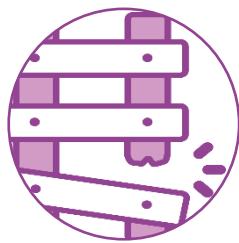


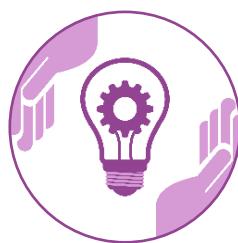
Tulsa Public Schools:

Redesigning Schools for Professional Learning—on a Budget



Common Challenge

Teachers in Tulsa Public Schools struggled to meet their students' diverse needs and deliver instruction that met new, more rigorous standards. This was exacerbated by high teacher turnover, especially among novice teachers. District leaders aimed to increase support—but very low funding levels presented an additional challenge.



Tulsa's Approach

To transform school-level staffing and scheduling in ways that increased support and job-embedded professional learning time for teachers, Tulsa Public Schools redesigned the way the central office supported principals—including providing intensive training and tools for a pilot group of principals to help them revamp roles, teacher teaming, and school schedules.



Tulsa's Results

At the end of the first year of implementation, all pilot schools have increased teachers' collaborative planning time by at least 50 additional minutes per week *and* have new teacher leadership roles to facilitate this time. According to principals, the training and tools have helped them make more informed, deliberate decisions about how to achieve their schools' goals.

ERS Districts at Work Series

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Tulsa, Oklahoma

Tulsa Public Schools:
Redesigning Schools for Professional Learning—on a Budget

TAKE ACTION IN YOUR DISTRICT!

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Visit bit.ly/tulsaartifacts or look for the  artifact icon throughout this case study to access tangible materials—such as templates and tools—that leaders in Tulsa Public Schools created to guide their work.

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What are the gears of change in my district? Where are our gears getting stuck? Where do we need one gear to push another to enable meaningful change?

Get support.

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Share these stories.



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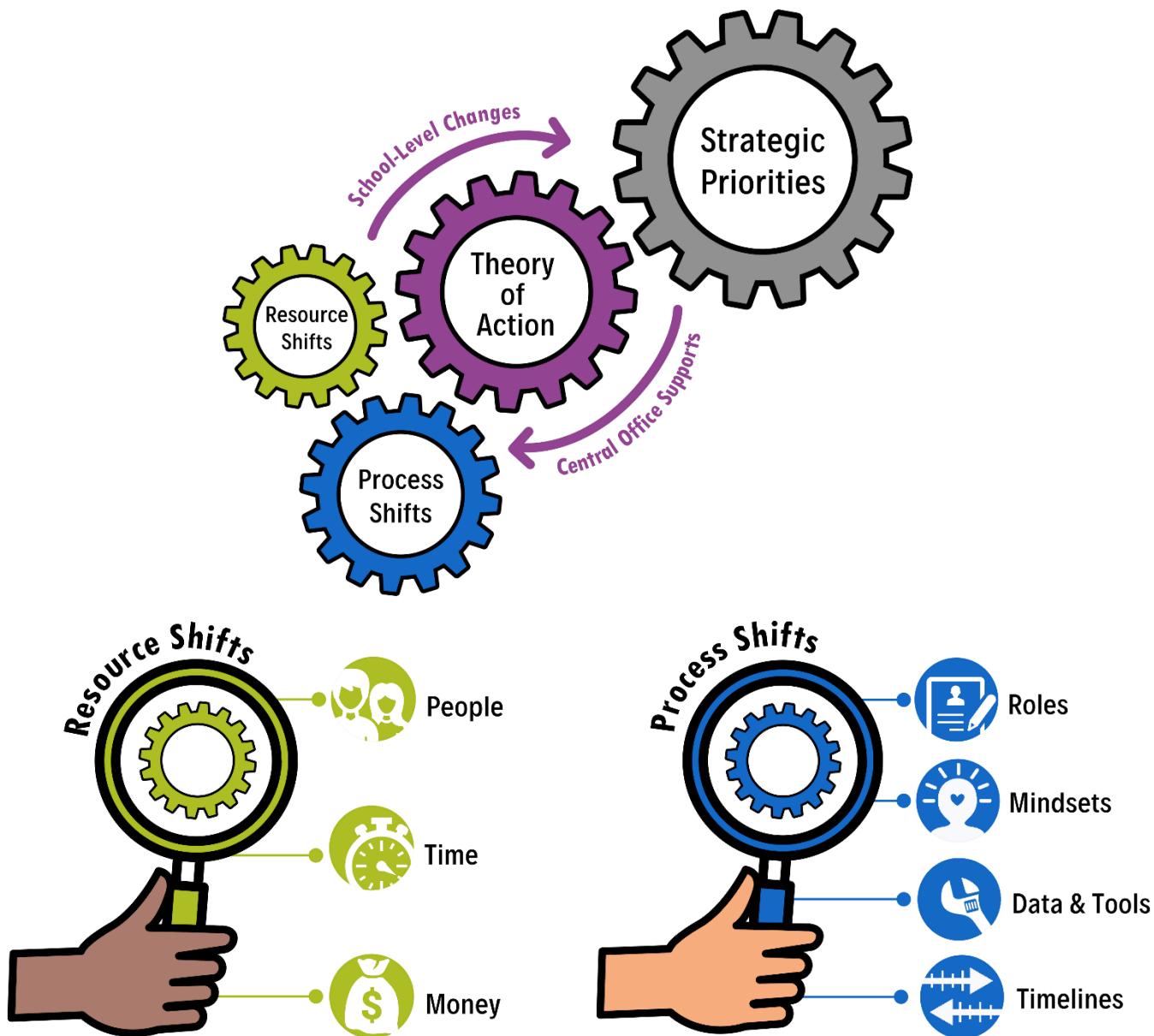
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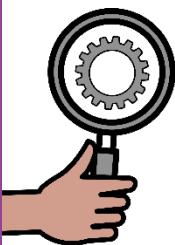
ERS Districts at Work Framework

We studied eight school districts that struggled with the same challenges as many urban systems around the country—and like many others, the eight districts we studied set **strategic priorities** that they hoped would address their challenges. **What sets these eight districts apart is that they didn't stop there.**

Think of these **strategic priorities** as a gear—without focusing on what is needed to power it, the gear stays stationary. Just setting the right strategic priorities is not enough to produce or sustain the results district and school leaders hope for.

Leaders from Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) and the other districts we studied rolled up their sleeves to carefully and collaboratively construct three other gears that effectively powered their strategic priorities. They developed a clear **theory of action** by identifying: (A) the big changes that schools needed to make to power progress toward the strategic priorities, *and* (B) how the central office needed to support schools to successfully implement those changes. To power their theory of action, these districts made tough trade-offs in a series of **resource shifts**, and they made **process shifts** to ensure central office management structures enabled schools to efficiently, effectively, and sustainably implement the changes.





Tulsa Public Schools: Strategic Priority

In 2015, TPS launched *Destination Excellence*, their five-year vision and strategic plan for teaching and learning. Core parts of the plan included attracting and retaining an effective and empowered team; incubating and implementing innovative classroom, school, and district designs; and designing the district to be adaptive and responsive in providing excellent learning experiences for students and families. To operationalize their strategic plan and improve teacher retention and performance, TPS identified the following **strategic priority** for the 2017-18 school year:

Improve instructional practice by implementing a job-embedded professional learning model for teachers.

Within this strategic priority, TPS committed to including **three elements** common across successful professional learning programs to form an approach that used an integrated, research-based model of teacher professional learning that was successful in other districts.¹²

- **Rigorous, comprehensive curricula**

In TPS, all elementary schools had access to rigorous math and ELA curriculum that was aligned with college- and career-ready standards.³

- **Content-focused, expert-led collaboration**

To ensure that teachers had the knowledge and support they needed to implement the standards-aligned curriculum with fidelity, the district prioritized creating time for 90-minute weekly collaborative planning blocks for teams of at least four teachers who taught the same subject and/or grade. These collaborative planning blocks were facilitated by teacher leaders who received intensive professional learning and support of their own.

- **Frequent, growth-oriented feedback**

TPS sought to help teachers improve instructional practice and classroom culture by providing them with more regular feedback from content experts.

Tulsa Public Schools: District at a Glance

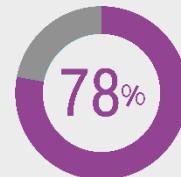


36,609 Students
Second Largest District in Oklahoma

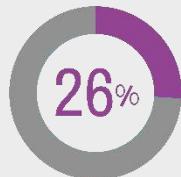
Black and Latinx* Students (2018)



Economically Disadvantaged Students (2018)



Students Proficient in Both Math and ELA (2018)⁴

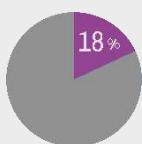


Under-investment in education across Oklahoma has prevented school systems like TPS from paying teachers a competitive salary and has contributed to an inexperienced teaching workforce. During the 2014-15 school year, almost 25 percent of TPS teachers had two years or less of classroom experience. Teacher turnover among new teachers was high:

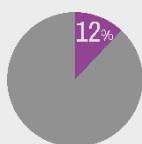
Novice Teacher Attrition in TPS



Overall Teacher Attrition in TPS

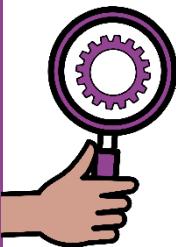


Overall Attrition in Urban Peer Districts⁵



As challenges with student performance and teacher turnover persisted, only 19 percent of teachers and 31 percent of principals felt district administration showed concern for the needs of their school.⁶

^{*}"Latinx" is the gender-neutral alternative to "Latino" or "Latina," meaning a person of Latin American origin or descent. Common pronunciation is "lah-TEEN-ex" or "lah-teen-EX." ERS chose to study districts with high populations of black, Latinx, and low-income students to highlight school systems that are actively addressing longstanding inequities.



Tulsa Public Schools: Theory of Action

TPS leaders didn't stop after setting the district's strategic priority: First, they identified big changes that schools needed to make to power progress toward the strategic priority. Then, they identified how the central office needed to support schools to successfully implement those changes. Together, these school-level changes and central office supports formed the district's **theory of action**. To power their theory of action, TPS made a series of resource shifts and process shifts. **Going beyond an initial strategic priority by developing and powering this theory of action is what sets TPS apart.**

TPS's theory of action was composed of three major parts:

#1

Support school leaders as they redesign their schools for effective professional learning.

Why?

Most principals were teachers themselves before moving into administration, and therefore had the tendency to focus on the delivery of instruction and not the structural changes required to support it. Leaders in the central office understood that this posed challenges for most principals when it came to redesigning their schools for content-specific, teacher-led collaboration models and regular cycles of observation and feedback.

Resource Shifts

- People
- Time
- Money

Process Shifts

- Roles
- Mindsets
- Data & Tools
- Timelines

#2

Redesign the school planning process and timeline.

Why?

School leaders needed to be able to implement the new professional learning strategy in a budget-neutral way by making tough resource trade-offs and dramatically rethinking the way they used people, time, and money. To pull this off, the central office needed to shift processes to create the enabling conditions necessary for principals to have adequate time to engage staff in decision-making and the ability to make decisions across a full set of available resources.

Resource Shifts

- People
- Time
- Money

Process Shifts

- Roles
- Mindsets
- Data & Tools
- Timelines

#3

Provide cross-departmental strategic feedback to schools.

Why?

Pilot schools needed to experience dramatically different support from the central office while they made the big resource shifts necessary to enable innovative models. The central office delivered this support via strategic review cycles: district-level teams collaborated to deliver comprehensive, aligned feedback that was designed to strengthen the quality of principals' strategic decisions and therefore increase the likelihood of effective implementation.

Resource Shifts

- People
- Time
- Money

Process Shifts

- Roles
- Mindsets
- Data & Tools
- Timelines

Support school leaders as they redesign their schools for effective professional learning.

Implementing job-embedded professional learning required organizing teachers into teams, increasing collaboration time, ensuring expert-led cycles of observation and feedback, and allocating money to compensate teacher leaders. However, many principals did not have the knowledge, tools, or supports to effectively lead the design and implementation of these changes. To address this, TPS began a pilot in a subset of schools that were already implementing new teacher support models. Central office supported pilot schools to reorganize resources for job-embedded professional learning by providing scheduling and staffing “prototypes” and wraparound supports.⁷



Process Shifts



Roles

Principal supervisors (called instructional leadership directors or ILDs) were an integral part of the district's efforts to redesign schools for professional learning because they were well positioned to provide direct support to schools and to coordinate with the central office on instructional priorities and resource flexibilities. Therefore, TPS **focused on building the capacity of ILDs to: (A) serve as a key source of support for principals, and (B) guide future parallel shifts in all schools across the district.** To do this:

- TPS ensured that ILDs were better equipped than those in typical districts to provide these additional layers of support to pilot schools by maintaining an ILD-to-principal ratio of 10:1, compared with 16:1 in a typical district.⁸
- TPS expanded the role of elementary-level ILDs to support a readiness assessment in pilot schools, analysis of school-specific resource shifts, engagement around relevant district-level policy questions, and facilitation of check-ins around specific decisions.
- ILDs received professional development to better support principals' use of decision-making tools, including prototypes that modeled the resource shifts needed to implement design strategies.
- ILDs collaborated with a cross-section of central office departments to provide feedback to schools about their strategic plans (see page 10).

Artifact #1: Instructional Leadership Director's School Planning Process Calendar



Data & Tools

Using philanthropic dollars, TPS partnered with [Education Resource Strategies \(ERS\)](#) to provide training, support, and tools that pilot principals needed to make decisions about creative school designs. Together, ERS and TPS **developed a series of scheduling, staffing, and budgeting prototypes that gave principals examples of how they could create effective school designs that strategically leveraged their existing people, time, and money.** These prototypes included sample school staffing models, schedules, and Title I budgets based on the resources available to a typical TPS elementary school. The goal of the prototypes was to provide a starting point for school leaders to make strategic resource decisions that aligned with the *Destination Excellence* strategic plan and the district's new approaches to professional

learning. School leaders used these prototypes as a source of inspiration for how to reorganize their resources and adapt the models to fit their specific context in ways that made progress toward their instructional goals but stayed within their current budgets. This resulted in a variety of creative resource shifts across the 10 pilot schools.

◆ **Artifact #2: Sample Scheduling, Staffing, and Budgeting Prototype**



Resource Shifts



Time

As a result of the process shifts described above, pilot schools **repurposed time to better align with the strategic priority element of content-focused, expert-led collaboration**. First, principals in most pilot schools assigned all their teachers into teams of four or more, plus an expert teacher leader. Then, school leaders **created 90 minutes of collaborative time for these teams each week by redistributing planning time across the week or by stacking teachers' planning periods with other blocks of non-instructional time (e.g., lunch or recess) or more flexible time (e.g., intervention blocks)**. To enable coverage so that at least four teachers could meet at the same time, principals re-envisioned the roles of support staff, who provided instruction to students during intervention and other flexible instruction blocks. One school tripled teachers' collaborative planning time by hiring an additional position to teach social studies across multiple grade levels.

In addition to content-focused, expert-led collaboration, some pilot schools focused on implementing cycles of growth-oriented observation and feedback. Overall, schools **created release time for experts to observe and debrief with teachers in one of two ways**:

- Aligning school leaders' time with teachers' schedules to increase the amount of time available to conduct classroom observations.
- Repurposing dollars to fund the creation of new positions that played a combination role of coach, teacher leader, or interventionist. Schools freed up these dollars by reducing external professional development that did not align with the district's new approach.

To provide time for teachers to debrief observations, school leaders scheduled post-observation meetings before or after school hours or during teachers' planning time, or they hired additional teaching positions to provide coverage during instructional time.



People and Money

To ensure time for collaboration and feedback was used effectively, TPS **used philanthropic dollars to partner with [Leading Educators](#), an instructional partner, to provide professional learning curriculum and training to teacher leaders** for the purpose of preparing them to effectively facilitate collaborative planning time with teacher teams.⁹



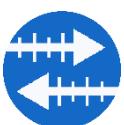
Because the teacher leader role required taking on more responsibilities than the previous team lead role, the district **strengthened the value proposition by compensating teacher leaders with a stipend that was twice as much as the team lead stipend (or 8.5 percent of the average teacher salary)**.¹⁰ After that, schools were required to find the money necessary to fund the stipend increase. To continue to allocate money to pay this stipend, schools repurposed funds spent on existing stipends, external professional learning, or instructional materials.

Redesign the school planning process and timeline.

Historically, the school planning timeline and process in TPS were organized around separate touchpoints within each central office department, without an eye for connections across departments or the order in which these touchpoints should occur to enable strategic school design. This disconnect limited school leaders' ability to make decisions across a full set of resources or with their full staff. For example, budget and staffing information was released each May, which often meant that the design work principals had already completed with their teachers to rearrange schedules and assignments in support of collaborative planning had to be discarded due to new information about budget constraints. It also meant that schools received new funding or an additional teaching position too late in the hiring season, after many of the most promising candidates had already accepted positions in other districts. TPS committed to redesigning the school planning timeline and process to better support school leaders' efforts to implement the district's strategic school design prototypes for effective job-embedded professional learning. The district provided school leaders with a single timeline and tool to make and record decisions across all their resources. TPS leaders decided to roll out the new process with the 10 pilot schools, rather than changing the process across the entire district all at once. Staggered implementation made it easier for central office departments to deliver within the new, tighter timelines and to address problems before introducing the process to all 80 schools in the district.



Process Shifts



Timelines

The finance, data analytics, and Federal Programs teams **coordinated to ensure that pilot schools received enrollment projections, staffing allocations, and Title I and discretionary budgets two months sooner**. This new timing aligned with when schools were working with ILDs and leadership teams to set instructional priorities and make strategic resource decisions for the upcoming year.

In the past, budget and staffing decisions were made so late in the year because they were dependent on other decisions, such as program placements. For accurate finance data to be shared earlier, the finance and staffing teams needed to communicate and collaborate more closely with the district's academic leadership. Shifting to an earlier timeline for enrollment projections required district leadership to solidify instructional decisions—such as those related to pre-K expansion or dual-language program placement—earlier too. Everyone in the central office needed to understand and support the instructional strategy around teacher professional learning and commit to making changes to their own routines in service of empowering successful implementation in schools.

- ◆ [Artifact #3: District Office School Planning Process Calendar](#)

- ◆ [Artifact #4: Collaboration Calendar](#)



The time was really key. Having projections and staffing so much earlier gave me **time to engage my team and really plan.**



-Pilot school principal



Data & Tools

In the 10 pilot schools, TPS introduced new tools to help principals make and record decisions across their full set of resources. To help principals consider all possible configurations and trade-offs (such as prioritizing funding for paraprofessional or novice teacher positions in grade levels with higher enrollment, or shifting expenditures for instructional materials from Title I funds to general funds to free up money for a Title I interventionist), the central office **combined all resource inputs—including projections, allocations, and budgets—into one centralized document.**

Then, they developed a **Strategic Design Decisions planner** that let school leaders record decisions about teacher assignments, team composition, instructional time, and budgets, all in one place. This streamlined planner enabled ILDs and central office teams to refer to a single source document when they reviewed schools' plans.

These tools saved time because school leaders no longer needed to track down and combine data from multiple sources. The tools also helped school leaders make more strategic decisions by guiding them through the process of assessing their needs and resources, clarifying their priorities for change, planning for staff engagement, designing cohesive strategies, and mapping out the resource-use implications of their strategies. All together, this process enabled pilot school leaders to create comprehensive and compelling strategic plans that aligned resources with their schools' needs and priorities.

Artifact #5: Strategic Decision Planner



[The timeline and new tools] make a nearly impossible job accomplishable in an efficient and effective way.

-Pilot school principal

Provide cross-departmental strategic feedback to schools.

In the past, the district's review of school plans focused narrowly on compliance within each central office department, which resulted in schools receiving disconnected feedback that didn't support strategic decision-making. Additionally, central office departments had limited visibility into school-level resource decisions, which led to a mismatch between school needs and central office support. As pilot schools made big resource shifts to enable innovative models, they needed dramatically different support from the central office. TPS delivered this via strategic review cycles that were timed to support key decisions throughout the year. District-level teams collaborated to deliver comprehensive, aligned feedback that was designed to strengthen the quality of schools' strategic decisions and increase the likelihood of effective implementation.

Process Shifts



Roles

The central office **created new cross-functional strategic review teams to help departments align the feedback they provided to principals.** TPS leaders recognized that in successful district efforts, all district teams engaged to focus on teaching and learning improvement. The new cross-functional support teams included representatives from the Federal Programs, teaching and learning, budget, talent, and data analytics teams—who all reviewed schools' strategic plans and then met to align on key decisions and build consensus around the feedback they provided to school leaders. ILDs were also involved in the cross-functional review because they had the most direct knowledge of schools' needs, priorities, and resource-use decisions, and were well-positioned to deliver the group's feedback to principals.

These new strategic review cycles required a much greater time investment from the central office. The time invested by each member of the cross-functional team members was much greater than in previous years: between 1 ½ and 3 ¾ hours for each pilot school.¹¹ Even though these strategic review cycles required a greater time investment, district leaders understood that enabling stronger school plans that aligned with school priorities and district requirements was an integral aspect of their role as a service provider to schools. By bringing together leaders across central office departments, TPS increased efficiency because collaborative decisions were made in real time instead of spending time tracking down information from a variety of sources. The process tightened the communication loop between school leaders and various district-level teams, which ensured that school leaders received consistent messages on policy from their ILDs and various central office departments.

Even though it was a larger time investment for the pilot schools, it was time well spent since we were able to hash out our questions and answers as a cross-functional team. Instead of having to leave and go find answers, then update everyone via email, **we had all of the subject-matter experts in one room at the same time.**

-Jill Hendricks,
executive director of the Office of
Federal Programs and Special Projects

Artifact #6: Strategic Review Cycles Calendar



Mindsets

By setting a goal to make the central office a *service and strategy partner to schools*, TPS **redefined how the central office engaged with schools**. The cross-functional support teams embraced their new roles as school partners, and for the first time, school leaders received feedback that was focused on strategy rather than compliance. Instead of only documenting whether a specific part of their plan met state and federal requirements, discussions centered on how school leaders could better align their resources to meet the most urgent student needs and instructional priorities. By learning from other district offices' perspectives, TPS leaders further increased the alignment and consistency of their support. The review cycles gave central office teams more insight into school-level strategy and decisions, which therefore enabled them to evolve their services to better meet schools' needs.

Artifact #7: Linking the Planning Process to the District's Strategic Plan



“I’d never really gotten feedback like that before. In the past, people at the service center would say, ‘Fix this line or that line,’ and that was it. **The feedback this year was much richer.** It made me process and think about a lot of things.”

-Pilot school principal

Results: Changes to the Teacher Experience

All 10 pilot schools developed coherent budget, staffing, and scheduling plans for the 2018-19 school year. All 10 pilot schools increased their collaborative planning time from 40 minutes per week to at least 90 minutes per week, which allowed teachers to participate in teacher-led, content-focused cycles of professional learning in collaborative teams. Even in a highly resource-constrained environment, schools achieved this in several creative ways, including using non-classroom teachers and support staff to provide coverage, and scheduling collaborative planning time before or after non-instructional blocks, such as lunch or recess.

- One school tripled their collaborative planning time from 40 minutes per week to 135 minutes per week by hiring an additional person to teach social studies across multiple grades. Overall, the school increased total planning time from 200 minutes per week to 315 minutes per week.
- Five schools repurposed Title I funds to create new site-based coaching/intervention positions to provide targeted instruction for the lowest-performing students and to give teachers the support needed to improve instruction and classroom culture.

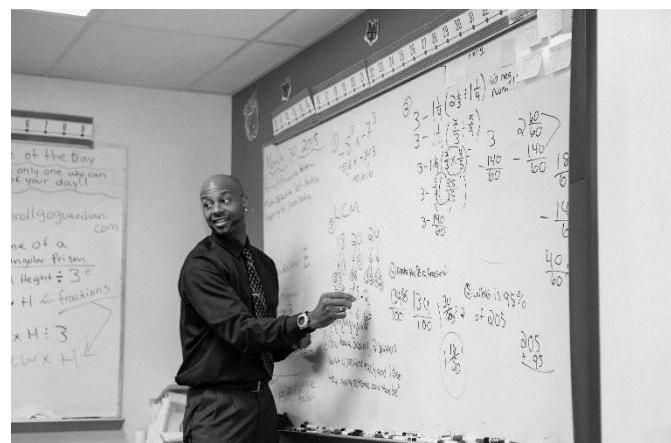
Results: Changes to the School and District Leader Experience

At the end of the first year of implementation, all pilot school principals agreed that the new planning timeline and process were an improvement from previous years and that the customized training and tools helped them make more informed, deliberate decisions about how to achieve their schools' design priorities.

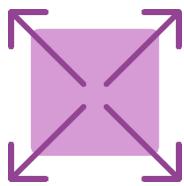
Central office staff also experienced improved efficiency. Executive Director of Federal Programs and Special Projects Jill Hendricks reflected, "It was amazing to 'backwards map' the district planning process from the school planning process. Having the school planning process nailed down allowed us to better plan at the district level as far as decision-making timelines. It put pressure where there wasn't any previously and essentially forced our hand to make quicker, more strategic decisions."

“I have been in the district for 29 years. I am more excited about this opportunity than any before.”

-Pilot school principal

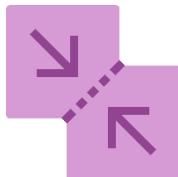


What's Next for Tulsa Public Schools?



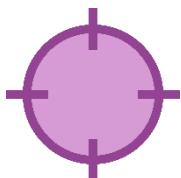
Expand the pilot.

During the 2018-19 school year, TPS will expand the pilot to 10 more schools (20 schools total). All schools planning for or implementing redesign will participate in strategic plan reviews during 2018-19, as the district continues to build internal capacity around this type of support. Eventually, TPS leaders hope to scale strategic reviews to all schools in the district.



Better integrate strategic planning processes with budgeting, staffing, and scheduling processes.

During the 2017-18 school year, TPS made progress by kicking off strategic planning earlier in the year. However, district-level teams did not complete their strategic planning or determine resource allocations before schools began to make resource decisions. During the 2018-19 school year, the leadership team will set district priorities, and district-level teams will develop their own roadmaps, plan implementation of new strategic initiatives, and make resource decisions early in the year.



Clarify roles and decision-making responsibilities.

During the 2017-18 school year, TPS developed a decision support guide for school leaders that outlined the role of various district departments, key contacts, and the types of questions they support. During the 2018-19 school year, the district will continue refining district roles and evolving the support guide to streamline principal communication with the central office. The district is exploring how it can monetize staffing resources to give school leaders the flexibility to convert positions allocated through the staffing plan or trade those positions for dollars. TPS cannot move to student-based budgeting at this time due to funding constraints, but district leaders are working to give school leaders increased resource flexibility.



Sources

¹ Hawley Miles, Karen; Rosenberg, David; and Quist Green, Genevieve. *Igniting the Learning Engine: How School Systems Accelerate Teacher Effectiveness and Student Growth through Connected Professional Learning*. Part of the “Connected Professional Learning for Teachers” series. Education Resource Strategies. April 2017. www.erstrategies.org/tap/connected_professional_learning.

² Ibid.

³ In elementary schools, Tulsa Public Schools uses Eureka Math and Core Knowledge Language Arts curricula.

⁴ “Destination Excellence: Strategic Plan 2016-2010.” Tulsa Public Schools.

<https://resources.finalsuite.net/images/v1517593372/tulsaschoolsorg/sdp6tkbrsgodzgl8ah5x/StrategicPlan.pdf>.

⁵ Education Resource Strategies’ Resource Map Analysis for Tulsa Public Schools. Peer Districts included: Aldine Independent School District; Baltimore City Public Schools; Cleveland Metropolitan School District; DC Public Schools; Denver Public Schools; El Paso Independent School District; Los Angeles Unified Public School District; New Haven Public Schools; and the School District of Palm Beach County.

⁶ ERS analysis of 2014-15 human capital data from Tulsa Public Schools.

⁷ Tulsa Public Schools piloted an annual planning redesign with schools already working with Leading Educators on new teacher support.

⁸ Tulsa Public Schools has 50 elementary schools and five elementary ILDs. The typical district average comes from Education Resource Strategies’ Strategic System Snapshot Database, which includes 22 urban districts that ERS has worked with.

⁹ In 2017-18, Tulsa Public Schools worked with Leading Educators, the New Teacher Project (TNTP), the Center for Transformative Teacher Training (CT3), and Education Resource Strategies to operationalize their strategic priorities.

¹⁰ In 2017-18, Tulsa Public Schools’ average teacher salary was \$43,555. Teacher leader stipends were \$3,739.

¹¹ ERS analysis of School Planning Process Redesign for the Tulsa Public Schools Leadership Team.

Note: Most of the content featured in this case study comes from interviews and email correspondence with TPS district and school leaders. Unless otherwise noted, all facts and data points are drawn from this qualitative data set.

Photos courtesy of Tulsa Public Schools.



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Every school. Every child. Ready for tomorrow.



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