of progress. The purpose of the Schools on the Move framework is to resolve this complex issue faced by school districts and school sites: navigating a coherent path of progress.

Navigating a Coherent Path of Progress

School improvement is dependent upon how site leaders and teachers collectively create clarity of focus, cultivate shared leadership, develop collective expertise, and guide continuous improvement. And the linchpin is engaging in collaborative inquiry to establish a common mindset and structured process for co-leading these improvement efforts. The challenge is the natural tendency to focus on changing structures to improve the work at hand (i.e., roles, responsibilities, policies and procedures) rather than leading improvement processes that develop capacity to do the work at hand. This is akin to asking a novice driver to switch from an ordinary sedan to a race car and expecting that driving skills will improve by virtue of being in a superior automobile. A better approach is having a co-pilot in the passenger seat of the sedan with a clear focus on developing the expertise of the driver with feedback aimed at improving practices to yield better results and then transferring these much-improved practices to successfully drive the race car. Changing the structure without building capacity will not result in better performance.

It cannot be taken lightly how often the failure of school improvement efforts are due to the absence of a well-designed capacity-building strategy. The examples are boundless. A school staff becomes energized by the thought of becoming a professional learning community (PLC). And as a result, weekly collaboration time is allocated, essential standards are created, formative assessments are designed,

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low-performing students are identified, and tiered interventions are formalized. Then over time there is the realization that pedagogical practices have not changed, collaboration time is not used effectively, student learning supports are not being targeted or adjusted, and gains in student performance are not being realized. And soon PLCs no longer have the initial buzz and fade away to become a Wednesday event without clear purpose or impact. Sound familiar? The same scenario can apply to the adoption of new curriculum, training on research-based instructional strategies, a shift to project-based or personalized learning, a movement promoting social-emotional learning, and onward.

Schools that sustain improvement of practices and growth in student learning have harnessed the power of collaborative inquiry to navigate a path of progress using the four key drivers of school improvement; clarity of focus, shared leadership, collective expertise, and continuous improvement. These successful schools focus on learning "how to improve" rather than deciding "what to improve." The first step in navigating the journey of school improvement should be developing a common mindset among site leaders and teachers for co-leading the improvement of practices to realize equitable growth in student learning.

Schools that sustain improvement of practices and growth in student learning have harnessed the power of collaborative inquiry to navigate a path of progress.

Figure 1.1 depicts collaborative inquiry as the connective tissue that binds together the four key drivers of school improvement. Critical success factors extend from each driver, which when attended to collectively, serve as a road map for site leaders and teachers to sustain improvement efforts. This is not a prescribed approach for checking off the boxes to arrive at a final destination. Rather, it is an ongoing and agile improvement process wherein site leaders and teachers continuously analyze, design, implement, and refine the work at hand.

The intent of this conceptual framework is to develop a common mindset and structured process for co-leading improvement efforts. And when actualized through the collective efforts of site leaders and teachers with support from district personnel, this becomes the foundation for schools to be on the move. For this forward movement to be realized, it is essential to begin with the end in mind. Mary Jean Gallagher, in gleaning from her years of experience with guiding systemic improvement around the world, has a simple phrase that gets to the heart of the matter; "In order for schools to improve, it is essential to develop a common understanding of what good looks like."

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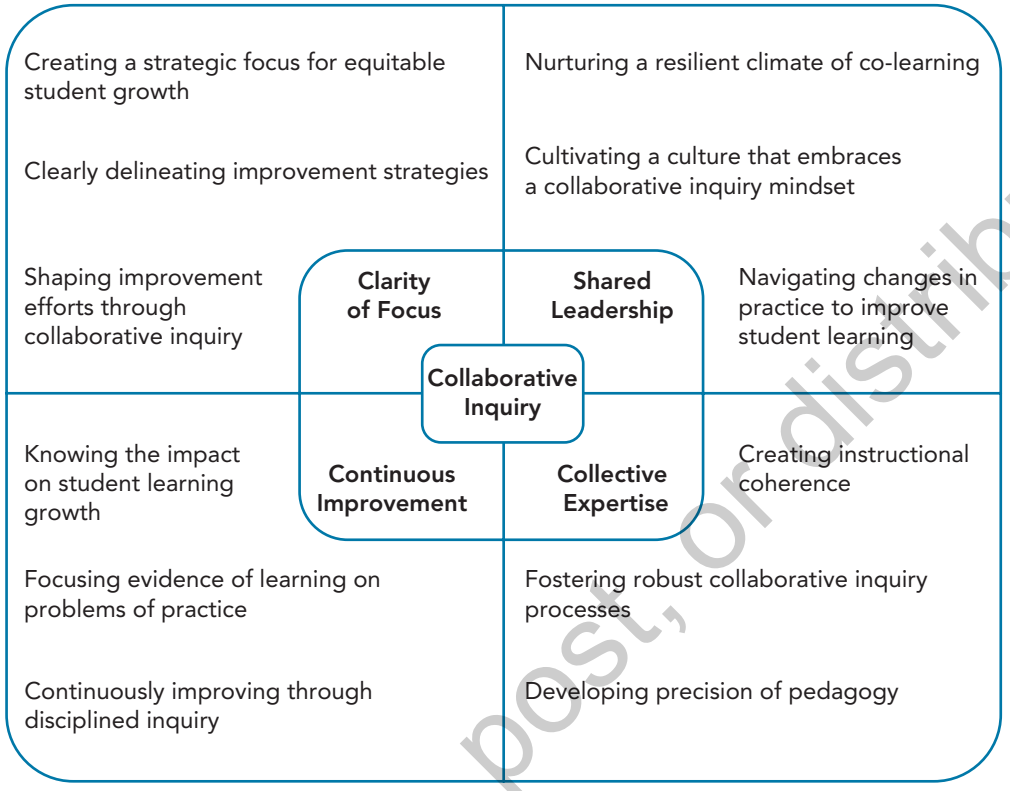
Figure 1.1 Navigating a Coherent Path of School Improvement



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This is so true because most often there is a desire and pressure for improvement without a clear vision of success or the clarity needed to effectively navigate a coherent path of progress. Let's then shed light on what the key drivers and critical success factors for school improvement look like in action—in other words, "what good looks like."

Clarity of Focus

Creating clarity of focus has different meanings when considered from the context of teachers, site leaders, and district personnel. In finding common ground among all levels, the key is to ensure that the school focus is grounded in the daily work of students as they engage in learning at the classroom desk. Yet in reality, the sole purpose of having clarity of focus is to ensure that improvement efforts will overcome the root causes of variance in student learning occurring within

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and among classrooms. Another way of framing a strategic focus is in the form of a *theory of action*, or "if–then" statement, that by design is intended to overcome the *problems of practice* that are barriers to achieving growth in learning for all students. An example of a theory of action in practice would be focusing classroom instruction on student learning tasks that require close and analytic reading and evidence-based arguments so that all students develop improved literacy skills as part of daily instruction. In this fashion, if the school focus clearly defines the most critical factors for improving student learning at the classroom desk, then the result should be equitable growth in student learning.

However, this is a general statement for solving a complex problem and is the reason why clearly delineated improvement strategies are essential to create the *causal pathway* linking student success indicators with high-yield instructional practices informed by evidence. We would call this putting the theory of action into practice while seeking evidence of impact on student learning growth. This defines the most critical work at hand for developing shared depth and understanding of action steps moving forward. It is important to note that clarity of focus is achieved over time as precision of practices evolves to have greater impact on improving student learning. This requires that teachers and site leaders engage in recurring cycles of "learning by doing" shaped by a *collaborative inquiry* mindset and structured process extending over 6- to 9-week timeframes.

*A **strategic focus** for achieving equitable student growth guides school-wide improvement efforts with **clearly delineated improvement strategies** that take shape through the **ongoing collaborative work** among teachers and site leaders.*

A few critical questions for consideration to create clarity of focus will be addressed in forthcoming chapters.

1. How can a theory of action guide school-wide improvement efforts to achieve equitable growth in student learning? (If we focus on this, then the result will be that.)
2. What problems of practice within and among classrooms could be the root cause of variance in student learning growth?

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3. How can student success indicators be explicitly linked to high-yield instructional practices that are informed by evidence of impact on student learning?
4. How do a collaborative inquiry mindset and structured process for co-leading improvement efforts shape the ongoing work among teachers and site leaders?

Shared Leadership

Cultivating shared leadership may be one of the most misunderstood concepts in education and, therefore, is often underdeveloped and poorly attended to at both the district and school levels. This is primarily due to the fact that leadership is tightly coupled with navigating the inherent complexities of changing and improving climate (beliefs and attitudes) and culture (behaviors and actions). To cultivate shared leadership there must be common experiences that develop a shared belief and value for co-learning as the means of getting better together. And at the same time, collaboration structures and processes must be collectively shaped over time to establish common agreements for engaging in productive group work. Or to paraphrase Michael Fullan (2018), "Growing the capacity of the group to co-lead the improvement efforts of the group." Such an endeavor calls upon leaders to serve as lead learners that model co-learning, shape culture, and navigate changes in practices to improve student learning.

To cultivate shared leadership there must be common experiences that develop a shared belief and value for co-learning as the means of getting better together.

Clarifying what shared leadership looks like in action is best understood through examples and non-examples. The most often taken and least effective action is to focus on structural changes with predefined roles and responsibilities, which translates into overtaxing formal and informal leaders in the school to take on more work. This sounds like, "You're a good leader, so take on more leadership responsibilities," and conversely, "If you don't want to lead, then be a team player and do as you're told." This is not shared leadership but rather a hierarchical leadership structure. A more effective approach is to frame shared leadership in the form of a question, such as, "I wonder if we can work smarter and not harder by identifying our common challenges and dedicating time to work together on seeking solutions. I certainly don't have the answers but would greatly appreciate working together to see what we can collectively accomplish." Words like this, if spoken often enough and acted upon by formal and informal leaders, will begin to *nurture a climate of co-learning*.

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Culture is a harder nut to crack in that changing behaviors is the most challenging endeavor of any change process. Going back to ineffective actions, an often-seen strategy is to create structures for collaboration that include calendaring of dates with defined agendas, prescribed activities, and expectations to complete specific outcomes. The intent is that a structured process will promote effective collaboration, and that simply by participating, behaviors will change and ultimately result in productive group work. This only creates a compliance mentality, which further breeds frustration and resentment within and among groups. The unfortunate truth is that culture is cultivated and shaped as groups *embrace a collaborative inquiry mindset* for attending to the work at hand. Once again, a key question can be the catalyst for cultural change; "I wonder how we can come to know and understand which practices will yield the greatest impact on improving student learning in our school and classrooms?" In other words, culture is a mindset developed by collectively improving the work at hand and not a structured process that defines the actions and outcomes for doing the work at hand.

Changing practices should be easy now that climate is being nurtured and culture is being cultivated—right? Not so fast. There is a cartoon that beautifully illustrates the challenge of navigating changes in practice. A person stands at a podium in front of a crowd asking, "Who wants change?" And all raise their hands. Then they ask, "Who wants to change?" And all heads look down. And finally they ask, "Who wants to lead the change?" And the whole crowd quickly disperses. Therein lies the dilemma in that change is embraced until it affects us personally or necessitates us to lead the change process. The undertow preventing change from moving forward is fear of failure. So common sense would be to reduce anxiety and make success easily attainable, but that's not common practice. Unfortunately, the more common approach is a moral imperative for improvement with little clarity as to what to do better or how to do it effectively. For example, a principal might say, "Our number one priority is for all students to demonstrate growth in literacy and math proficiency." *Navigating changes in practice* requires a more nuanced approach wherein a few first followers initiate simple changes to realize short-term successes that quickly spread to others who want to experience the same success. And because success begets success, confidence, and willingness to overcome more complex changes follow suit. This is akin to starting an avalanche by rolling a snowball down a hill; start small and slow to go fast with increasing momentum.

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*Shared leadership is developed by nurturing a **climate of co-learning** and cultivating a **culture of collaborative inquiry**, which over time, builds the collective capacity needed to successfully **navigate changes in practice** for improving student learning results.*

A few critical questions for consideration to cultivate shared leadership will be addressed in forthcoming chapters.

1. How can the concept of "learning together to get better together" be modeled and promoted as part of daily work to nurture a resilient climate of co-learning?
2. How can the concept of "collaboratively seeking solutions to overcome the most common challenges at hand" be promoted to develop a collaborative inquiry mindset?
3. How can leadership structures, roles, and responsibilities be focused on developing collective capacity to navigate changes in practice within and among groups?
4. How can the pace of change and improvement of practices be attended to in a way that promotes "starting small and slow to go fast with increasing momentum"?

Collective Expertise

Developing collective expertise within schools to achieve instructional coherence and precision of pedagogy is not a novel idea in education. But it's worth considering how this is best accomplished to have a sustainable impact on student learning growth. A vivid image from the past comes to mind in which a teacher, after 2 years of delivering instruction with fidelity using adopted curricular materials, is in tears because she is distraught by the fact that student growth has not been realized in her classroom. And yet in her mind she has instructional coherence and is attending to pedagogical precision. The lesson learned here is a key missing link; instructional coherence and precision of pedagogy are developed over time through *robust collaborative inquiry processes* that engage teams of teachers in collectively understanding how to improve the impact of teaching as learning unfolds among students within classrooms.

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This brings into question the impact on student learning that is realized by *integrating curricular resources* (alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment), *creating instructional coherence* (a framework with guiding principles for high-quality teaching and learning), and *developing precision of pedagogy* (maximizing the impact on student learning by adjusting the interactions between the teacher and students and among students during the learning process). All three improvement strategies are essential, and yet, each requires specific expertise for improving the impact of teaching on student learning. However, as illustrated by the distraught teacher, we try to use instructional planning as if it were a silver bullet.

In the simplest form, developing collective expertise in schools occurs through the collaborative design and implementation of 3-week learning progressions with clearly defined learning tasks focused on a few key student success indicators. And when teacher teams co-lead robust collaborative inquiry processes to attend to this critical work, the result is greater instructional coherence with more precision of pedagogy. By design, improvement strategies that develop collective expertise have four essential components: 3-week learning progressions, clearly defined learning tasks, student success indicators, and a robust collaborative inquiry process.

Developing collective expertise in schools occurs through the collaborative design and implementation of 3-week learning progressions with clearly defined learning tasks focused on a few key student success indicators.

The reason for structuring as 3-week instructional cycles is that when teaching is informed by evidence of learning within this timeframe, the potential impact is 20% annual growth in student learning (Marzano, 2006). From a practical standpoint, this would be akin to defining the learning targets and performance outcomes for 3-week units of study (learning progression) so that curricular resources, instructional strategies, and formative assessments are integrated to support the learning needs of all students. Attention is also directed to supporting all students in the successful completion of rigorous and complex learning tasks. As brilliantly concluded by Richard Elmore, "task predicts performance," and so the insights gained from 1- to 3-day student learning opportunities are rich sources of information for improving teaching and learning. Last, identifying a few key student success indicators ensures that student learning priorities stay in focus through the duration of the 3-week learning progression as students engage in multiday learning tasks. Student success indicators represent the transferrable skills that students develop over year-long timeframes, such as close and analytical reading, precise use of rigorous academic language, structured collaborative conversations, or evidence-based arguments and writing.

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Developing collective expertise to deepen student learning calls upon teams of teachers to engage in robust collaborative inquiry processes that guide the design, implementation, and refinement of clearly delineated learning progressions with rigorous and complex learning tasks focused on a few key student success indicators.

A few critical questions for consideration to develop collective expertise will be addressed in forthcoming chapters.

1. How should robust collaborative inquiry processes guide teacher teams to collectively design, implement, and refine learning progressions and classroom tasks?
2. How can curricular resources, instructional strategies, and formative assessments be integrated in a way that meets the learning needs of all students?
3. How can instructional coherence be shaped by a framework with guiding principles that promotes high-quality teaching and learning?
4. How should precision of pedagogy be developed by focusing attention on a few key student success indicators so that all students are able to apply these critical skills?

Continuous Improvement

The standards-based accountability movement in education has promoted the steadfast pursuit of evidence to monitor student progress and measure growth over time. This encompasses the analysis of annual summative assessments, trimester screening tools, quarterly interim assessments, monthly formative assessments, and daily checking for student understanding. The intended purpose of this assessment continuum is to inform the continuous improvement of student learning. But there is an inherent flaw in this theory of action that essentially states that analyzing evidence improves student learning. But are we monitoring and measuring the factors that most influence student learning? The reality is that *improvement of practice precedes growth in student learning*, and therefore the focus should be knowing and understanding the impact of teaching on student learning to realize the desired growth in student learning results.

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To this end, knowing the impact on student learning should move away from analyzing student learning outcomes toward clarifying the pedagogical practices that will have the most impact on improving learning for all students. *Knowing the impact on student learning* would then shift to predicting the impact of teaching on student learning with a clearly defined theory of action for achieving the desired growth in student learning. The most critical question may be: "What is the desired growth in student learning, and how will we know the impact of pedagogical practices as students progress toward realizing this outcome?" This builds a strong foundation for guiding continuous improvement because it focuses the collective efforts of teachers and site leaders on seeking evidence of impact on "learning progress" rather than monitoring and measuring "learning outcomes."

Knowing the impact on student learning should move away from analyzing student learning outcomes toward clarifying the pedagogical practices that will have the most impact on improving learning for all students.

Inevitably, improvement efforts will come to identify the *problems of practice* that are impeding growth in student learning within and among classrooms. Understanding the root causes of these barriers to learning is essential and requires that teachers and site leaders seek solutions through collaborative inquiry. Such efforts focus on both challenges observed among students during the learning process as well as challenges teachers experience while engaging students in learning tasks. This takes shape in the form of asking probing questions such as "What could be the cause of . . .", "I wonder how to . . .", and "What would be the impact if . . ." It's as simple as first understanding the cause, followed by identifying viable solutions, and then considering the effect on improving student learning.

Overcoming problems of practice to improve teaching and learning is an ongoing and never-ending process. Sustaining these efforts requires that schools adopt a mindset and structured process for *continuously improving through disciplined inquiry*. The four phases of a collaborative inquiry process begin with analyzing evidence to clearly define the problems of practice. Then comes designing a theory of action for improving teaching and learning with evidence to know the impact on student learning growth followed by implementing action steps and making adjustments along the way informed by the evidence of impact. And last is reflecting on what worked best, why, and how to develop shared depth and understanding of the most promising practices for achieving growth in student learning. The collaborative inquiry cycle can serve as a school-wide improvement process if evidence of learning is shared by each teacher team at the conclusion of each 3-week inquiry cycle. This affords site leaders and teachers the opportunity to engage in a robust collaborative inquiry process every

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6 weeks for the purpose of overcoming common problems of practice and the sharing of promising practices.

> *Achieving growth in student learning requires that schools adopt a continuous improvement process for analyzing evidence to clearly define problems of practice, designing theories of action that improve teaching and learning, and knowing the impact on student learning to refine improvement efforts and identify promising practices.*

A few critical questions for consideration to guide continuous improvement will be addressed in forthcoming chapters.

1. How can evidence of impact on student learning guide the design, implementation, and refinement of practices to achieve equitable growth in student learning?
2. How can monitoring of student learning progress focus on seeking evidence of impact to know the extent to which improvement efforts are achieving equitable growth in student learning?
3. How should improvement efforts be shaped by recurring collaborative inquiry cycles for the purpose of overcoming problems of practice and the sharing of promising practices?

Setting the Stage

School districts that successfully create a coherent system of continuous improvement have a common vision with guiding principles (clarity of focus, shared leadership, collective expertise, and continuous improvement) for co-constructing the most critical work in collaboration with school sites. It is important to note that navigating systemic improvement requires a collaborative inquiry mindset and structured process for co-leading efforts to achieve equitable growth in student learning. The following is how Anywhere School District began the journey of becoming a *District on the Move* and how one school within the district, Somewhere School, assisted with initiating and sustaining systemic improvement through the ongoing efforts to become a *School on the Move*.

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At the onset of the school year, Anywhere School District established a focus on literacy and critical thinking skills to guide school sites with improving student learning outcomes. This priority stemmed from the analysis of multiple measures and review of classroom observations that pointed to the fact that many students struggled with completing rigorous and complex learning tasks. The root causes of these student inequities were found to be gaps in close and analytical reading skills and the ability to analyze, interpret, evaluate, problem solve, and justify with evidence. Each school was asked to create an action plan for implementing these priorities. At an upcoming principal meeting, these action plans were to be shared and discussed among principals and district leaders. The principal of Somewhere School, Jacob Westfall, had spent several weeks collaborating with staff to create the action plan and was looking forward to an opportunity to learn how other schools were attending to this critical work.

Erin McFarland, assistant superintendent of education services, had been tasked with coordinating the principal meeting. Much time and attention was dedicated to organizing key topics and ensuring there were opportunities for sharing and asking questions. She was dismayed when the principals voiced more questions than answers as to how best to support students and staff with moving forward the district priorities of literacy and critical thinking. The site action plans were vague, with little clarity as to how strategies would be implemented or how evidence would be monitored to know the impact on student learning. It was clear principals wanted more guidance, and so a list of key questions were created to go deeper with designing more precise, actionable, and impactful plans.

1. What are the school-wide priorities for student learning?
2. What measures of student progress or growth will define our success?
3. Which student success indicators (cognitive skills and application of key concepts) will best inform the design of student tasks and learning progressions?

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(Continued)

4. Which high-yield pedagogical practices will have the greatest impact on student learning?
5. How will evidence of learning inform both timely student feedback and adjustments of student learning supports?
6. What timeframes should guide our collective efforts with engaging students in short cycles of instruction and improving upon teaching and learning practices?

Erin asked Jacob to stay after the principal meeting to debrief because they had worked on other committees in the past and had a good working relationship. As they reflected on their observations and insights, themes emerged as to how principals had framed the work with their staffs. The four descriptors were compliant, rogue, fragmented, and focused. Some principals were asking exactly what was wanted from the district in their action plans, whereas others wanted full autonomy to design what was best for their schools. Others seemed to be torn on what to do because there were many competing priorities among staff, and a few schools already had staff consensus as to how best to support the district priorities. Erin was uncertain how to proceed with such divergence among principals and variation in school action plans.

Jacob offered to assist by forming a small work group with a few principals, and Erin asked if this group could be representative of the four themes from their meeting (compliant, rogue, fragmented, and focused) because this would provide insights needed to support each type of school. In the end, it was decided that visiting each school site together would be most beneficial. This would allow Jacob an opportunity to discuss the work with each principal and talk with the school staff to garner takeaways that could assist his school. And Erin could learn more about each school site and how they were understanding and attending to the work at hand. A simple diagram was created for capturing insights from each school visit that noted what was believed to be the key drivers for shaping the work at hand: clarity of focus, shared leadership, collective expertise, and continuous improvement. Jacob would follow up with Erin as to which schools would be visited and a schedule of dates and times that were preferred by the school sites.

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Anywhere School District is not unique from the perspective of how schools and districts engage in the process of shaping culture, developing capacity, and creating coherence. Are there similarities to your own school or district? What insights or key takeaways can be gleaned from the beginning journey of Anywhere School District and its school sites? What would you do next if you were Erin and Jacob? In the forthcoming chapter we will dive into the first key driver of school improvement: clarity of focus. What will unfold is how schools and districts create a strategic focus for achieving equitable student growth with clearly delineated improvement strategies guided by short cycles of collaborative inquiry.

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