

Supporting Effective Teaching

Communications Resources
for Implementing New Systems
for Teacher Development
and Evaluation

*Emerging Perspectives from
Partnership Sites to Empower Effective Teaching*

This guide is based on research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and contributors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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INTRODUCTION

MaryEllen Elia (Hillsborough County Public Schools): “You can never communicate enough, and you can never be overprepared.”

This guide was developed by school district leaders for school district leaders and for the state leaders who support them. Its goal is to help you communicate about changes in policies and practices affecting your teachers. With the possible exception of the Common Core State Standards, no issue requires so many changes at so many levels.

A growing number of states, districts, and public charter school organizations understand that to increase student learning they must support effective teaching. They are focusing on personalizing and strengthening supports for teachers, developing new evaluation systems to recognize and foster excellence and improvement, and creating new opportunities for teachers.

Clear, consistent, and transparent communication is critical to successful implementation of these changes. Effective communication is more than messages or messengers. It involves sharing information, getting feedback, making changes based on that input, and establishing predictability in what is inherently a continuous improvement process.

The lessons and resources come from 11 organizations funded since 2009 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as Partnership Sites to Empower Effective Teaching. Project leaders and communicators from Partnership sites have been working with each other for the past three years to share lessons and resources (see Appendix for an overview of each site’s effective teaching priorities). This guide explains what they have been doing and why, how they have implemented their plans, and what they have learned. Perhaps most helpful, it includes dozens of practical tools and resources that other districts and charter management organizations can use or modify to support their own efforts.

Partnership Sites

Alliance College-Ready Public Schools

Aspire Public Schools

Atlanta Public Schools

Denver Public Schools

Green Dot Public Schools

Hillsborough County Public Schools

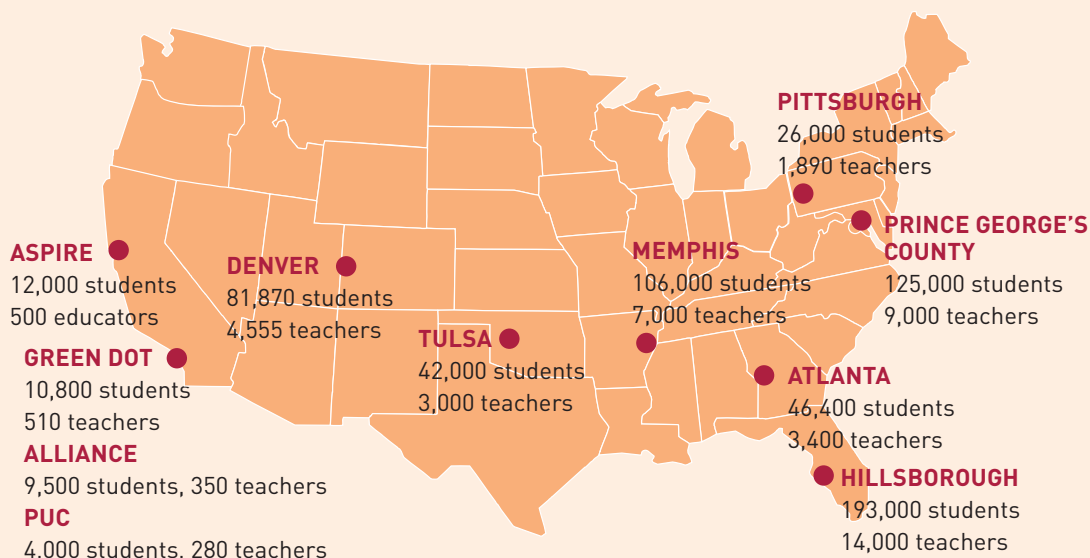
Memphis City Schools

Partnership to Uplift Community (PUC) Schools

Pittsburgh Public Schools

Prince George’s County Public Schools

Tulsa Public Schools



Although this advice and these resources are drawn from local practices, they are relevant for state leaders and communicators as well. Indeed, because in many instances state policy changes are or will be driving local practice on these issues, it is especially important that state and local communicators be “on the same page” about how best to engage stakeholders in these changes: what they involve; why they are happening; and how they will affect educators, students, and ultimately communities.

These school systems are not alone in undertaking this important work, and we encourage others to augment this resource as new guidance emerges, with the hope that every student has access to effective teaching every day and in every class.

LESSON 1: BE STRATEGIC, PRIORITIZE AUDIENCES

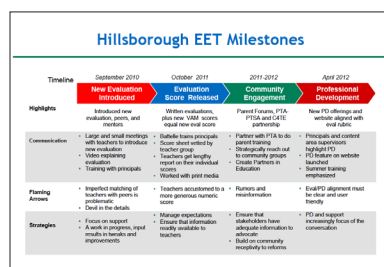
The reforms these organizations are undertaking affect all aspects of teaching and learning: defining what effective teaching looks like and how it can be fairly measured, rethinking the roles of principal and teacher leadership, redesigning professional development to help teachers strengthen their craft, and reallocating resources to accomplish these goals. The magnitude and complexity of these changes require clear communications so that everyone is on the same page — understanding what is changing, why, how, and when — and so that the district can continue to improve.

Communications resources are scarce, so establishing priorities is essential. Plus, different stakeholders need different information at different times. That requires thinking strategically about communications.

With some exceptions, most of the school systems featured in this guide started by focusing on principals and teachers for obvious reasons: They are most directly affected by the changes in policies and practices, and they are the ones responsible for implementing them.

Having a strategic communications plan allowed these districts to set priorities, “play offense,” target resources, and keep everyone on the same page about what mattered most and who was responsible for what. Having educator-led design teams helped shape the communications plan at the front end and provided a built-in mechanism for testing effective strategies and messages along the way, allowing for revisions as necessary.

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD



Hillsborough County Public Schools (FL)

[This summary](#) highlights the evolving strategic communications priorities between September 2010, when the new teacher evaluation was introduced, and April 2012. When the evaluation was created, the priorities were to support large and small meetings with teachers and train principals. The central themes focused on offering support, getting input, and making improvements.

When the new teacher evaluation scores were released a year later, the communications shifted to explaining the scores to teachers, managing expectations, and avoiding “flaming arrows” since teachers were used to a more generous scoring rubric that made earning high scores easier. Plus, to help combat rumors and misinformation and ensure that parents and others had enough information to become advocates, the district expanded its external focus by working with the county’s PTA (see Lesson 11) and other community groups.

By 2012, the focus had shifted internally again to support the district’s robust new professional development offerings.

[Upcoming milestones](#) from October 2012 through 2013 continue to tailor strategies to audiences and try to anticipate the key questions and potential challenges. By being proactive, Hillsborough can make sure stakeholders have the information they need in a timely way.

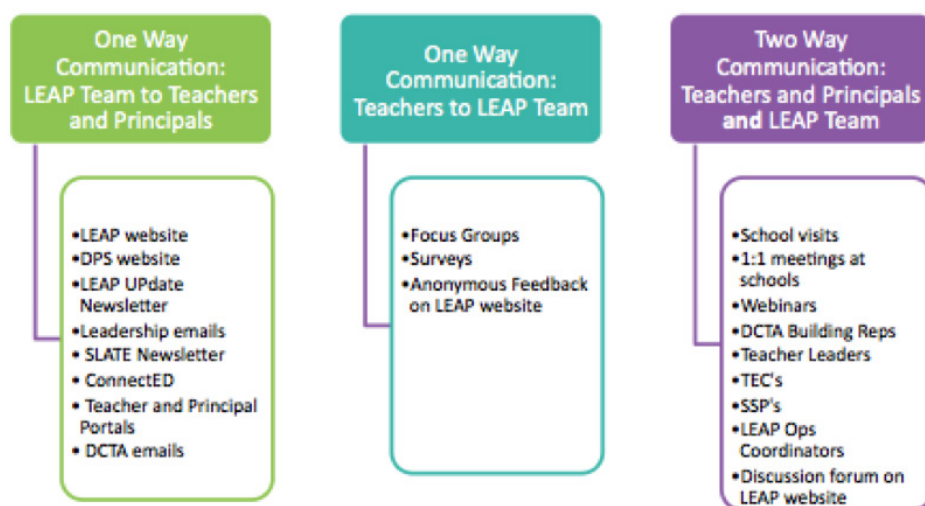
Denver Public Schools (DPS)

This [2011–12 communications and teacher engagement plan](#) was designed to build teacher understanding and support for DPS' new classroom evaluation and feedback tool: Leading Effective Academic Practice (LEAP). The plan was used internally to guide communications efforts. It was developed based on extensive conversations with central office stakeholders and educators. The overarching goal is stated succinctly:

"Key to successful implementation of LEAP in 2012-13 is for DPS educators to believe that LEAP is a fair and supportive evaluation system. We must work to build this trust and belief throughout the 2011-12 pilot by providing timely and authentic communication to teachers and principals as well as ensure that trusted feedback channels are in place throughout the 2011-12 LEAP. Teachers and principals must feel confident that they have a voice in this aspect of the Empowering Excellent Educators work at every step of development and implementation."

The 10-page plan, plus an additional 10 pages of messaging advice, includes a two-page situation analysis, five goals (with accompanying tactics), six key communications milestones and metrics, and nine key strategies. Audiences are segmented into internal (10 groups from principals and pilot schools to the union and students) and external (four groups from parents to political leaders). And key communications vehicles are clustered into five categories: people, emails, e-newsletters, events, and online.

The plan graphically describes the mix of one-way and two-way communications.



A separate, earlier plan usefully lays out a [week-by-week communications timeline](#) for building the support of at least 80 percent of teachers to participate in the LEAP pilot program. They succeeded.

LESSON 2: ENGAGE TEACHERS EARLY AND MEANINGFULLY

Since teachers are the most directly affected by changes in policies and practices, earning their understanding and support is paramount for successful implementation and ongoing refinements of the system. Getting their input at the front end, listening to their questions and concerns, and adjusting plans if necessary are essential to building their ownership and creating a partnership. Beyond crafting stronger plans, an additional outcome is that these teachers become authentic champions and ambassadors with their peers and parents (see Lesson 6).

Stephen Hegarty (Hillsborough County Public Schools): “This work must be locally owned and developed by teachers and administrators. It’s important that it’s being done with teachers, not to teachers.”

Stephen Alford (Atlanta Public Schools): “The key is to have teachers at the table, weighing in as experts. Teaching effectiveness is a buzz phrase. You need to go to teachers to understand what it really is.”

Make sure to get ongoing feedback, make changes in response to input (as appropriate), and proactively communicate back to teachers that their voice made a difference. Districts used various mechanisms to get input. Some formed advisory committees. Others conducted regular surveys and focus groups. Others, such as Atlanta and Hillsborough County, set up online/phone hotlines for questions, with a promised response within 48 hours (Hillsborough) or a week (Atlanta).

The 500 teachers at the 19 Green Dot sites (part of California’s The College-Ready Promise, a consortium of four charter management organizations) have multiple opportunities to provide input and ask questions: advisory groups/focus groups on various topics (multiple measures, classroom observations, value-added scores, student surveys, special education teachers, teachers of nontested subjects, career ladders, etc.); online surveys; wiki conversations; and “lunch and learn” conversations over pizza.

Julia Fisher (Green Dot Public Schools): “We have tried to create a variety of ways for teachers to weigh in on the work, including opportunities for teachers to participate from in front of their computers, in live webinars, at lunch at their school sites. We really try and work around a teacher’s desire to provide input without having to commit too many hours to do so.”

Also, know when to draw the line so that input does not become paralyzing or cause confusion. Hillsborough County, for example, reported that many teachers and administrators were getting confused and concerned by the number of policy changes being made in response to the input. Two primary lessons: Communicate the practical reality that you want feedback but cannot possibly incorporate it all, and make sure to set expectations at the front end about how decisions will be made.

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

Design Team Area of Focus				
RECOMMENDATION	Formulation of the proposal for final review	Next Steps	May have	Should not have
Process				

Denver Public Schools (DPS)

The school system and Denver Classroom Teachers Association invited teachers to [apply](#) to participate on a design team to review best practices and offer recommendations to the Leading Effective Academic Practice (LEAP) leadership team around key elements of the LEAP system. Some 35 teachers spent the spring and summer 2010 helping inform the design of the system. In addition, DPS solicited schools that wanted to participate in a spring pilot; the initial pilot schools were representative of the broader DPS school community, and all had high levels of staff support. More than 50 teachers from these initial pilot schools led the efforts to speak to other schools about their experience and were critical in getting 94 percent of DPS schools to agree to participate in the 2011–12 LEAP pilot. A [sample worksheet](#) shows how design team recommendations aligned to the district’s seven core values.

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. I can do almost all the work in this class if I don't give up	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. My teacher doesn't let people give up when the work gets hard	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. My teacher believes in my ability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Even if the work in this class is hard, I can learn it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I can do my best quality work in this class all year long	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. My classmates notice the way my teacher wants them to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. My teacher in this class makes me feel that she really cares about me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Aspire Public Schools

The public charter school network serves 34 campuses in three regions in California: Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay Area, and the Central Valley. It uses multiple mechanisms to gather input from teachers, notably 12–15, topic-specific teacher advisory panels, which meet four times a year in each region.

For example, a [May 2012 advisory group](#) addressed several topics affecting teachers of nontested subjects: brief updates; quick “buzz” survey (what is working and what is not); setting cut scores and determining levels of effectiveness based on multiple measures, from student growth to classroom observations; career paths; and creating a more robust support system.

For all issues related to evaluation and support, Aspire first puts most proposals before the teacher advisory board in each region. The boards do not have veto power but have a chance to discuss different components and offer their feedback. Sometimes input is incorporated into a revised plan. For example, advisory panelists helped reduce the number of questions on the [elementary](#) and [high school student surveys](#).

T.G.I.F. Teachers Get Informed First

May 11, 2012

Happy Teacher Appreciation Week!

A Primer on Teacher Keys

Why the change from the old Teacher Keys to the new Teacher Keys?

Elisha Gray Nominated for Georgia Teacher of the Year

As a teacher, you know that the most important thing in your classroom is your students. You want them to learn, grow, and thrive. You want them to be the best they can be. You want them to be the teachers of the future.

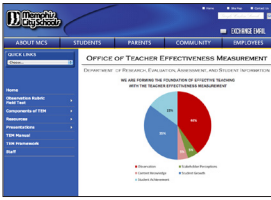
We would like to hear from you!

Let us know what you think about the new Teacher Keys. We want to hear from you. We want to hear from you. We want to hear from you.

Atlanta Public Schools

Atlanta conducts quarterly focus groups with teachers randomly selected from each school in a cluster of 25 schools. Regional superintendents lead the meetings while teacher effectiveness staff members take notes and recommend changes based on the input. Atlanta also conducts an annual online [survey](#) of all teachers and regularly uses its TGIF (Teachers Get Informed First) [newsletter](#) to solicit input and answer questions.

Angela King Smith (Atlanta Public Schools): “Focus groups were by far the best thing we have done, much more effective than town hall meetings where teachers could give feedback but often missed the messages that we were trying to deliver.”



Memphis City Schools

As a first step in its effective teaching strategy, the district established a teacher working group strategy to empower teachers to help lead the changes. During the 2010 school year, teachers worked alongside administrators, union leadership, researchers, and industry experts to develop a thoughtful approach to teacher evaluations.

By encouraging and enabling broad cross-functional collaboration with teachers in the lead, Memphis built the case for change at the same time it built the tools to drive that change. The result: the [Teacher Effectiveness Measurement \(TEM\)](#), a rigorous evaluation process designed by teachers for teachers. In July 2011, Memphis applied for and received approval from the state of Tennessee to implement the TEM as an alternative evaluation model. Teacher ownership was so pronounced that a teacher actually presented the district's appeal to the board. Now, teacher working groups are convened as part of every major strategic decision process.

The graphical [teaching and learning framework](#) includes a five-point rubric for each of the four main priorities: plan, teach, cultivate learning environment, and reflect and adjust.

LESSON 3: INVOLVE PRINCIPALS FROM THE START

For the same reason that engaging teachers early and often is essential, so is engaging principals. They also are directly affected and have a lot at stake.

Stephen Hegarty (Hillsborough County Public Schools): “We’re paying more attention to principals and providing more care and feeding and support. They’re overwhelmed. They have the same accountability but less power — now responsible for only 35 percent of a teacher’s evaluation, not 100 percent.”

Plus, research by The Winston Group shows that teachers consider principals by far the most trusted source for credible information on these issues.

If your local school district was planning to implement some new policies that would impact teachers, who would you trust most to give you accurate information about the new policies?

Other teachers in your school or district	13
Your school’s principal or administration	40
Your local school district administration or school board	20
Your local teacher’s union	22
The local media	1
Other	2
DK/Refused	2

Source: *The Winston Group, Summer 2010*

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD



Hillsborough County Public Schools (FL)

Of the six key lessons learned in Hillsborough County and documented in [case studies](#), the fourth focuses on the necessity of powerful principal engagement: “Include teachers and principals in every phase of the work.”

Change can be imposing, even threatening. Realizing the importance of initial support from teachers and administrators, district leaders included teachers and principals throughout the process of developing new teacher and principal evaluations. In particular, a 28-member Teacher Evaluation Committee, mainly principals and teacher representatives from the Hillsborough County Teachers Association, helped refine the changes in multiple ways, from adding peer and mentor evaluators to changing the language of the Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching.

An outside review of the program concluded: “Including teachers and principals in every phase of the evaluation redesign has resulted in an evaluation that honors the realities inside classrooms, while giving teachers the feedback they need to succeed. It also helped reduce fear and skepticism toward significant and controversial change.”

Memphis City Schools

In addition to providing principals with more personnel and other resources to accomplish the teacher evaluation process, Memphis also is looking at new ways to grow and develop its principals into more effective instructional leaders. While there is consensus that teachers are the single most important school-based factor affecting student achievement, the best teachers demand strong leadership. The Leadership Effectiveness Initiative runs parallel to the Teacher Effectiveness Initiative and serves to reinforce the spirit of team: *We are all in this together* working hard to perform at a higher level.



Pittsburgh Public Schools

Under the leadership of former superintendent Mark Roosevelt, principal effectiveness was an early reform priority. The [Pittsburgh Urban Leadership System for Excellence \(PULSE\)](#) addressed several issues: induction; evaluation; support; ongoing professional development; and an emerging leadership academy, which was established in 2007. As the home page of the [website](#) said: “Scratch the surface of an excellent school and you are likely to find an excellent principal. Look into a failing school and you will find weak leadership.” Communications Coordinator Susan Chersky reflected, “The principal work was the foundation that allowed us to move on to the effective teaching initiatives. They were the pathfinders.”

LESSON 4: PROACTIVELY EXPLAIN CHANGES TO PARENTS

Beyond school staff, parents have the most at stake in ensuring that every class is taught by an effective teacher. But given the initial emphasis on internal communications, direct parent outreach understandably has been a secondary priority for these organizations. A few early lessons have emerged.

Rely on teachers to help reach parents. Years of research show that parents consider teachers and school staff to be the most credible messengers about school information. Hence, all the districts are using teachers as key communicators, not just with their peers but with parents and the general public as well (see Lesson 6).

Make parent messages relevant. Most parents do not know how teachers are evaluated or receive professional development. And understandably most are not interested in the details of these policies and programs. What they do care about, however, is that their own child has a great teacher in every class and every subject. And they do want to know what their child should be learning in each grade. That is one reason why Communities for Teaching Excellence has published a [guide](#), in English and Spanish, to help parents talk to their children's teachers. (Other excellent examples are the National PTA's [grade-level guides](#) to the Common Core State Standards.)

Jason Mandell (Communities for Teaching Excellence): "If parents are talking regularly with teachers, they are more likely to support reforms that help those teachers thrive."

Promote transparency. You cannot expect parents and others in the community to be involved until they know what is going on. To that end, groups such as A+ Schools and the Hillsborough County PTA have provided information in multiple forms, from meetings to websites, to help raise parents' awareness of teacher effectiveness issues, always in the context of the broader school improvement efforts.

Involve parent leaders directly. In Pittsburgh, for example, parent volunteers recruited and developed by A+ Schools played a key role both in building support for the initial reform plan and then in conducting school site visits to check on progress.

Carey Harris (A+ Schools): "Monitoring implementation has been crucial. Parents need to know what's happening in schools with professional development and whether teachers and principals have what they need to be effective."

Make sure parents are at the table. Parents (and other community leaders) can play a critical role both in designing sensible policies and in crafting ways to communicate about them. Although they are not experts, they can provide an important, common-sense reality check. They have on-the-ground

credibility that district staff often do not. And they can help counteract negative perceptions spread by teachers who are dissatisfied.

Melissa Erickson (Hillsborough County PTA): “If there’s a groundswell of community support for this, the negative teachers will not find sympathetic ears.”

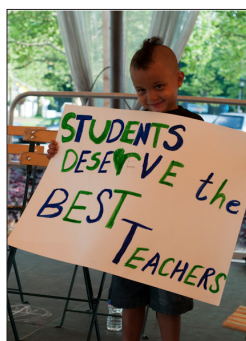
EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD



Communities for Teaching Excellence

The nonprofit is providing research, messaging, and outreach support in several communities, including Pittsburgh, Memphis, Hillsborough County, and Los Angeles. Its [Teachers Matter guide](#) for Memphis parents underscored four main points: (1) Teachers matter most in boosting student achievement; (2) the old system for hiring, evaluating, supporting, and rewarding teachers did not work very well; (3) Memphis has adopted smart policies to fix it; and (4) parents can help in multiple ways, from signing the I Teach, I Am pledge to learning more about what their students should be learning in every grade. Its [parents guide to the academic standards](#) helps encourage constructive conversations between parents and teachers. And its [monthly e-newsletter](#) tells stories about the champions of teaching effectiveness, from Pittsburgh parents who help guide policy change to Los Angeles teachers working with parents to develop a [model teacher evaluation system](#).

Jason Mandell (Communities for Teaching Excellence): “Stories can help paint the picture of what teaching effectiveness and community support really look like.”

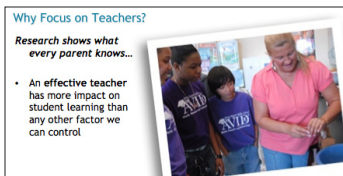


A+ Schools (Pittsburgh)

The nonprofit organization has several main priorities, including improving transparency across the board, improving student outcomes and equity, and ensuring teaching quality in every classroom.

Parents are a key constituency and have participated in multiple ways: signing petitions supporting the original district-union reform plan; helping monitor implementation as part of [school review teams](#); creating detailed report cards on [school board meetings](#); and [participating in a rally and signing pledges](#) encouraging the district and union to use effectiveness, not seniority, when making decisions about layoffs. Three community organizers work directly with parents, helping them become more informed and training them to be more involved.

Carey Harris (A+ Schools): “Ultimately we want parents and students to be the most empowered advocates for great teaching so that future decisions about who teaches and where they teach are based solely on what is best for kids.”



Hillsborough County (FL) PTA

Local PTA leaders have played an important role in building understanding and support for the district's efforts. As described in the district's [e-zine](#), parents have been active on many fronts. And the Empowering Effective Teaching work has given parents a more [prominent](#)

[role](#). Former PTA President Melissa Erickson offers several recommendations.

- Make sure parent leaders are involved at the front end in helping shape policy. They can be an important sounding board.
- Simplify the content and deliver it in bite-size chunks. Hillsborough has a basic [overview video](#) and [PowerPoint presentation](#), supplemented by more in-depth presentations on issues such as “value-added” test scores and performance pay.
- Go where parents are: school libraries, community centers, churches, and the like. And target the content of your meetings to the particular hot spots of each community.
- Provide ongoing training. Hillsborough has trained teacher leaders in each of its 226 PTAs, with regular booster shots of information and training throughout the year.

Melissa Erickson (Hillsborough County PTA): “Parents need to fully understand the content before we can be asked to communicate about it. But we’re not experts. It will mean spending time to help us catch up.”

- Have parents and district staff co-present information and field questions.
- And perhaps most important, focus the discussion on how these changes will make a positive difference for *their* kids. Some parents fear that their students will get left further behind, while others fear that a disproportionate share of resources will be shifted to support struggling students.

LESSON 5: CRAFT POSITIVE, SUPPORTIVE, AND “CONNECTED” MESSAGES

Words matter, especially on an issue as complex and potentially controversial as effective teaching. The key advice from these school systems and communications professionals includes the following.

Emphasize the positive. New evaluation systems are designed to support teachers, not sort them. Celebrate the dedicated teachers already in your classrooms. Believe that your teachers truly want to be effective and do what is best for kids and that you are supporting them in achieving the goals they already have.

Emphasize sustainability. Teachers need to be convinced that this focus on teacher effectiveness is not another passing fad and reform du jour.

Connect the dots. Help teachers, staff, and the community see how new evaluations are part of a larger strategy to increase educator quality (recruitment, induction, development, compensation, assignment, career pathways, etc.) and that educator quality is part of the even broader priority to improve student achievement (including implementing the new rigorous Common Core State Standards and related curriculum and assessments).

Avoid jargon. This is especially important when talking with parents and other nonexpert audiences.

Melissa Erickson (Hillsborough County PTA): “Make it about students, not teachers. Strip down all the jargon. Words like *pedagogy*, *instruction*, and *curriculum* just don’t mean the same to parents as to educators.”

Explain why effective teaching matters so much. **Denver:** “Change can’t wait. Teachers and students deserve it now.” **Memphis:** “An effective teacher can advance a student — any student — one to two grade levels per year. We must ensure each one of our students has access to an effective teacher in every classroom, every year. Their future depends on it.” **Pittsburgh:** “Great teachers do more than just raise grades. They change lives. In Pittsburgh and nationally, we are focusing on teacher effectiveness and emphasizing education as the key to our country’s future.”

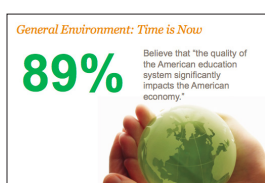
“Walk the talk.” Actions speak louder than words. You can message all you want about aligning professional development and supports to your new evaluations, but you want to make sure your professional development system is up to the challenge.

Jennifer Stern (Denver Public Schools): “It was important that we launched our Teacher Leader Academy a year ahead of the LEAP [Leading Effective Academic Practice] system to build capacity in our schools around teacher support. We also launched extensive, aligned professional development resources concurrently with the LEAP evaluation measures; we said LEAP is an evaluation and support system, and we had to prove we meant it.”

Be careful of the nuances. For example, it is better to frame the work in terms of “effective teaching,” not “effective teachers” — the former is less personal. An “observation system” is not the same as an “evaluation system,” which includes observations as well as measures of student growth, student surveys, and other measures.

Melissa Erickson (Hillsborough County PTA): “Avoid too much emphasis on evaluating effective teachers vs. empowering effective teachers by talking about mentors and the ongoing improvements and supports they’ll get throughout the year.”

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD



Messaging Research

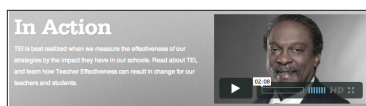
Good research can help you (1) learn about your key audiences’ priorities (what matters most to *them*) and (2) uncover misunderstandings, concerns, and questions. Both are essential to creating a strategy that engages and informs stakeholders on their terms — not yours.

This [*Communications Implications from Education Opinion Research*](#) presentation, written by GMMB and based on recent research conducted by The Winston Group, Peter Hart, and Harris Interactive, offers advice on (1) connecting to what the public cares about; (2) using message frames that work; (3) connecting to other issues such as the Common Core and technology; and (4) communicating with specific audiences (principals and superintendents, teachers, African American and Latino parents, and the general public).

[*The Big Picture: The Impact of National Storylines on Local Reform*](#), written by Brunswick Group and GMMB, looks at the national conversation about education (including the 2012 presidential and state races); the impact of local news coverage of education; and how a single story in the *Wall Street Journal* rippled out through the media and amplified/clarified key talking points for and against the issue.

[*Summary: Winston Group Public Opinion Research on Education Issues*](#) is based on a national survey and focus groups in 2010 and 2011. It zeroes in on the views of teachers and key public audiences (African Americans, Latinos, married women with children, and independent voters).

[*Primary Sources*](#) is a series of two in-depth surveys of teachers in 2009 and 2011 on a range of education issues, including teaching effectiveness.



Memphis City Schools (MCS): I Teach, I Am campaign

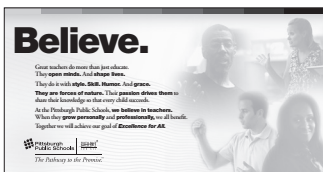
The Memphis City Schools Foundation launched the [*campaign*](#) as a strategy to drive community conversations around effective teaching.

Early on in the teacher effectiveness work, teacher recognition was identified as a gap. The district had no programs to celebrate the most effective educators, which left no starting point to introduce a positive, constructive conversation about teaching effectiveness into the community. The campaign created one. It has four primary components:

- **Peer recognition:** More than 4,000 votes (about 60 percent of the teachers) were cast this year for The Prestige Award, which went to 127 of the district’s highest-performing teachers.
- **Student recognition:** The Golden Apple Award goes to teachers voted most admired by students.

- **District recognition:** A paid media campaign celebrates the accomplishments of the highest-performing teachers.
- **In-school recognition:** Teacher of the Month features appear in every school building.

Diane Terrell (Memphis City Schools): “The most tangible impact is expressed by teachers themselves — they feel like celebrities! They are recognized and approached wherever they go: on the street, in the grocery store, at church. And it often leads to a conversation about teacher and school performance. We’re told anecdotally and in surveys that it’s changed teacher perceptions about the workplace: Teachers are proud to work for MCS.”



Pittsburgh Public Schools: Believe campaign

A key part of the district’s Empowering Effective Teachers work has focused on developing a brand identity around these efforts, called [Believe](#). The goals of this strategy are to (1) begin a sustainable inside-out communications approach to highlight the work teachers are doing in their

classrooms every day to increase student achievement; (2) reinforce that this work is a key district priority that will endure; (3) recruit 2011–12 career ladder candidates; and (4) introduce rewards and recognition opportunities and multiple measures of effectiveness. The district began by heavily communicating with teachers and staff and in the future plans to take similar materials (print materials, video, billboards, etc.) to parents and community members.

Lisa Fischetti (Pittsburgh Public Schools): “The Believe campaign was designed to win hearts and minds.”

LESSON 6: ELEVATE PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS AS KEY COMMUNICATORS

Virtually every organization recommends encouraging principals and teachers to act as key communicators. They are the most knowledgeable and the most credible resources. [Research by The Winston Group](#) confirms that teachers trust information from their principals and most want to hear from them about these issues. And multiple surveys over the years confirm that teachers are more effective communicators with parents than school boards, superintendents, other administrators, or the media are.

Jennifer Stern (Denver Public Schools): “Our teachers have been instrumental at all stages of LEAP [Leading Effective Academic Practice] development and rollout, from helping to generate an opt-in vote of 94 percent participation in 2012–13 to sharing their experience with school board members at every board meeting.”

Diane Terrell (Memphis City Schools): “Teachers have grown cynical about reform — they feel attacked at local and national levels and see the effectiveness conversation as yet another manifestation of that negativism. Adding to that, our urban school district is consolidating with the county, which is controversial and stressful. We needed proxies to help explain all the changes and set them in a positive light.”

Three cautionary notes:

Teachers can be reluctant ambassadors. Sometimes the most effective teachers are educational leaders who believe in the work and change but are not necessarily comfortable with putting themselves out there. Districts have realized that they need to build leadership capacity within their organizations so that these teachers become more vocal proponents for the work. Partly in response, the Green Dot (CA) public charter school network is strengthening its teacher leadership program, hoping to create pride and confidence in different leadership roles, including communications.

Angela King Smith (Atlanta Public Schools): “The additional responsibility and recognition made teachers feel really special, but some felt uncomfortable being spokespeople and wanted more training before getting in front of their peers.”

Stipends might not be enough of an incentive. Memphis had mixed success getting broad participation in its initial teacher ambassador program, which offered stipends, so it is now shifting participation to teacher leaders only, with extensive professional development a key incentive (see next page).

Make sure your ambassadors are prepared with timely, accurate, and relevant information. Prince George’s County (MD) says its communications got ahead of the program reality in 2011. The district had a good website to explain the big picture and program goals to multiple stakeholders but was unable to provide the level of detail that could have helped teachers and administrators understand the full implications on their workload.

Briant Coleman (Prince George's County Public Schools): "In any communications strategy, timing and sequencing are critical and can be the difference between success and failure. You want to ensure your communication does not get lost in the countless messages that teachers and principals receive on a daily basis. The communications strategy must be embedded into the everyday life of the school district."

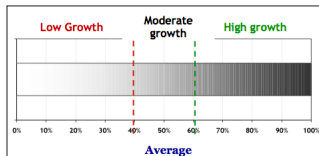
EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

I teach. I am The Public Campaign

Letter to Principals
Campaign Overview
Campaign Components

Memphis City Schools

Memphis is using its teacher recognition awards program to systematically promote the most effective teachers in each building and then develop them to take on leadership roles, including serving as key communicators to their colleagues. A [toolkit for principals](#) includes a program overview, sample letters to teachers, applications and other forms, scoring rubrics, and sample public ads.



The College-Ready Promise (TCRP)

Aspire Public Schools, the California-based nonprofit public charter management organization that is a member of the TCRP consortium, uses principal meetings to share information and train principals as communicators. Then it provides [PowerPoint presentations](#) and other tools

they can use to train staff in their own building. James Gallagher, director of instructional effectiveness and growth, notes that it is hard to fully educate principals on complicated issues, such as student growth percentiles, in a single session, so he often presents or co-presents with the school leader.

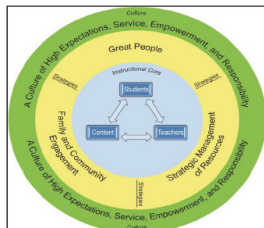
Green Dot, also a member of TCRP, has a site liaison on all campuses who leads monthly meetings and helps deliver professional development, sometimes side-by-side with administrators.

- 1 Develop a Comprehensive Evaluation System for Teachers Focused on Student Achievement & Growth
- 2 Implement a Teacher Effectiveness Dashboard as a Tool to Maximize Teacher Effectiveness
- 3 Strengthen the Capacity of Principals as Human Capital Managers to Monitor Teacher Effectiveness
- 4 Develop a Pay for Performance Compensation System built on Student Achievement & Growth

Atlanta Public Schools

In year 1, about 100 ambassadors (principals and teachers of the year at each school) served as key advisers and communicators. Principals took the lead in year 2, partly because many teachers were uncomfortable getting in front of their colleagues (see above). Principals receive a [detailed toolkit](#) with talking points, FAQs, a link to the [Effective Teaching in Every Classroom microsite](#), a three-

minute video, and an immediate online evaluation survey for feedback on the training, plus letters to solicit and then congratulate teacher of the year ambassadors.



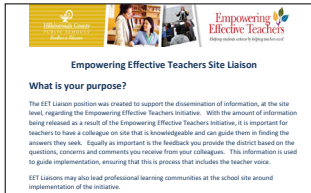
Denver Public Schools (DPS)

During one-week workshops, Denver trained 500 teacher leaders and principals in summer 2011 and 800 in 2012, the increase driven largely by the addition of teacher leaders focused on the new standards. The first summer training focused on the Framework for Effective Teaching and ensured that teachers and school leaders had a strong common understanding of what effective instruction looked like in Denver. DPS provided the educators with [basic information](#) — videos

explaining the Leading Effective Academic Practice (LEAP) system and individual measures, access to a comprehensive website, newsletters, and interactive exercises to experience the framework. School teams were encouraged to customize the information.

Jennifer Stern (Denver Public Schools): “For us, it’s about distributed leadership, not one size fits all. Schools had two days of paid planning time to customize the training tools we gave them. Teacher leaders delivered the bulk of the content to their colleagues and really took ownership of ensuring a smooth rollout of the framework and LEAP.”

The most recent training emphasized the relationship among the district’s three key initiatives: rollout of the new academic standards, improving the achievement of English language learners, and implementing the new teacher evaluation and support system.



Hillsborough County Public Schools (FL)

The district created a speakers bureau in year 1, featuring 10 teachers who were given additional information and communications training. In 2011–12, each school had Empowering Effective Teachers liaisons, responsible for two-way communications: listening, getting feedback, and sharing consistent information. Principals selected participants, who had to be respected by colleagues and willing to support changes. The district’s communications team has been meeting with all of them monthly. A two-page [handout](#) explains expectations for the liaison.

Pittsburgh Public Schools

The district has used several mechanisms to directly engage teachers. In year 1, it hired a member of the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers’ executive committee to serve as a liaison from central office to the field. Since then, teachers have been front-line communicators in several ways: serving on various implementation work groups and as Teaching and Learning Environment liaisons. These school-based liaisons have played a key role in distributing the annual working conditions surveys and working with principals to analyze results and incorporate them into each school’s improvement plans. The [job description](#) spells out the responsibilities, time commitment, and compensation. Communications Coordinator Susan Chersky says the liaisons have been critical in building educator understanding and support: “We know that teachers trust other teachers.”

LESSON 7: STREAMLINE COMMUNICATIONS

Many of the school systems have deliberately streamlined their communications to minimize information overload. Instead of bombarding staff with emails and newsletters, they are increasingly driving them to their initiative websites, which are serving as one-stop portals for information and updates.

They have adjusted their strategic communications plans and eliminated or significantly reduced the frequency of emails, e-newsletters, and the like.

Julia Fisher (Green Dot Public Schools): “In the last two years teachers and principals seemed bogged down by the amount of communications from the home office about this work. They didn’t know what to prioritize until we streamlined our communication with them.”

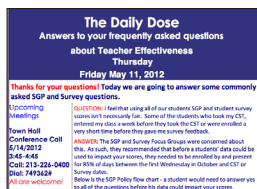
Angela King Smith (Atlanta Public Schools): “We underestimated the amount of work to help teachers understand these issues. We need to get information to them in reasonable chunks and pieces.”

Christopher Payne (Tulsa Public Schools): “We have found that having a portal for the Tulsa Model, our teacher evaluation system, has proven to be the most effective way to communicate with our stakeholder audiences. In addition to our own teachers and principals, we have 499 school districts and career tech centers statewide that are using our system. The portal is the easiest way to make all video and print resources available.”

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

Aspire Public Schools (CA)

Aspire’s internal website has a special section for The College-Ready Promise information on teacher support and evaluation, with rotating news and updates and the ability to search by category.



Green Dot Public Schools (CA)

Green Dot drives everyone to its internal website, which has all the relevant documents and information. Plus, principals get a [weekly summary email](#), which is required reading. The charter network is planning a similar resource for teachers. As the new teacher contract was being considered, the network also sent teachers daily email updates, [The Daily Dose](#), which answered frequently asked questions.



Pittsburgh Public Schools

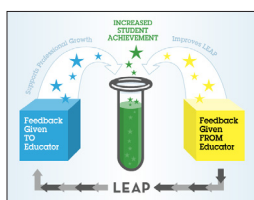
Using Constant Contact, which allows the sender to track email results, Pittsburgh staff found that only 26 percent of teachers were even opening their weekly emails, so they switched to monthly and are making more use of the web. The [website](#), developed

jointly with the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, offers research; updates; accomplishments; a video library; and a detailed archive with overviews, presentations, white papers, and FAQs on about a dozen issues, from career ladders to multiple measures and value-added models. In addition, the internal teacher portal, with teachers' grade books and evaluation information, prominently features regular news updates.



Hillsborough County Public Schools (FL)

Hillsborough County has dramatically reduced the number of messages that automatically pop up on staff's computers whenever they log in. And it is making more judicious use of surveys. Its [website](#) features videos, podcasts, seasonal e-zines, mini-bios of peer and mentor teachers, and detailed FAQs on everything from communications and compensation to induction and professional development.



Denver Public Schools

Denver's [website](#) includes comprehensive, clear messaging materials and talking points; extensive videos of both peer observers and evaluated teachers (including those with concerns); detailed FAQs and timelines; transparent explanations of the process; downloadable copies of the evaluation/support tools; and an easy-to-use, prominent feedback mechanism.



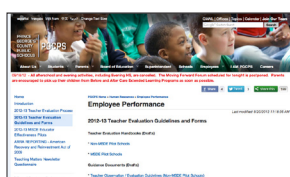
Atlanta Public Schools

Atlanta's [website](#) features basic background information; FAQs; archives of its monthly TGIF (Teachers Get Informed First) newsletter; and a prominent link to submit questions, which are answered within a week.



Memphis City Schools

The Memphis [website](#) features the I Teach, I Am empowerment campaign materials; a blog; more than a dozen high-impact, 30-second videos; PSAs; a tumblr feed; and an online press kit.



Prince George's County Public Schools (MD)

Prince George's County's [website](#) features a 10-minute overview video of the new teacher observation process, an electronic evaluation handbook with tools and references, and detailed FAQs to help evaluators use Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Effective Teaching.



Tulsa Public Schools

Tulsa's [website](#) features basic overview information, a video library showcasing examples of effective classroom teaching for "calibration" purposes, a detailed evaluator's handbook, multiple rubric documents, observation and evaluation forms, news releases, and links to related "value-added" performance reports.

LESSON 8: INVEST IN STAFFING

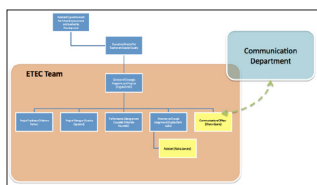
Implementing a new teacher support and evaluation system is complex and complicated, with many details and politically charged nuances. Explaining these changes requires both deep content knowledge and communications expertise. Having embedded communications professionals is important not only for getting messages out but also for facilitating the collection of input, measuring understanding and progress, and supporting the changes that are occurring.

To that end, many of the sites have chosen to embed a communications professional within the department managing the work, closely coordinating with the district's communications office. These embedded professionals are the content experts and primary “translators.” The communications department retains responsibility for overall strategy, coordinating outreach, managing the tools (web, email, media relations, printing, etc.), and overseeing vendors.

Some district leaders warn against creating too many materials that appear slick and costly.

Jennifer Stern (Denver Public Schools): “We’ve been very cautious about having flashy stuff that looks expensive. Most of what we do does not cost much money. Ninety percent of the expenses are for our two dedicated staffers (one on loan from the union) and paying teacher ambassadors for their outreach time.”

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD



Atlanta Public Schools

As the [organizational chart](#) shows, the district has a seven-person Effective Teacher in Every Classroom office, which is responsible for all aspects of program implementation. Communications is a key part of *everyone's* job — regular meetings, responding to emails and phone calls, etc. — but a *dedicated* communications staff member provides basic tools and on-demand support for principals, teacher ambassadors, and others. She works closely with district's communications department, which helps with materials (including two videos and a monthly TV show).

Hillsborough County Public Schools (FL)

The five-person Effective Teaching Office has a full-time communications professional who is mainly responsible for content, with frequent outreach to the schools. Meanwhile, the five-person communications department handles the traditional PR functions: earned and paid media, radio/TV, speechwriting, publications, and other means.

Denver Public Schools

The Leading Effective Academic Practice (LEAP) system team has a full-time senior [communications manager](#) who oversees communications about evaluation as well as about the district's broader Teacher and Principal Talent Management work (recruiting, new teacher experience, tenure/renewal, principal recruiting, principal evaluations, etc.). She also oversees a communications manager and the

communications liaison to the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, who is responsible for day-to-day outreach to schools, responding to concerns, gathering feedback, and clarifying confusion. A major part of her job is to monitor and analyze the regular input that comes through the dedicated website.

She reports directly to the executive director of talent management and strategic programs so that she is in the loop on all teacher and principal talent management strategy decisions. But to ensure that messages, schedules, and tactics are aligned, she also “dot-lines” to the Communications Department, attending its staff meetings and supporting its work. A dedicated, five-person operations team also responds to every piece of feedback and questions that come through the website, email, and phone line.



Memphis City Schools

Much of Memphis’ communications and outreach has focused on opinion leaders and the general public and was originally organized and funded by the Memphis City Schools (MCS) Foundation (see Lesson 5).

The senior leader there created the concept and strategy for the [I Teach, I Am](#) teacher recognition campaign and then assembled a group of external partners to develop and design the videos and robust website. Meanwhile, the school district’s Communications Department manages all aspects of media outreach.

FUNDING THE WORK

Much of the communications and engagement work described in this guide, including hiring embedded communications staff, has been supported by the grant funding. However, Partnership sites attest that clear and regular, two-way communications is such a high priority, it is important to prioritize it in planning and budgeting.

Make two-way communications and engagement a districtwide priority. Improving teaching effectiveness is central to every school district’s work. As we hope this guide makes clear, you cannot do this work without significant engagement throughout the process from those most directly affected: teachers and principals. You cannot do this work without broad-based understanding and support, starting internally. If staff members are not clear about the changes, and how they will positively affect them and their students, the work will not happen.

As the Aspen Institute Education & Society Program’s guide to developing effective teacher evaluation systems put it: “Supporting professional growth and motivating breakthrough performance demand engaging, informing, and inspiring teachers. And this requires two-way communication — lots of it, with multiple audiences, throughout the process of design and implementation.” (The [guide](#) includes useful advice and do-it-yourself templates.)

Building that understanding and support requires communications expertise. If the work itself is a districtwide priority, then communicating about it must be, too. And as this guide showcases, communications involves a lot more than writing a press release, posting a document on a website, or creating a new PowerPoint presentation — although all of these are useful steps. Making the funding case to your organization’s leadership is job one.

Stephen Hegarty (Hillsborough County Public Schools): “You have to send a clear message early on that this is not an initiative or a project. Those things have a beginning, a middle, and an end. This work doesn’t. This is the way we do business. That helps to eliminate the ‘flavor of the month’ problem and encourages people to incorporate it into their daily work.”

James Gallagher (Aspire Public Schools): “To quell anxieties from the many stakeholders in this work — teachers, parents, school boards, etc. — it is essential that some investment is made in clear communication due to the large amount of misinformation in the airwaves that often doesn’t represent the actual local district’s teacher effectiveness model.”

Use existing resources. It is not especially time consuming to update your website with at least basic information about what is being done with teacher and principal evaluations, why, and when — and how people can learn more. Many teachers are great writers. Ask them to create minutes for the various committees. Spread the costs among various departments: academics, professional development, etc.

Julia Fisher (Green Dot Public Schools): “All of the systems we use have become Green Dot-wide systems and are only partially funded by foundations, making them the responsibility of more than just one department.”

Stephen Hegarty (Hillsborough County Public Schools): “A lot of our resources are being repurposed. So, for instance, it’s the same professional development budget we had before, but now it’s focused on this work.”

Pittsburgh Public Schools has made a concerted effort to turn multiple administrators into key communicators. A [project charter](#) offers a one-page worksheet for developing a mini-communications plan, addressing the key questions about goals, key audiences, key messages, and timing. “We’re training them to think like communicators,” said Communications Coordinator Susan Chersky.

Find local funding and partnership support. Denver, for instance, has used multiple funding sources for this work; two local funders have helped pay for the communications resources, supplemented by a Wallace Foundation grant and general funds. See if your local teachers association or union can provide support, as those in Prince George’s County (MD) and Pittsburgh have done, among others. Take advantage of local advocacy and school reform groups such as the Memphis City Schools Foundation and A+ Schools in Pittsburgh.

Jennifer Stern (Denver Public Schools): “I definitely think this is a priority funding need. We were able to secure local support by emphasizing the stakeholder-engagement and best practice-sharing components of our communications work: communications as a way to engage teachers, capture feedback, and ensure we are sharing back our work with the state.”

LESSON 9: PARTNER WITH THE TEACHERS UNION

All of these sites entered this work through close collaboration with their teachers union or association. Ongoing coordinated and collaborative communication with the union has been important as well. Union leaders played a role in all sites except Atlanta, which has no union, and three of the charter management organizations without teacher unions.

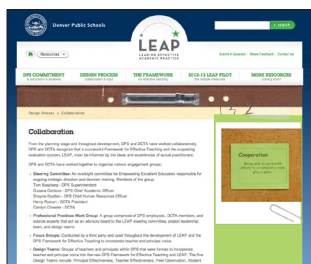
Tulsa says the communications alliance has been key — not only for the creation of its own evaluation system but also for its adoption by about 90 percent of the state’s other districts.

Christopher Payne (Tulsa Public Schools): “In developing a new teacher evaluation system, we sought union involvement at the very earliest stages. Teachers, principals, and union representatives all provided early — as well as ongoing — input. As a result, teachers wholeheartedly embraced our new evaluation system. This played a significant role in the selection of TPS’ evaluation system by 499 school districts and career tech centers throughout Oklahoma. This would never have happened had it not been for the support of our teachers union. Union collaboration is key to building support for most districtwide initiatives.”

Similarly, Prince George’s County (MD) has monthly meetings and “a good relationship” with its teachers union, which has provided a reality check on language and helped with FAQs and distribution. In addition, Prince George’s teacher Bridgette Blue is one of the union’s appointees on the state advisory council on educator effectiveness.

Briant Coleman (Prince George’s County Public Schools): “The state advisory council has been a great asset in our efforts to implement our educator effectiveness initiatives. It allows us to exchange ideas with our colleagues and gives us insight into how well others are doing in implementing this work.”

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD



Denver Public Schools (DPS)

Denver’s [website](#) elaborates on the collaborative approach. Major announcements always have been done jointly, not just top-down from the administration. The Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) played an important role in nominating teachers to serve on the design teams and advisory committees. Two full-time DCTA representatives serve on the core project team, including a communications liaison and a project liaison.

The full-time outreach liaison has been a key part of the overall communications team. A different teacher staffs the position each year and then returns to the classroom. This role is very grassroots oriented — the liaison spends most of his time in schools with teachers, fielding questions, surfacing issues, addressing concerns, offering feedback, and clarifying misunderstandings.

In combination with other feedback mechanisms, the communications and operations teams bring the major issues to senior leadership for resolution. The liaison role was designed as a rotating position so that the teacher has recently experienced the Leading Effective Academic Practice (LEAP) system and identifies himself or herself primarily as a teacher, further increasing credibility.

Jennifer Stern (Denver Public Schools): “DPS and DCTA are jointly committed to the success of LEAP. By having a full-time DCTA liaison on the project leadership team, we are able to ensure that DCTA has a voice in the design and implementation process. Our DCTA liaison has helped us avoid numerous missteps by proactively identifying where communications messaging or design decisions could be misconstrued by our teachers in the field.”



Pittsburgh Public Schools

The Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers and district collaborated to enlist teachers and administrators in redesigning the evaluation system. The project's [website](#) was jointly designed by the district and union. The union has been sending monthly letters to its members with regular updates; district staff members help with messaging. Teacher leaders/building representatives in each building helped principals deliver [professional development](#) on these issues.

Lisa Fischetti (Pittsburgh Public Schools): “We modeled the ‘new world’ of collaboration. Unions recommended teachers for these teams. It’s been a real win for everyone.”

The collaboration weathered a very [public controversy](#) during spring 2012 over how to handle the layoffs (“furloughs”) of about 300 teachers because of huge budget shortfalls: the current seniority-only-based system or using the performance tools that had been developed in the past few years combined with seniority. Communications Coordinator Susan Chersky offered the following advice for coping with setbacks such as this:

- **Stay cordial, and stay focused.** The superintendent and union president continued to have weekly meetings, and work goes on. Chersky said, “This issue has caused strains, but it hasn’t deteriorated relationship overall. This is how unions and districts work.”
- **Be clear, consistent, and transparent.** Through videos and other mechanisms, the superintendent was very clear and consistent in her messaging about these issues: why the layoffs were necessary and why seniority-only-based layoffs were not in the best interests of students. The district also was very transparent about the budget realities that led to the layoffs, preparing teachers and the public months in advance that budget cuts could lead to layoffs. Plus, the district worked closely with teachers to make sure they had accurate data about their certifications and other information.
- **Be sensitive.** Understand that this is about people’s livelihoods. Make sure messages communicate the human element. Proactively provide support through employee assistance programs and hold numerous information sessions.

- **Communicate directly.** The district used Constant Contact and emails to communicate directly to all teachers — setting expectations, giving them regular updates, linking to topic-specific FAQs, and regularly monitoring click-throughs. It also set up a centralized call number, a one-stop call center to funnel calls to the right person.
- **Make sure to keep the public informed.** The district proactively relied on third-party partners to help communicate more broadly: A+ Schools (a local education advocacy group), foundation leaders, and community leaders. Their shared message: “We need to look for a better way.” (See Lesson 11 for more.)

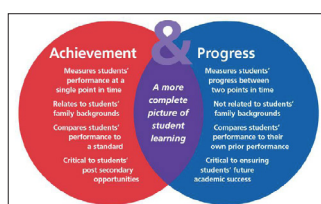
LESSON 10: ENGAGE THE MEDIA AT THE RIGHT TIME

External media relations has been less of a priority for most of the sites, at least in the early stages of their work, because the focus has been on internal communications to principals and teachers. The rationale: If districts and unions do their jobs well internally, these issues are less likely to “blow up on the front page.”

However, as the new evaluation systems begin to be implemented, additional public scrutiny is inevitable. The advice for working with the media on this issue does not differ from other issues:

- Have a plan.
- Be prepared.
- Be transparent and proactive.
- Build relationships.
- Use multiple messengers.

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD



Tulsa Public Schools

The school district had a comprehensive strategy for communicating publicly about the new “value-added” system that is so central to its new way of assessing the effectiveness of both schools and teachers. A detailed [media plan](#) spelled out the key steps, including giving an advance to the *Tulsa World*, training all media how to read the new reports, and providing key messages to district administrators. Several pieces, including an [overview](#), translated the methodology of the new report cards. The district also was quick to publicize its positive [news](#) in April 2012, when nearly all of the state’s 520 school districts selected Tulsa’s model for their new teacher evaluation systems.

Pittsburgh Public Schools

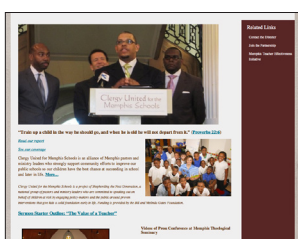
Media relations assumed a new urgency when multimillion-dollar budget cuts forced the school district to lay off hundreds of teachers in spring 2012; the local union wanted to base layoffs solely on seniority. The key advice from Communications Coordinator Susan Chersky:

- **Be transparent and proactive.** Pittsburgh began preparing teachers and the public a few months in advance that budget cuts at the state level would lead to staff reductions. The district explained the budget situation, made sure information for each staff member was accurate, and regularly updated the media and staff with detailed information.
- **Communicate directly to teachers.** The district used Constant Contact emails to regularly update teachers about what to expect and when because it did not want staff to be reading about developments in the newspapers without first hearing from the district.

- **Have consistent messaging and multiple messengers.** A priority was to make sure the public understood that layoffs by seniority was not the district's preferred solution. The district relied on third parties such as A+ Schools, local foundations, and community leaders to help spread the word and publicly reinforce its position.

Carey Harris (A+ Schools): "The outpouring of public demand over the past few months demonstrates that parents, students, and community members support the teaching effectiveness work and expect the district and union to make sure our best teachers are teaching our kids — regardless of budget constraints or contract language."

A+ Schools was particularly active and effective in generating community attention through media outreach, op-ed placements, letters to the editor, school board testimony, a public rally, and more than 1,500 postcards to the district and union in support of the district's position.



Memphis City Schools

When [Clergy United for the Memphis Schools](#), organized by the Council for a Strong America, released its [report](#) on the importance of teachers, it created a multiday "echo chamber" of coverage, tapping several unusual suspects as public messengers. Two pastors and a rabbi helped release the study at a well-attended press conference that was [covered](#) by the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* (several articles) and all the local TV stations and weeklies. A follow-up [Sunday Celebration of Teachers](#) at local churches and synagogues drew additional [coverage](#). Then, the local district attorney and police chief wrote letters to the editor. And statewide, two four-star generals wrote a supportive op-ed in the *Nashville Tennessean*.

Jeff Kirsch (Council for a Strong America): "We deliberately wanted a lot of echoing on this issue."

LESSON 11: WORK WITH EXTERNAL CHAMPIONS

Third-party partners such as businesses, community-based organizations, and local foundations provide important early and sustained support for the work. They, too, have an important stake in the work. They offer external validation that the effort is worth doing — and doable. They provide the additional credibility needed to build the broad-based community understanding and support required to implement and sustain the reforms. And in many cases, they provide much-needed additional resources — from funding to people — to help spread the word.

Leaders from Memphis, Pittsburgh, Hillsborough County (FL), and elsewhere offer some practical advice.

Make sure everyone is on the same page about the goals and timeline. When multiple stakeholders are involved, there is always the challenge of bringing everyone up to speed — and keeping them there. And there is always a risk of “lone rangers” going their own way.

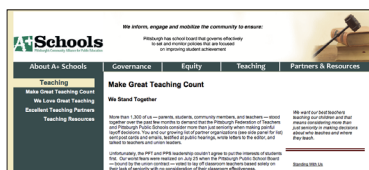
Diane Terrell (Memphis City Schools): “By design, the I Teach, I Am campaign created a lot of energy, which brought in many partners. They wanted to be part of the work, which was very positive. But it was hard to corral, collaborate, and cooperate. It was hard to keep people on message.”

Make sure they understand how this work fits into the big picture of reform. Clear messages that help “connect the dots” are critical. External audiences will not be as invested as school staff in the details of professional development and teacher evaluation. But they definitely want to know and should be able to communicate how this work will help students and, more generally, how better schools will help the community. (More on messaging in Lesson 5.)

Ensure that partners have very specific things to do. As part of its effort to build support for layoffs based on effectiveness in Pittsburgh, for example, A+ Schools mounted a public [campaign](#) that featured about a dozen very specific [actions](#), from sending postcards to writing letters to the editor to using social media to share information.

Take advantage of “odd bedfellows.” In Hillsborough County, for example, teachers especially valued hearing from parents because they were valued as a “neutral party,” said former PTA President Melissa Erickson. She also said that having three-way community forums with the superintendent, union leaders and teacher leaders reinforced that all were engaged and united. In Memphis, the Council for a Strong America helped organize the clergy, the business community, and retired military leaders in support of the reforms. According to Council for a Strong America’s Jeff Kirsch: “Our efforts generally are bipartisan, focused on the middle, designed to win moderates.”

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD



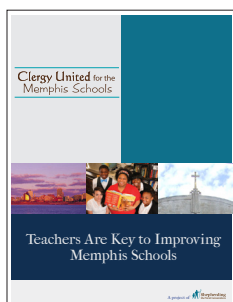
A+ Schools (Pittsburgh)

The [nonprofit organization](#) has several main priorities, including making school information more accessible and understandable, improving student outcomes and equity, strengthening school board governance, and ensuring teaching quality in every classroom. General initiatives

include a detailed annual report on school performance, regular monitoring of school board meetings, voter education, and School Works action research projects through which community members conduct in-depth interviews with school staff about school practices.

To build support for teaching effectiveness, its I Heart Great Teaching [campaign](#) has played a crucial role in promoting the teacher effectiveness work. An early step was mobilizing support that helped earn Gates Foundation funding in 2009; T-shirts, postcards, signs, and the like helped generate 1,800 signatures. Its detailed *Tools, Rules, and Schools* [report](#) examined professional development, staffing patterns, and working conditions — making a research-based case for change. Its three organizers helped inform and involve parents. Its [one-pager](#) documented progress in key areas. And most recently, its Make Great Teaching Count [campaign](#) mobilized community pressure to end seniority-based layoffs. The campaign offered detailed background on the issues and gave community members multiple opportunities to weigh in.

Carey Harris (A+ Schools): “We’ve seen movement on some issues: Hiring is more timely, fewer principals report hiring challenges, more teachers have demonstrated passion for the kids at their school, and all schools are implementing the new RISE evaluation system and teachers are reporting that it’s fair.”



Council for a Strong America (Memphis)

The [nonprofit](#) works nationally and locally to bring different voices into the school reform debate: 5,000 police chiefs and law enforcement officers, 600 business leaders, 300 retired generals and admirals, and 300 pastors. In Memphis, it focused on organizing the clergy through a new group, [Clergy United for the Memphis Schools](#), which now has about 60 pastors and ministry leaders. Its [report](#) on the importance of effective teaching drew strong [media attention](#), while its follow-up [Sunday Celebration of Teachers](#) gave the community a focused opportunity to thank the city's teachers.

One key piece of advice from Council for a Strong America's Jeff Kirsch: Local chapters need to be staffed with organizers.

LESSON 12: EVALUATE AND REFINE STRATEGIES — REPEAT

It is relatively easy to measure communications “inputs” such as microsites launched, e-newsletters sent, presentations given, toolkits created, media interviews conducted, and so on. But beyond the obvious “outcomes” (website hits, open rates on emails, number of positive media mentions, and the like), it is more difficult to measure the actual effectiveness of communications programs. That is, did the recipients actually hear what you had to say? Did they understand it? And are they more likely to engage with you and support the work as a result? Is more or different communication needed?

At least three of the participating districts (Atlanta, Hillsborough County [FL], and Pittsburgh) are trying to answer questions such as these with more detailed surveys. Green Dot (CA) also uses audience response clickers, surveys after all presentations, and wiki forums to assess the effectiveness of its communications.

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

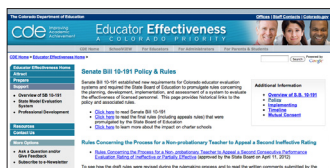
Atlanta Public Schools

The district uses several tools to determine both levels of support for the new system and the impact of communications. The district administers and analyzes surveys after each meeting to make sure people actually understood and heard key messages, not just to find out whether they liked the meeting. It conducts quarterly focus groups with teachers randomly selected from each school. It conducts an [annual survey of all teachers](#) and [administrative staff](#). The [principal survey](#) asks questions such as: Have you read the emails? Have you had a sufficient opportunity to provide input? And do you have enough information to answer questions from parents and teachers or make a presentation?

Hillsborough County Public Schools (FL)

The district uses touch-pad technology (“clickers”) to get instant feedback on key issues during weekly principals meetings. It also uses tools such as [these](#) to survey teachers regularly.

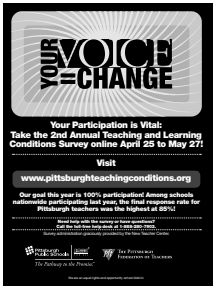
Stephen Hegarty (Hillsborough County Public Schools): “The clickers are fun, anonymous, and timely and provide instant results.”



Denver Public Schools

Denver uses a four-question [survey](#) four times a year to seek educator input on its communications efforts.

Jennifer Stern (Denver Public Schools): “We ask: Do they understand our system? Did they have a voice in developing it? Is it fair?”



Pittsburgh Public Schools

Each year the district works with the New Teacher Center to conduct a comprehensive and anonymous [survey of teacher working conditions](#). The survey covers multiple topics, from school leadership and instructional support to facilities and professional development. The Community Support and Involvement section includes items that assess the impact of communications, such as “our school maintains clear, two-way communications with the community” and “the majority of teachers provide parents/guardians with useful information about student learning.”

More than 90 percent of teachers participate, partly because of an active promotion campaign that includes a [poster](#), [flyer](#), [counter cards](#), and the active involvement of Teaching and Learning Environment liaisons (see Lesson 6).

The [website](#) includes background and results from the past three years. A [press release](#) summarizes results, and the district has taken several steps to act on what it’s heard, including publishing a collection of staff best practices; piloting a behavior expectations project to model common, positive expectations for all students and staff; and creating a comprehensive student support services guide.

OVERVIEW OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING PLANS

Aspire Public Schools (CA)

Nearly 100 Aspire teachers participated in focus groups and on advisory panels in 2010–11 to help shape the design of The College-Ready Promise (TCRP), a coalition of four California charter management organizations implementing a teacher development system that:

- Sets clear expectations for teachers by using a research-based framework for effective teaching;
- Develops effective teachers through timely, targeted support and professional development;
- Determines effectiveness through transparent multidimensional measures: 40 percent based on student achievement and 60 percent on teacher practice and behavior (principal and peer evaluations, feedback from students and families);
- Invests in effective school-site instructional leadership focused on teacher effectiveness; and
- Recognizes and rewards effective teaching.

Nearly 400 Aspire teachers (about 80 percent of the total) piloted one or more of the TCRP components during the 2011–12 school year.

Atlanta Public Schools

The district began its Effective Teacher in Every Classroom initiative in 2009 to recruit, prepare, place, and support effective teachers in every classroom. Starting in 2011–12, however, it is piloting the state's new Teacher Keys evaluation system, which features three main components: observations (based on 10 indicators in five domains), student growth and achievement, and student surveys.

Denver Public Schools

The district and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association collaborated to develop a new teacher evaluation and support system, Leading Effective Academic Practice (LEAP). When fully developed, student outcomes (based on multiple assessments in five potential categories) will comprise 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation. The other professional practice components include principal observation, peer observation, professionalism (such as collaboration and use of data), and student perception data. Sixteen schools piloted components of LEAP in spring 2011. At the end of that spring semester, 94 percent of schools voted to be part of the 2011–12 pilot. In the 2012–13 school year, all Denver public schools will pilot LEAP, and data will begin counting toward probationary/nonprobationary status in 2014–15, as mandated by Colorado law.

Green Dot Public Schools (CA)

More than 30 percent of Green Dot's teachers participated in advisory panels, in focus groups, on committees, as site liaisons, and as pilot teachers in The College-Ready Promise, a coalition of four California charter management organizations implementing a teacher development system that:

- Sets clear expectations for teachers by using a research-based framework for effective teaching;
- Develops effective teachers through timely, targeted support and professional development;

- Determines effectiveness through transparent multidimensional measures, which vary for teachers of subjects that are tested, of subjects that are not tested, and of special education students: 20–40 percent based on student achievement and 60–80 percent on teacher practice and behavior (principal and peer evaluations, feedback from students and families);
- Invests in effective school-site instructional leadership focused on teacher effectiveness;
- Recognizes and rewards effective teaching; and
- Sponsors career ladder options for effective teachers looking to expand their role as teacher leaders in the organization.

Hillsborough County Public Schools (FL)

The Empowering Effective Teachers initiative is transforming how the school district hires, supports, evaluates, and compensates teachers. The new evaluation (40 percent based on student achievement gains, 35 percent on principal's evaluation, and 25 percent on mentor's/peer's evaluation) was introduced in fall 2010. The new scores were first released in fall 2011, and new aligned professional development began in spring 2012. A second round of evaluation scores will be released in fall 2012, and with two years of data the district will establish performance "cut scores." Teachers and principals will be able to opt into the new system by fall 2013, which is when a new career ladder and compensation system also will roll out.

Memphis City Schools (MCS)

To implement its Teacher Effectiveness Initiative, MCS is focusing on four strategies: Use a common, agreed-upon process to define and measure effective teaching; make smart decisions about who teaches our students; better support, utilize, and compensate our teachers; and improve the surrounding contexts for teachers and students to foster effective teaching.

As part of its reform agenda, MCS has:

- Changed **who** it hires to teach and **how** it hires them;
- Redefined the meaning of "teaching effectiveness";
- Built new tools and processes to measure teacher performance; and
- Implemented those new tools and processes as part of its new Teacher Effectiveness Measurement.

At the close of the 2011–12 school year, 615 certified administrators had successfully completed more than 29,000 teacher observations. All teachers were observed at least four times a year throughout the year, and each observation was followed by a one-on-one feedback session with specific guidance to promote growth and development. Approximately 70 percent of teachers surveyed said the feedback sessions led to improvements in their instructional practice.

Pittsburgh Public Schools

The school district and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers collaboratively co-authored the Empowering Effective Teachers plan, which has three strategic priorities:

- Increase the number of highly effective teachers, using multiple measures, rewards and recognition, and a Teaching Institute;
- Increase the exposure of high-need students to highly effective teachers through career ladders and a Promise-Readiness Corps for 9th and 10th graders; and

- Ensure that all teachers work in positive learning environments by setting and reinforcing high standards for behavior and aspirations, building students' ability to meet those standards, providing more consistent supports, and improving working conditions.

A top recent priority has been to ensure to embed the work into relevant departments across the district so that it is not perceived as “just another initiative.”

Prince George's County Public Schools (MD)

In 2011–12, Prince George's County Public Schools was one of seven school districts involved in a statewide pilot of new evaluation systems for teachers and principals that included multiple measures of educator effectiveness. The multiple measures included professional practice and student growth. As a measure of professional practice, 25 percent of the eligible teachers in each of the 200-plus schools were observed using the Danielson Framework for Teaching (FFT). In 2012–13, all classroom-based teachers slated to be evaluated will use FFT for their formal observations.

Tulsa Public Schools

The Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Observation and Evaluation System was developed jointly with the Tulsa Classroom Teachers Association. It contains 20 indicators within five domains: (1) classroom management; (2) instructional effectiveness; (3) professional growth and continuous improvement; (4) interpersonal skills; and (5) leadership. Teachers are ranked on a five-point scale, from “superior” to “ineffective.” The system was piloted and then implemented districtwide in 2010. In 2011, the district introduced school-level “value-added” achievement scores. By 2013, all districts in the state must begin using these scores as part of their teacher evaluation systems. To date, 499 of the 520 school districts in Oklahoma have elected to use Tulsa's evaluation model.

LIST OF TOOLS AND ARTIFACTS

SECTION 1: AUDIENCES

LESSON 1: BE STRATEGIC, PRIORITIZE AUDIENCES

Hillsborough County (FL)

- [Summary of communications priorities](#)
- [Upcoming milestones document](#)

Denver

- [Communications and teacher engagement plan](#)
- [Week-by-week communications timeline](#)

LESSON 2: ENGAGE TEACHERS EARLY AND MEANINGFULLY

Denver

- [LEAP design team application](#)
- [Core values alignment worksheet](#)

Atlanta

- [Annual online survey of teachers](#)
- [Teacher e-newsletter](#)

Aspire (CA)

- [Advisory group presentation](#)
- [Elementary student survey on teacher performance](#)
- [High school student survey on teacher performance](#)

Memphis

- [Teacher Effectiveness Measurement website](#)
- [Teaching and learning framework](#)

LESSON 3: INVOLVE PRINCIPALS FROM THE START

- Hillsborough County [case studies/lessons learned](#)

Pittsburgh

- [Emerging Leadership Academy presentation](#)
- [Principal accountability system website](#)

LESSON 4: PROACTIVELY EXPLAIN CHANGES TO PARENTS

- National PTA [parents guides to the Common Core State Standards](#)

A+ Schools (Pittsburgh)

- [Results of principal and teacher survey on first year of implementation](#)
- [School board meeting report card](#)
- [Pledge to support effectiveness as rationale for layoffs](#)

Communities for Teaching Excellence

- [Parents guide to communicating with teachers](#)
- [Parents guide to supporting effective teaching](#)
- [Parents guide to academic standards](#)
- [Teaching Excellence Report e-newsletter](#)
- [Parent- and teacher-developed model evaluation system](#)

Hillsborough County PTA

- [District initiative e-zine](#)
- [Overview of parent role in initiative](#)
- [Video about initiative](#)
- [PowerPoint presentation about initiative](#)

SECTION 2: MESSAGING

LESSON 5: CRAFT POSITIVE, SUPPORTIVE, AND “CONNECTED” MESSAGES

- Denver [rationale for reform](#)
 - Memphis [rationale for reform](#)
 - Pittsburgh [rationale for reform](#)
- Messaging research
- [Communications Implications from Education Opinion Research](#) (GMMB summary of research by The Winston Group, Peter Hart, and Harris Interactive)
 - [The Big Picture: The Impact of National Storylines on Local Reform](#) (Brunswick Group and GMMB)
 - [Public Opinion Research on Education Issues](#) (The Winston Group)
 - [Primary Sources teacher surveys](#) (Scholastic)
 - Memphis [I Teach, I Am campaign website](#)
 - Pittsburgh [Believe campaign materials](#)

SECTION 3: TACTICS AND MESSENGERS

LESSON 6: ELEVATE PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS AS KEY COMMUNICATORS

- The Winston Group [Public Opinion Research on Education Issues](#)
 - Memphis [principals' teacher recognition program toolkit](#)
 - The College-Ready Promise [sample training for principals](#)
- Atlanta
- [Communications toolkit for principals](#)
 - [Effective Teaching in Every Classroom website](#)
- Denver
- [teacher and principal training materials](#)
- Hillsborough County
- [communications liaison responsibilities](#)
- Pittsburgh
- [working conditions survey teacher liaison job description](#)

LESSON 7: STREAMLINE COMMUNICATIONS

- Green Dot
- [Weekly email for principals](#)
 - [Daily teacher email updates during contract negotiations](#)
- Pittsburgh
- [website](#)
- Hillsborough County
- [website](#)
- Denver
- [website](#)
- Atlanta
- [website](#)
- Memphis
- [website](#)
- Prince George's County (MD)
- [website](#)
- Tulsa
- [website](#)

LESSON 8: INVEST IN STAFFING

- Atlanta [organizational chart](#)
- Denver [communications manager job description](#)
- Memphis [I Teach, I Am campaign website](#)
- Aspen Institute Education & Society Program [guide to developing effective teacher evaluation systems](#)
- Pittsburgh [project charter](#)

LESSON 9: PARTNER WITH THE TEACHERS UNION

- Denver [website](#)

Pittsburgh

- [Website](#)
- [Professional development PowerPoint presentation](#)
- [Newspaper article on layoffs](#)

LESSON 10: ENGAGE THE MEDIA AT THE RIGHT TIME

Tulsa

- [Media plan](#)
- [Overview of “value-added” growth measure](#)
- [Press release on adoption of system across most of the state](#)

Memphis

- [Clergy United for the Memphis Schools website](#)
- [Clergy United for the Memphis Schools report on the teacher effectiveness program](#)
- [Newspaper articles and press releases on the report](#)
- [Media advisory on follow-up celebration](#)
- [Newspaper article on celebration](#)

LESSON 11: WORK WITH EXTERNAL CHAMPIONS

A+ Schools (Pittsburgh)

- [Tumblr for layoff campaign](#)
- [Actions stakeholders can take](#)
- [Website](#)
- [I Heart Great Teaching campaign](#)
- [Report on professional development, staffing patterns, and working conditions](#)
- [Progress report](#)
- [Make Great Teaching Count campaign](#)

Council for a Strong America (Memphis)

- [Website](#)
- [Clergy United for the Memphis Schools website](#)
- [Clergy United for the Memphis Schools report on the teacher effectiveness program](#)
- [Newspaper articles and press releases on the report](#)
- [Media advisory on follow-up celebration](#)

SECTION 4: MEASUREMENTS

LESSON 12: EVALUATE AND REFINE STRATEGIES — REPEAT

Atlanta

- [Annual online survey of teachers](#)
- [Annual online survey of administrators](#)
- [Annual online survey of principals](#)
- Hillsborough County [teacher survey](#)
- Denver [educator survey](#)

Pittsburgh

- [Teacher working conditions survey](#)
- [Survey promotion campaign poster, flyer, and counter cards](#)
- [Survey website](#)
- [Survey results press release](#)

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