FACILITATOR GUIDE

Introduction

This guide provides schools with a selection of recommended strategies for using *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge*. While there are many ways to engage with the tool, it is important that school leaders and facilitators remain focused on outcomes and designing goal-driven activities for participants. In addition to the self-assessment process and planning worksheets, *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge* will help schools develop a common purpose for their professional learning and planning program, and gain a deeper understanding of the systemic conditions essential to high-quality, job-embedded, teacher-driven professional development.

How to Organize a Work Session

The first step in creating an effective *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge* work session is to decide how it will be structured—who will be participating and how will they be grouped. We recommend one of the following approaches:

1. Leadership teams are encouraged to work through all five dimensions, since it is vitally important that collaborative learning and planning programs are systemic—that is, coherent and integrated with other district or school programs and priorities.

2. Districts teams are encouraged to break up into school-based teams and work through all five dimensions—again, a systemic approach is paramount. After each school team has completed the process, the group reconvenes to discuss the results and how the district can support each school's priorities and evolving action plans.

3. When working with a faculty, school leaders have a variety of options:
   - One option is to divide the faculty into five smaller groups, with each team working through one dimension (larger schools can divide the faculty into ten or fifteen smaller groups). When the teams reconvene, the results are shared during a facilitated group discussion.
   - A second option is to divide the faculty into several groups, with each team working through the same dimension or selection of dimensions. When the teams reconvene, they share their scores and engage in a facilitated discussion about why their results either diverged or converged.
   - A third option is to divide the faculty into several two- or three-person groups, with each team working through the same dimension or selection of dimensions. Before reconvening, all the individual group scores are collected and transcribed onto a single chart or table. The full group then discusses how the scores diverged or converged during a facilitated discussion.

Sample Work Session Agenda

The following detailed facilitation agenda will help school leaders construct an effective *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge* work session. Building on a simple four-step process—reflecting, connecting, deciding, doing—this three-hour framework can be modified as needed to address a variety of needs or to suit different group configurations.

I. Welcome and Purpose of the Session

After welcoming the group, the facilitator should clearly state the purpose of the work session. For example:

> *The purpose of this meeting is to introduce the faculty to a new tool that will help us develop and implement a high-quality professional learning and planning program. Today's session is a direct extension of our action-planning process, and we hope to end the day with a clear direction for professional planning time in our school. As you know, we've been working over the past few years to decrease some persistent achievement gaps, and we believe that greater and more focused collaboration will help us get there. And let us not forget that the end goal of this work is higher aspirations, achievement, and educational attainment for all our students, which begins with effective teaching in every classroom.*

II. Expected Outcomes

The facilitator should also include a clear set of expectations or outcomes for the work session:

Participants in this meeting will:

- *Engage in a self-assessment process that will help our school determine where we are on a best-practice continuum and what we need to do next.*
- *Identify systemic issues that will help or hinder the implementation of a collaborative learning and planning program.*
- *Begin to formulate a collective vision of high-quality collaborative learning and planning for our school.*
- *Develop a first draft of an implementation process for teacher-driven professional development that is aligned with our action plan.*
- *Leave with a stronger understanding of professional learning and planning, including research-based strategies that have been effective in other schools.*

III. Collecting the Wisdom in the Room (30 minutes)

This activity is a "warm up" session for participants that is intended to move the faculty toward a collective vision for professional learning and planning:

1. *Take a few minutes to think about your personal vision of high-quality professional learning and planning, and jot down your ideas. What should be the goal of professional planning time? What should a collaborative, teacher-driven professional learning program look like in practice? What essential conditions need to be in place?* ***(5 minutes)***

2. *Divide into groups of three and share your ideas. Make note of any commonalities and particularly important conditions, such as school policies, necessary resources, or cultural factors.* ***(10 minutes)***

3. *Report out. One person from each group takes 1–2 minutes to summarize their conversation. Following the report out, the facilitator will lead a group discussion based on the following question: What would our ideal professional learning program look like?* ***(15 minutes)***

IV. Engaging with the Tool (60-90 minutes)

After dividing the faculty into teams of six by pairing two triads from the previous activity, the facilitator provides a brief introduction to the tool, describes how it is organized, and reviews the purpose of the activity:

> *In this session, each team is going to work through two dimensions in Harnessing Teacher Knowledge, but collectively we will complete all five dimensions. The purpose of this activity is to take a hard look at our current collaborative learning and planning practices, and then begin mapping out ways to improve them. Keep in mind that the performance descriptions you will read are merely concise, illustrative snapshots of a school at various stages of development—they are not absolute categories. Don't get bogged down in the details of the descriptions, but consider the overall picture. The most important thing is that we all engage in a thoughtful, honest, objective discussion about our current practices, and then score ourselves accordingly. This is what we are going to do…*

Have each group work through two or three dimensions, but make sure that every group completes either Dimension 1 or Dimension 2 because strong, supportive leadership and a collegial faculty culture are critical to professional learning and planning. NOTE: This structure can be modified depending on the size of the group, the length of session, or school needs.

Instructions:

1. *Read the performance levels in the first assigned dimension. Make note of the similarities and dissimilarities between the descriptions and our school.*
2. *In the same dimension, read the Actions for School Leaders list. Again, make note of any similarities or dissimilarities.*
3. *As a group, discuss and list our current school practices that directly relate to the dimension in the blank Our Actions column. Please note that we should only record actions that are currently in place or in practice—not strategies we are considering or planning to implement.*
4. *After listing our actions, discuss as a group where you feel our school is on the performance continuum. Return to the previous page and determine a score for our school on the 1-5 scale.*

The group should be given 30 minutes to complete this activity, and another 30 minutes to complete each additional dimension. We recommend limiting the session to 60 or 90 minutes and focusing on depth over breadth. It's better to engage in a longer and more substantive discussion of two or three dimensions than a relatively cursory discussion of all five. Make sure each one of the five dimensions is completed by at least two teams—i.e., a minimum of two scores for each dimension.

V. Moving Forward (30 minutes)

Based on the discussions and self-assessment process, the group will now complete the two planning worksheets. While there are several potential ways facilitators can organize this session, we recommend one of the following two approaches:

Full-Group Discussion: Collect scores for all the individual groups and list them on chart paper. Assign someone to take notes—ideally on a computer connected to an LCD projector—and work through each step in the worksheets during a facilitated full-group discussion while recording the scores and most important strategies from each group. The advantage of this approach is that it is open and transparent. If time is limited, a full-group discussion may be the preferred option.

Small-Group Discussion: Maintain the same groupings from the previous activity and instruct each team to complete the two planning worksheets. While the teams are working, the facilitator should collect scores for all the groups and list them on chart paper. After fifteen minutes, each group will report out and a recorder will transcribe the comments. The advantage of this approach is that it may produce more diverse and potentially helpful results, since less outspoken voices may not participate as readily in large-group discussions, which can sometimes become overly focused on more moderate or conventional ideas or the ideas that happen to be presented first. Out-of-the-box thinking should not only be welcomed at this point, but explicitly encouraged.

General Advice: Completing the Planning Worksheets

- When completing the priorities grid as a full group, the score for each dimension should reflect either (1) a group consensus that emerged during a facilitated discussion or (2) a numerical average of the scores collected from each team.
- The priorities list should represent the major school priorities that emerged from the session, and they should be ordered in terms of relative importance. These should be the "big picture" priorities that will drive the school's collaborative learning and planning program.
- When filling out the list of assets and obstacles, the group should focus on refining and prioritizing this list based on the day's discussions and what is likely to help or hinder their work the most.
- Be specific and focused when determining student-performance goals. It is better to select a few critical, high-impact performance measures and interim growth targets. This step will become the foundation of any evaluation or monitoring plan, so make sure the list of performance goals is not only aligned with the school's action plan, but that it considers the school's existing capacity to collect data and track progress.
- The priority actions list should also reflect a group consensus and be ordered by relative importance. This is the first step toward zeroing in on a concrete implementation plan, so make sure this list is based on a thoughtful consideration of what is needed, what is feasible, and what will advance the school toward its goals most efficiently and effectively. The strategies described throughout *Harnessing Teacher Knowledge* are based on sound research and can serve as a starting point for the discussion.
- The implementation timeline for collaborative learning and planning should be integrated with the school's action plan. Whether you are refining an existing plan or launching a new program, it is important that your school remain focused on outcomes. While schools should never act hastily, they should nevertheless move expeditiously to identify the top priorities, assign responsibilities, and map out short-term goals for implementation.

VI. Final Comments and Closure

At this point, the facilitator should summarize the day, focusing on any particularly positive outcomes or observations. The principal, project director, or other school leader thanks everyone for their participation and briefly outlines next steps. To maintain transparency and inclusivity, the work session leaders should provide participants with a written summary of the day's notes, including copies of the completed planning worksheets.

Tracking Progress: Revisiting the Tool

- Every six to twelve months, revisit the tool and repeat the self-assessment process. As new strategies are implemented, it could be instructive to observe progress through the lens of self-assessment, while the planning framework will help schools refine and restructure the work as needed.
- As a school progresses toward its goals, it is important to celebrate progress. In addition to tracking critical student-performance data, schools can observe their progress by charting their self-assessment scores over time on a line graph or bar graph. A few powerful graphics can sometimes be more persuasive than even the most well articulated arguments.
- Don't forget to revisit and reflect on the list of obstacles and assets. If a school is making progress, obstacles will be diminishing and assets will be increasing.
- Teacher surveys are another way to collect data on progress, and the tool can be used to frame survey questions. In some cases, school leaders may want to consider an anonymous survey if they believe that the faculty will be more forthcoming.