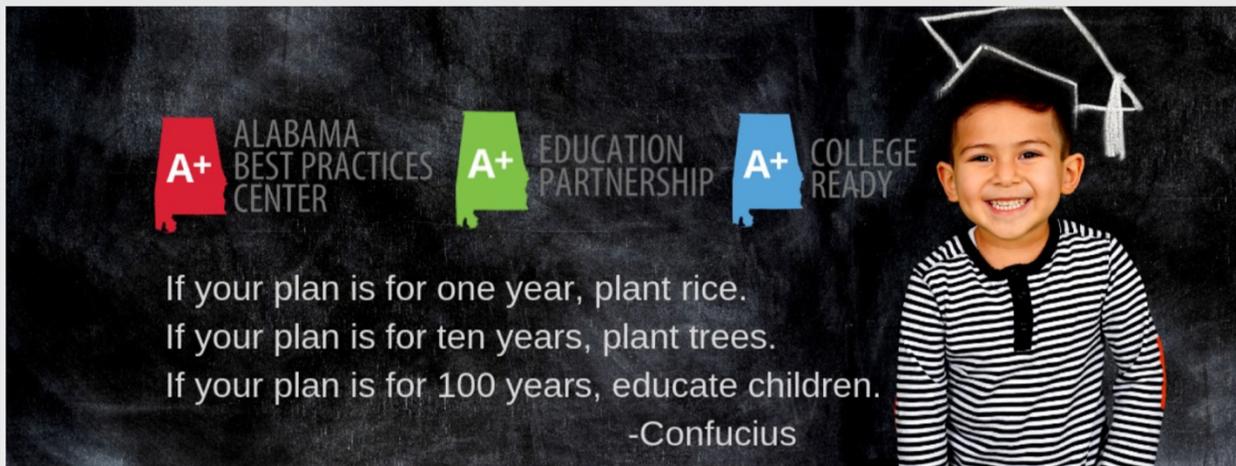


# ALABAMA BEST PRACTICES CENTER EVALUATION



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Aug 2020

# ALABAMA BEST PRACTICES CENTER EVALUATION



# Athens City School District Case Study

## Building Capacity for Quality Implementation



ALABAMA  
BEST PRACTICES  
CENTER



EDUCATION  
PARTNERSHIP



COLLEGE  
READY

If your plan is for one year, plant rice.  
If your plan is for ten years, plant trees.  
If your plan is for 100 years, educate children.

-Confucius

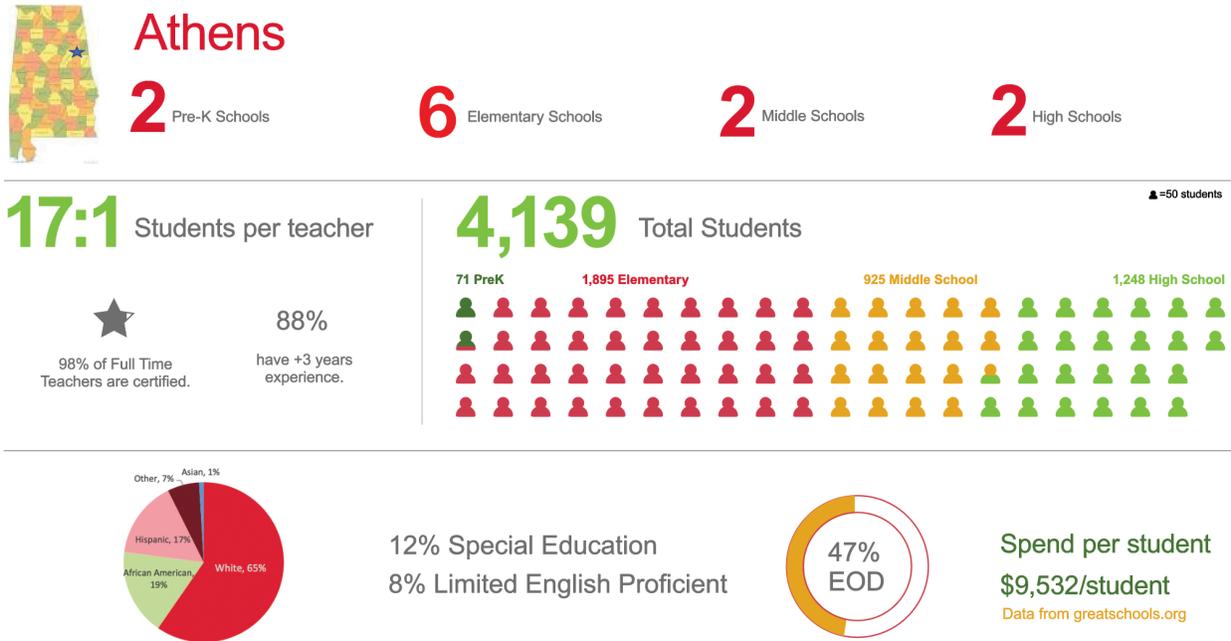


# About Athens City School District

Athens City Schools are located in north central Alabama, just south of Nashville and west of Huntsville. The district serves just over 4,000 students enrolled in kindergarten through Grade 12. There are four elementary schools, one intermediate school, one middle school, one high school, and an alternative school (which serves students through a non-traditional format, largely online).

Athens City Schools students are majority white (65%) with 16% of the population Hispanic and 19% Black/African American. Almost half (47%) of its students were identified as economically disadvantaged, 12% were served through special education services, and 8% were categorized as Limited English Proficient. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Athens City School District Demographics**



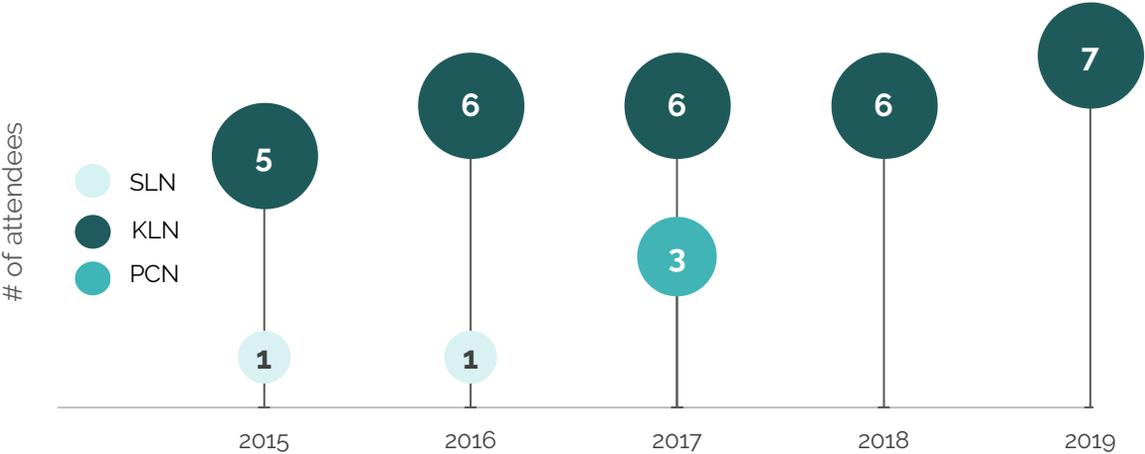
Sources: Alabama State Department of Education Enrollment Data, 2019; Greatschools.org data, 2019

# Athens City Schools' Journey with ABPC

Athens City Schools began participating in ABPC in 2015, making them the least experienced school included in our spotlight analysis. Staff from Athens City school district started their journey by participating in two networks beginning in 2015: the superintendent attended the Superintendents Learning Network (SLN) and a team of five staff members attended the Key Leaders Network (KLN).

Since 2015, staff from Athens City school district have sent a growing team of administrators to the KLN. **Athens City school district staff reported that information gathered from the KLN has been the driving force for learning and for implementing best practices.** Staff are less involved in the Powerful Conversations Network (PCN), only attending in 2017 (Figure 2).

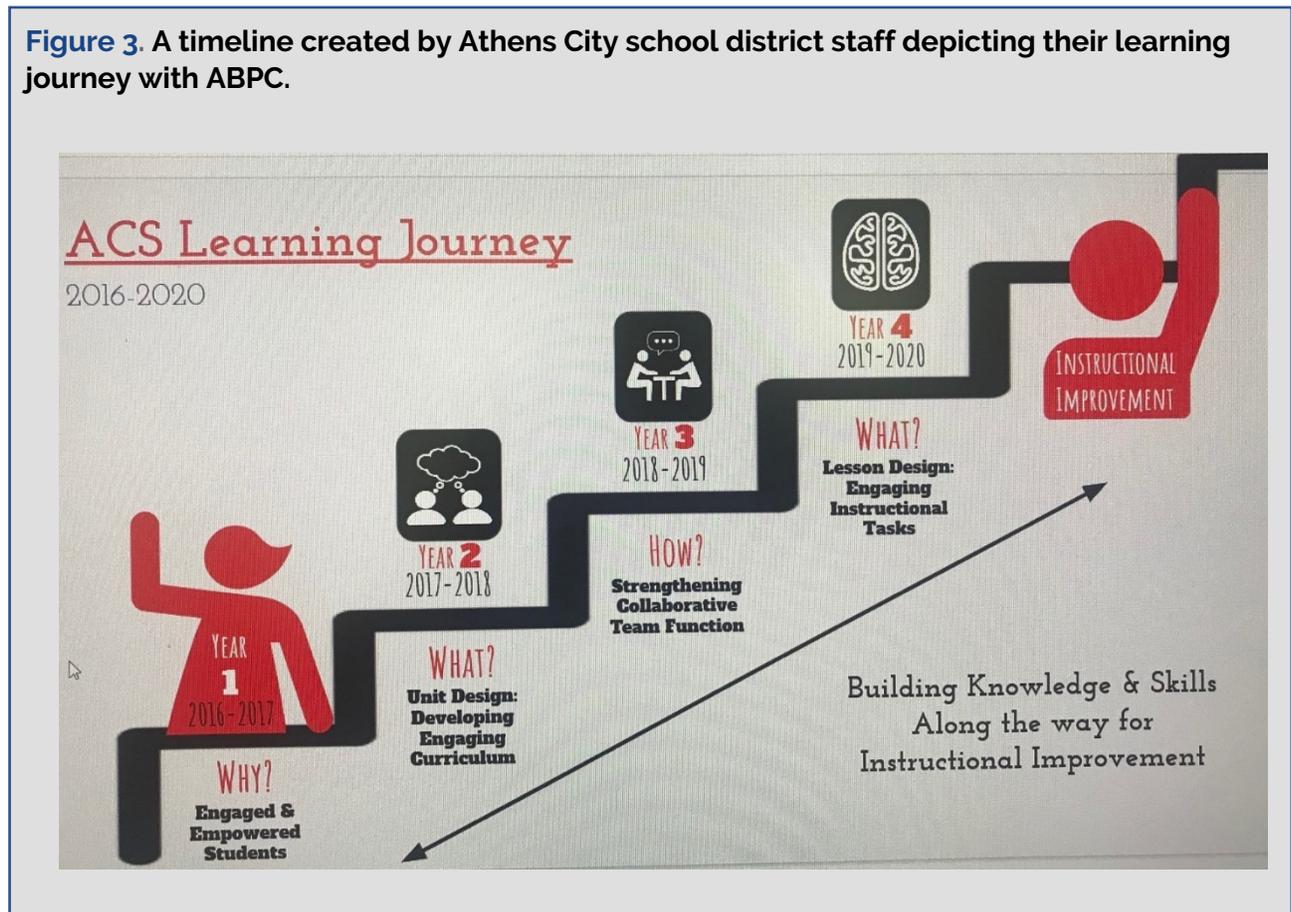
**Figure 2.** Athens City school district is relatively new to the ABPC network. Participation has grown over time but has been smaller compared to the other spotlight districts examined.



Source. Alabama Best Practices Centers (ABPC) attendance data  
 Note. SLN = Superintendent Learning Network; KLN = Key Leaders Network; PCN = Powerful Conversations Network; attendance data provided by ABPC. SLN discontinued in 2017

An additional resource for effective ABPC implementation at Athens City school district is a Professional Learning Coordinator who was a coach for the ABPC prior to her employment at Athens City school district. She used her learning gained through participation in the Instructional Partner Network to introduce the partnership principles of instructional coaching to the district, thus helping prepare the schools for participation in the ABPC Networks. She also facilitates a regional PCN for ABPC. In an effort to stay engaged and address their limited travel budget, Athens City school district teachers attend their regional PCN. See Figure 3 for a timeline of their learning journey.

**Figure 3.** A timeline created by Athens City school district staff depicting their learning journey with ABPC.



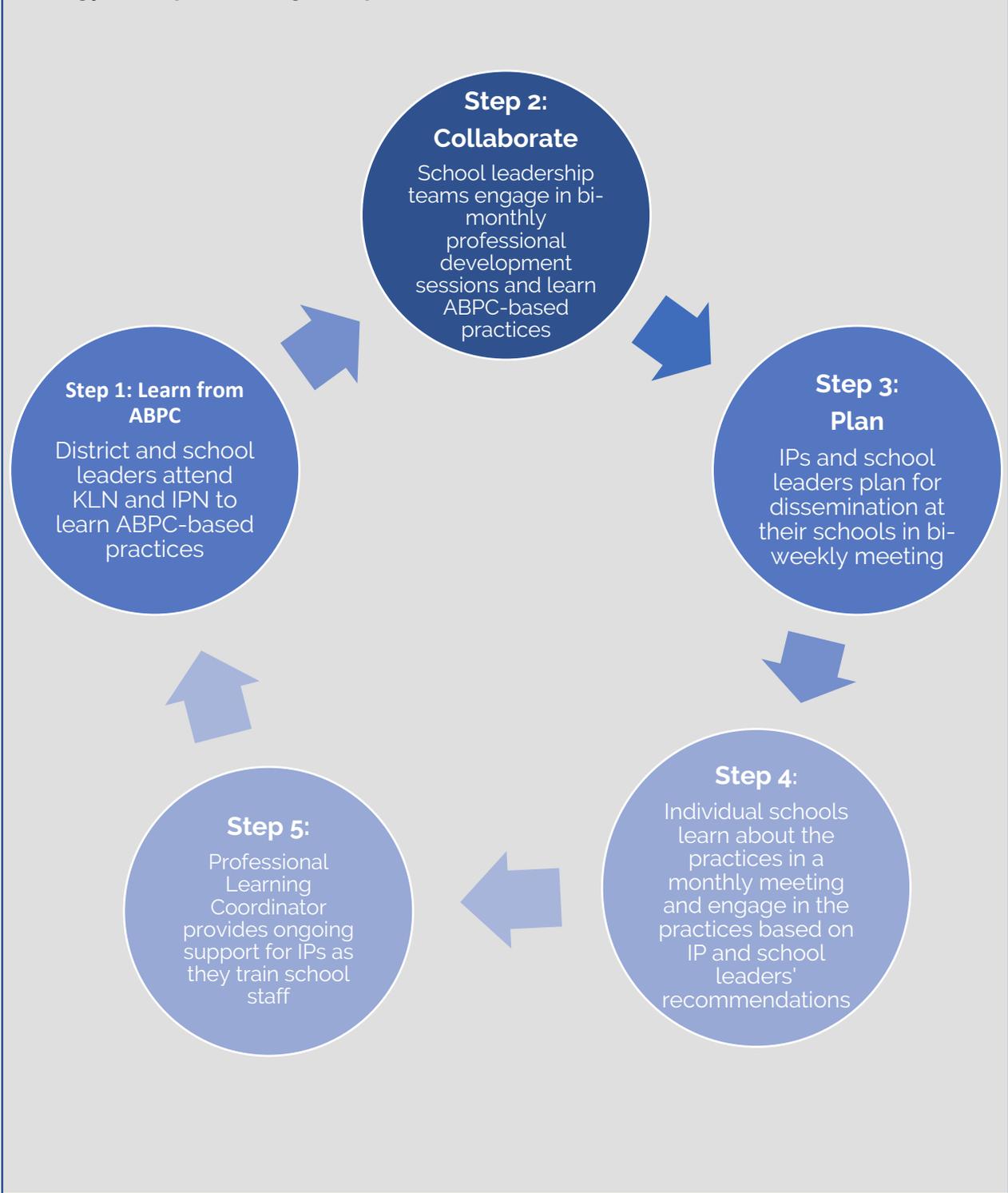
Although 'new' to ABPC Networks, Athens City school district staff reported widespread support and excitement for implementing ABPC best practices, marshalling the experience of their Professional Learning Coordinator as they build capacity. As they work towards district-wide implementation, leadership teams at Athens have developed several strategies for providing ongoing professional learning for all of their teachers and staff (Figure 4).

Staff share knowledge from ABPC network gatherings when school leadership teams along with the Curriculum and Professional Learning administrators conduct bi-monthly day-long professional development trainings following the ABPC KLN convenings. These meetings are conducted separately by school level (e.g., elementary and secondary). Sessions cover material based on ABPC Network best practices learned during the KLN gatherings and are tailored for the grade levels addressed.

Once the teams have completed their training, the Instructional Partner (IP) and school leadership team plan how they will disseminate that learning to their respective schools. All schools have one day per month set aside specifically for professional learning related to the bi-monthly meeting. Finally, the Professional Learning Coordinator provides monthly

professional development for the IPs to support them as they provide support to each school's teachers and staff.

**Figure 4. Athens City school district leaders use an intentional professional development strategy for implementing best practices.**



# Key Practices, Successes, & Opportunities

The following were identified as key practice and successes among Athens City School district.

## Key Practices

Based on data gathered during the course of our site visit, we observed the following practices critical to Athens City Schools' implementation:



**Bi-monthly all-day professional learning led by district leaders.** Elementary and secondary schools typically meet on separate days, with each school sending teams of 10. These professional learning opportunities focus on implementing data-driven best practices using the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model.



**School leadership team meetings.** During these meetings, school leadership teams meet with the IP and principal to “turn around” the learning from the bi-monthly professional learning.



**Collaborative planning time.** Core content area teachers have regular collaborative planning time with a learning focused agenda.



**Powerful task design.** Teachers use powerful task design, gleaned from the book of the same name (by Antonetti and Stice) used at the PCN, to develop engaging units that cross the rigor divide, delineate criteria for success, and include formative and summative assessments.



**Shared norms.** Athens City school district staff are working toward building shared norms based on collective leadership, public learning, and the creation of a psychologically safe environment conducive to risk taking, vulnerability and problem solving.



**Concise district One-Page Target.** This plan is a one-pager and helps teachers and leaders focus their efforts on a shared vision giving them the power to say no to things that do not fit within the plan.



**Standards-based report cards.** In 2019-2020, all elementary schools shifted their traditional report cards to standards-based report cards (see “Promising Practice” section for more).

# Other Key Strategies

In addition to the practices that district staff identified as critical to effective implementation, we observed the following strategies, also integral to program success:

 Athens City school district has a **strong shared vision** and a targeted approach to learning.

 **Support.** Teachers felt well supported in changing their instructional practices and understood that making these changes was not only important for their own work but also for the district as a whole.

 **Planning.** There was a strong focus on unit planning and connecting all the quality pedagogical skills back to unit planning. Teachers analyzed priority standards, delineated student success criteria for each standard, and analyzed how to move a lesson from lower to higher levels of rigor.

 **Shared resources.** Teachers are beginning to post units of study online for other teachers to see, use, and critique. Doing so suggests that teachers felt safe to let others see, use, and modify their work.

 **“One Athens”** is the district mantra meaning they are not separate schools but one district working together as a team.

 **Student engagement.** Athens City school district and school staff reported that students were more engaged now than they were prior to implementing ABPC best practices.

 **Strong Instructional Partners.** IPs use the motto, “Missionary not Messenger” as when working with teachers. Meaning they worked with teachers, rather than instructing or telling teachers how to teach.

## Detailed Results: Athens City Schools District Site Visit

To learn about the key practices, ongoing implementation efforts and challenges to widespread implementation, the evaluation team conducted a qualitative analysis with Athens City school district staff.

As a first step in this process, we interviewed Athens City school district leaders to understand the current conditions and contexts associated with their implementation journey.

Using this information as a guide, the evaluation team conducted a two-day site visit to observe promising practices and speak with a wider variety of administrators and staff, garnering a better picture of the implementation across different components of the school district.

During the visit we observed bi-monthly all-day professional learning sessions at both the elementary and secondary school levels and several types of collaborative planning meetings. Additionally, we interviewed district and school administrators, and conducted focus groups of elementary and secondary school teachers.



### Coordinated Process for Providing Ongoing Professional Learning for All Staff

The following describes the elements integral to the process Athens City Schools staff used to create systemwide change through continuous professional learning. In conversations with district administrators, they suggested that these elements (e.g., having some stable leadership team members attending professional learning sessions, and clear criteria for those staff who must attend) have been in place for the past two years.

To bring greater coherence to professional learning, school leadership teams were established, and bi-monthly sessions were held. Athens City School district staff partnered with each school to develop a plan and timetable for implementation. This process developed over time by



### What skills and mindsets did staff from Athens City school district implement?

Athens City School district's strong professional development strategies, a collaborative learning environment, and commitment to student engagement have tilled the soil for effective program implementation. The ABPC skills and mindsets we observed were:



Professional development



Collaborative planning time



Powerful task design



Student engagement



Shared norms and leadership



Learning targets



Standards-based report cards

gathering feedback from attendees and examining implementation strategies at the various schools.

**Bi-monthly all-day professional learning.** Providing ongoing high-quality professional learning that is deeply meaningful, engaging, and rooted in topics integral to practices is critical to creating a deep level of knowledge and practice. The bi-monthly professional learning sessions provided by the Athens City school district administration exemplifies those tenets.

**Bi-monthly all-day professional learning is the centerpiece of Athens City School district's professional learning**

**model.** Due to the high quality of the professional learning experience we observed, we are confident that quality implementation will become widespread among Athens City school district staff.

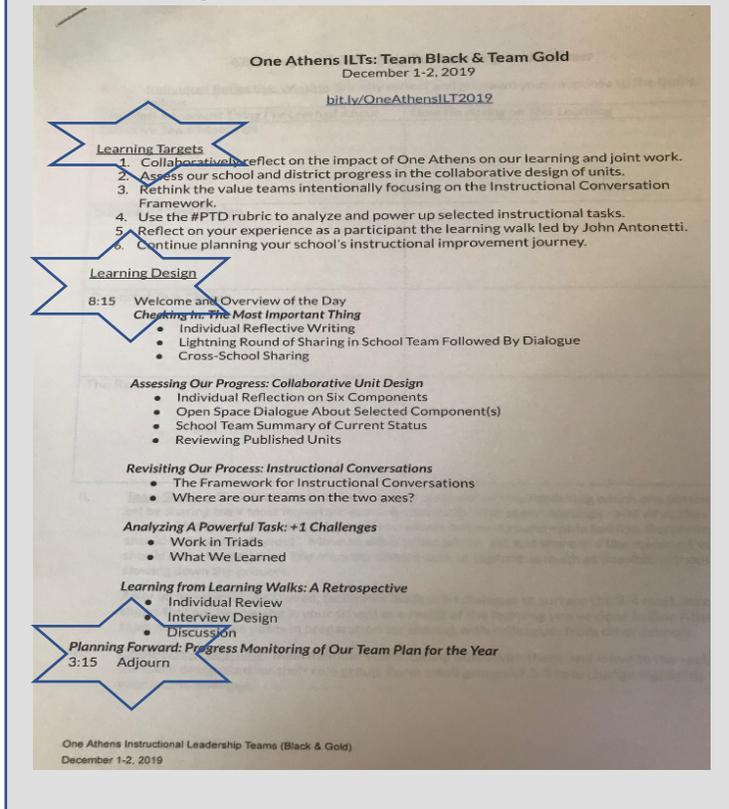


*"The administrators are in the PD with us. They are learning along with us. It's not us and them, we are all in it together."*  
~ Middle school teacher, on school-wide professional development

The trainings provide high quality learning opportunities for staff. **School district leaders model the key skills they have asked teachers to implement**, providing the kind of learning experiences that lead to reflective practices and collaborative learning. This practice also gives teachers the feeling that "we are in this together."

For each bi-monthly all-day professional learning session, schools send teams of 10 participants, including the principal, IP, and media specialist. The remaining members of the leadership team are chosen by each school's administrator. During interviews, most administrators reported that they tried to choose one teacher per grade level or one teacher per content area (depending upon the school) to comprise the team. The school leadership teams were stable over the year, although some fluctuated due to special circumstances.

**Figure 5. One-page agenda from a bi-monthly staff meeting.**



To help organize the bi-monthly all-day professional learning opportunities, Athens City school district staff creates a **one-page agenda**. During our observation of one of these meetings, the agenda included learning targets for the session, a timeline and some details about each session of the day (Figure 5). This type of agenda was used in all meetings and in teachers' instructional plans. During focus groups, teachers and staff reported that **having a clear, concise agenda helped teachers and leaders focus and to say no to things that did not fit within their learning targets.**

One of the overarching themes we encountered during our observations was that school districts (like Athens City school district) that adhere to implementing ABPC best practices are effective at focusing on the

specific needs of their students and staff. They are less likely to be distracted by other competing initiatives. Although teachers admitted that at times it was a struggle to stay on target with their own established meeting guidelines, establishing a clear focus helped them not waste time during conversations and to get the most out of each professional learning experience.



## Using Data for Professional Learning

One way the bi-monthly professional learning sessions were effective was by **intentionally focusing on data driven best practices at the core of the learning**. Additionally, each session was facilitated using professional learning communities' best practices. The following describes a bi-monthly meeting we observed highlighting the use of data driven best practices.

As described earlier, Athens City school district's leadership teams have a bi-weekly meeting with their IP and principal to use and adapt the learning from the bi-monthly all-day professional development opportunities (see Figure 4).

After attending the all-day bi-monthly learning session, school leadership teams met to plan how to provide support and learning within their context. The teams then developed any additional materials they needed and/or adapted materials provided during the bi-monthly learning session. In this way, there was a coordinated effort in terms of timing and content to ensure that all staff received similar learning opportunities and materials.

The message to district staff was aligned, clear, and focused. All staff engaged with the same professional learning and received information in a timely manner. It is important to note that although schools engaged in the same learning and implemented the same best practices, each school adopted the learning specific to their school's needs. Although most school leadership teams provided learning materials to staff at their school at the same time as the materials were provided to other schools in the district, they were also given the option of waiting to implement particular practices until staff at their school were ready to do so.

*"If we don't [implement] with ABPC when they are doing it, [it is] because we are not ready yet. We want to go back into their archives and do it on our own when we are ready."*

~ Athens City school district administrators on implementation timing



## Collaborative Planning Time

All core content area elementary and middle school teachers have regular collaborative planning time with a learning-focused agenda. The structure and timing of the meetings is determined by each school and team. The number of meetings varies from once per week to several times each week, depending upon the school and school level. For example, at one school content teams met weekly and grade level teams met twice a week to collaborate and plan. Teachers reported that they regularly used an agenda focusing on content integral to student centered learning strategies and engaging content.

*"We meet once a week for content collaboration (math) and twice a week as a grade level math team. I am thinking about how we used to come together; we'd spend first 10 minutes talking about what already happened and what will happen. Now we have an agenda that we follow, and we have the purpose set and these things have been determined to be important. This is a major change from before we did this stuff."*

~ Middle school teacher, on collaborative planning time

During collaborative planning time, teachers learn new practices from their IPs and school leadership team members and put those practices to use. For example, the evaluation team observed a meeting where the IP and principal described a practice, they were going to use at the elementary schools during the 2019-2020 school year: standards-based report cards (full description included in the next section). The process of using standards-based report cards was described in depth and teachers were asked to bring in examples of student

work, grades and the drafts of report cards to the meeting to deepen the discussion.

During our observations, it was abundantly clear that collaborative meeting time was integral to Athens City school district teachers' ability to plan lessons, collaborate, and learn from each other. Teachers said their planning time was more focused now compared to how they spent their planning time prior to working with ABPC.



## Promising Practice: Standards-Based Report Cards

One key practice Athens City school district began implementing in the 2019-2020 school year was the use of standards-based report cards at the elementary school level. These report cards eschew the standard A-F grading system in favor of one that focuses on students' mastery of priority standards. This system qualitatively describes where students' learning is on a rubric (e.g. 'Meets Standards', 'Working Toward Standards', 'Experiencing Difficulty'), rather than giving a single letter grade per content area (see Figure 6 below for an example).

**Figure 6.** An example of the Athens City schools district's standards-based report card.

ATHENS ACADEMIES		FIRST GRADE PARENT REPORT							
PRODUCT DESCRIPTORS									
M - Meets Standards	W - Working Toward Standards	E - Experiencing Difficulty	X - Not Assessed						
Student Name:									
Teacher Name:									
School:				Days Absent					
School Year:				1st	2nd	3rd	4th		
<b>Math</b>									
Operations and Algebraic Thinking									
Represent and solve problems									
Understand and apply properties of operations and the relationship between addition and subtraction									
Add and subtract within 20									
Work with addition and subtraction equations									
Number and Operations in Base Ten									
Extend the counting sequence									
Understand place value									
Use place value understanding and properties of operations to add and subtract									
Measurement and Data									
Order three objects by length; compare the lengths of two objects indirectly using a third object									
Tell and write time									
Represent and interpret									
Geometry									
Reason with shape and their attributes									

SAMPLE

Athens City school district staff have been working to implement powerful task design and project-based learning models at the elementary level which both focus on student learning progressions rather than point in time knowledge. For these reasons, Athens City school district staff decided it was a natural fit to shift their focus from traditional report cards to the implementation of standards-based report cards.

Athens City School district administrators planned for the effective dissemination of the new report cards by providing professional learning for teachers and information to parents and community members prior to circulating them. Both of these lines of communication were critical to ensure parents and community members adequately understood the purpose and the structure of the new standards-based report cards.

Using one of their signature best practices, intentional professional development, teachers learned alongside their principal and IP how to complete the new report cards through their bi-weekly collaborative meetings. In our observation of this meeting, the principal and IP shared information about the timing of the rollout, how teachers should complete the report cards and ways teachers should reply to parents' questions. Teachers practiced writing the student narrative, a critical component integral to the standards-based report cards. Teachers then identified student work to provide students and their families with specific examples celebrating student success and showcasing opportunities for growth. To guide the conversation, the principal probed: "What is one important thing they [students] must know or they will crumble next semester?"

To practice writing the narrative component of the standards-based report cards, teachers used students' data from their most recent grading period along with the following guiding questions to describe each students' learning:

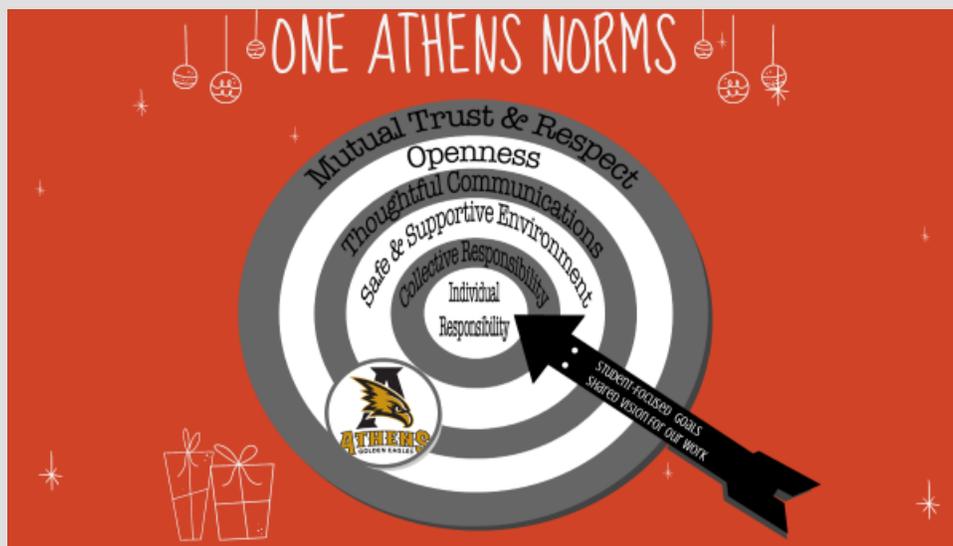
- When a parent reads the narrative, can they "see" their child? Not a generic child but *their* child?
- Can the child see him or herself when they read the narrative?

Importantly, in a way to model best practices and involve community feedback in Athens City Schools district decision making, parents had a chance to learn about the new report cards at the beginning of the school year during parent-teacher conferences and during other school functions like PTA Meetings. Finally, an FAQ about the new report cards was shared with the community via the Athens City Schools [website](#) and [print media](#) (see also The News Courier, September 27, 2019).

**Building New Norms: Creating a Space for Staff to Feel Psychologically Safe to Take Risks, Be Vulnerable, Problem-Solve, and Share in Collective Leadership and Public Learning**

One way to ensure that systemic change takes hold is to establish mindsets that support those changes. Much of the early work school districts engage in with ABPC is to learn these mindsets. Indeed, when we conducted our observations, staff from all spotlight districts reported that learning and modeling these mindsets from the administrators to the classroom was critical to long-term success (Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Athens City schools district staff adopted school norms created by the IPN to use as they implement ABPC best practices.**



As mentioned previously, Athens City school district staff are at the beginning of their learning journey, and are only now establishing, growing, and maintaining mindsets and supportive best practices necessary for systemic change. In conversations with Athens City schools district administrators, one described that early in the process the superintendent created the 'One Athens' district mantra to rally support and have a quick, catchy way to describe their approach. Another Athens City school district administrator agreed, stating that the slogan "means we are not separate schools, but one district".

Another key mindset frequently heard in spotlight school districts was a vision focused on student success. Staff often described this vision as "we focus on what's best for students" and frequently stated, "We don't have too many initiatives."

*"We invest in our people, not programs."*  
 ~ Athens City school district administrator on shared norms

Creating a new norm promoting public learning was observed in full effect in Athens City school district. We observed staff engaging in many different configurations of collaborative

meetings as the main venue for professional learning opportunities. For example, during a day long professional learning meetings, we observed table discussions, presentations of thought processes, and analyses of artifacts. Learning was varied, active, and most importantly, public. Throughout this day-long professional development, participants and facilitators were welcomed to share their insights related to the learning, personal and school level challenges they faced while implementing best practices, and to discuss ways to improve implementation.



## Strong Instructional Partners

As part of our qualitative study, we conducted interviews with IPs to discuss their role, training they received, and their perspective on how well their schools were implementing ABPC best practices.

In IPN, IPs, described how they learned to *partner with* teachers, rather than *direct* teachers. During the training, the IPs learned to focus on the teachers, the teachers' needs, and to be focused on what teachers want to learn. For example, an IP described how ABPC staff modeled desired behaviors for them, and how IPs in turn modeled these behaviors with their teachers, stating, "They scaffold for us, and we scaffold for the teachers the way the teachers scaffold for the students."

IPs used the book, *Internal Coherence Framework* (used in both PCN and KLN) and the Looking at Student Work protocols from the ABPC Institute led by Nancy Love, to learn and study these practices. ACS adopted Jim Knight's partnership model of coaching (used by the IPN), where the teacher directs the goals and the learning. As a result, IPs from Athens City school district appreciated that they felt supported by school administrators in their goal of working to "build a bigger bench."

*"The partner approach has helped me. I learned a lot about what I didn't know and about adult learning. We learned how to collaborate, because we don't model teach, we team teach and then reflect with the teacher."*

~ Athens City school district IP on ABPC training



## Shared Leadership

During our site visit, we observed varying levels of comfort with the shared leadership model. This was not surprising, and is in fact expected, as Athens City school district is still in their nascent stages of implementing best practices. Although we observed IPs, principals and district staff working to share leadership, more traditional forms of communication and validation of, rather than challenging ideas, were also evident. As long as district leaders from Athens City school district continue to support professional learning to the degree we observed, this variability will likely change over time. One thing that has become evident is that this type of work is a long, slow process, with the most experienced and successful districts engaging in this work for more than 10 years. As one staff member stated, "This is not a diet, this is a lifestyle change."



## Powerful Task Design

Teachers described working during their planning time to develop engaging units *crossing the rigor divide*, delineating success criteria, and including formative and summative assessments.

Athens City school district staff's focus in the classroom is to develop engaging units of study that address important, central content standards and provide high levels of rigor for all students using materials from the PCN guiding text *Powerful Task Design* (Antonetti & Stice, 2018). During our observations we noted a strong focus on unit planning, connecting all the quality pedagogical skills to *Powerful Task Design*. Indeed, teachers have learned to analyze priority standards, have internalized the importance of delineating success criteria for each standard, and used a rubric to determine how to move a lesson from lower to higher levels of rigor (Figure 8).

Because teachers were no longer pressured to teach all of the standards every year, they were able to take the time needed to allow students to deeply process the material. One teacher described the Powerful Task Design process in the following way, "If kids don't get it, it's ok to slow down and take more time. We don't have to stick to the calendar. This is because we aligned all the standards and determined the priority standards and we make sure to teach those. The rest can wait. Sometimes we look at the standards for the next year to and maybe it's not even supposed to be taught this year." During focus groups and conversations with district and school staff, they reported that students were more engaged since they began using Powerful Task Design than they were prior to implementing this practice.

*"Units- we have always known there are critical areas in each unit. I do not think that we had ever delved deeply into each unit to be sure that each contained the success criteria and important standards. We knew there were elements in there but we never looked deeply into priority standards, and that the rigor is there, and crossing the rigor divide. We had been doing things and some of the right things, but not like we are now. I think the success criteria, and how in one classroom you can have different levels of success criteria. How to modify them for all students is a challenge, but writing those criteria and looking at them every day... helped to show the purpose of what we need to know before we leave today. It helps keep the end goals in mind."*

~ Athens City school district teacher

**Figure 8.** Athens City schools district staff used the Powerful Task Design Rubric to assess student work.

↙ The "Rigor Divide"

Powerful Task Rubric for Designing Student Work		1	2	3	4
Cognitive Demand	Bloom – Revised Taxonomy	Recall	Understand	Apply/Analyze	Evaluate/Create
	<i>Examples</i>	Name the steps	Follow the steps	Infer with text support	Argue, defend, or justify
	Antonetti/Garver – Patterns	Repeat patterns	Restate or reproduce patterns	Find patterns Find use for patterns	Compare patterns Add/combine/ignore patterns
	Webb – DOK (Assessment) Stein/Smith – Mathematics	Recall Memorization	Skill/Concept Procedures without connections	Strategic thinking Procedures with connections	Extended thinking Doing Mathematics
Academic Strategies*	Similarities and Differences	List facts about A and B	Parallel facts about A and B	Compare or contrast by trait	
	Summarizing/Notetaking	Copy	Restate	Personalize or make unique decisions about content	
	Nonlinguistic Representation	Copy other given forms	Place into other forms	Create a new representation	
	Generating/Testing Hypotheses	Copy	Restate "known" pattern	Identify and extend patterns	
Engaging Qualities**	Personal Response (Clear/Modeled Expectations)	Not necessary	Fill in the blank with "my" answer	Explain and support my ideas (open)	Explain and defend or justify my ideas
	Intellectual/Emotional Safety	Not required	Not required	Expression of concepts or recognized patterns	Expression of supported opinions or new ideas
	Learning with Others	Take turns talking	Listen and repeat	Interdependence in roles or mini tasks	Interdependence of ideas
	Sense of Audience	A partner	The class	An audience I want to appreciate me or my ideas	An audience I want to influence
	Novelty and Variety	Recall is fun or different	Product without concepts	Product with concepts	Perspective
	Authenticity	Teacher connects to world	Repeat real examples	Recognize real examples	Create real examples
Questions	Closed with single right or wrong answers	Closed but with a "choice" of answers	Open with a range of answers, support, strategies, connections		

\* The strategies listed are those directly influencing rigor or cognitive demand. ©Colleagues on Call, 2013  
 \*\* The engaging quality of "Choice" is not listed; it is effectively provided through choice between rigorous tasks.



## Student Engagement in Action

During our site visit, we observed effective student engagement during a classroom visit at an elementary school. Much of what we saw was learned through the ABPC's guiding text *Leaders of Their Own Learning* (Berger, et. al)

In this observation, the teacher used many of the strategies Athens City school district staff have been working to implement in the last four years. Specifically, we observed the teacher's effective use of learning targets, rigorous lessons, quality questioning techniques, and helping students to make their thinking public.



When we entered the classroom, **the learning target** was posted on the board at the front of the classroom. The principal commented on the learning target stating that "the past few years we have shifted from teacher to student focused, authentic learning tasks."

In this class students were working on various aspects of a story they read called, *Bear Snores On*. At one center students were building bears from various materials; some were working alone, and others in groups. One pair of students were building a Lego cave for the bear. The teacher called the students into a large group to discuss and report on the various activities in which they were engaging.



The teacher used **quality questioning techniques, shared by ABPC lead consultant Jackie Walsh**, to facilitate and extend learning. She asked one student to describe what she built (the cave), asking her, "was the bear still in the cave?" The student said, "Yes, sleeping."

The teacher then asked, "Who can say more? What else happened in the story?"



Several students raised their hands and shared elements of the story.



The teacher moved on to two boys who built a bear they shared. The teacher asked them, "What do the cotton balls represent?" The boys said, "Bears have fur." The teacher asked, "Are you sure all bears have fur? How do you know? Have you done your research?" The boys had not.

The teacher continued **questioning** the students, asking them, "How could you research this?" The boys said they could watch a video. The teacher responded, saying "Yes," and then probed for students to go deeper, "How else?"

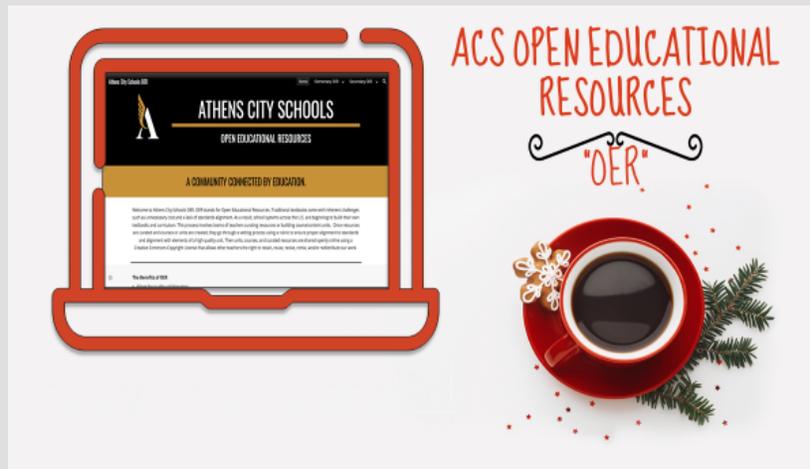
Another student said, "Read non-fiction." The teacher said, "Yes and what is non-fiction?"

This observation exemplifies the way the best practices implemented in Athens City Schools district can be woven together into a single lesson. In this way, implementation is a natural process that is embedded into teachers' daily work.

## Shared Resources

Finally, we observed teachers beginning to post units of study and sharing resources online for others to see, use, and critique. Doing so indicated that teachers felt safe to let others not only see their work, but also to use and modify their work. To help spur this development, Athens City Schools staff have devoted a portion of their website for all teachers and staff to access these materials (Figure 9).

**Figure 9. Athens City Schools staff have created online resources for all staff to share materials and learnings.**





## Opportunities for Growth

District leaders and others in Athens City school district identified these factors as growth opportunities:



**It is challenging to stay focused during weekly planning time.** Moving from a more traditional style of meeting to the fast paced, hyper focused meeting protocols from the ABPC takes work and practice. Old habits die hard. One middle school teacher described their solution to this challenge in the following way, "We have other things you want to discuss that are important, but not on the agenda. So, we made an extra day in the week to talk about those things."



**The learning culture is not safe across the board at all schools.** Although marked progress has been made to effectively implement ABPC best practices, there is still work to be done. System wide change is hard and slow and takes many years to take hold, and even more to maintain. One Athens City schools district staff member said it well, "This is not a diet, it's a lifestyle change!"



**Schools are in different places in their implementation journey, and some have different areas of focus.** For example, one school had a much more traditional management style with leadership less engaged even though they participated in the various professional development opportunities. The discussion with the team at this school was also more traditional; participants were more apt to agree with the discussion leader than to challenge ideas or put forth their own.

## **Summary: Athens City School District**

Although relatively new to the process, Athens City school district staff are dedicated to systemwide long-term change using implementation strategies provided by ABPC staff. Teachers and administrators alike were excited about the process of learning these skills and supportive of the changes being made. The energy and motivation were evident at all school and administrative levels, even where the skills and practices were still in their nascent stages. Collectively, Athens City school district staff are a strong committed team and are primed to reap the benefits of their partnership with ABPC.