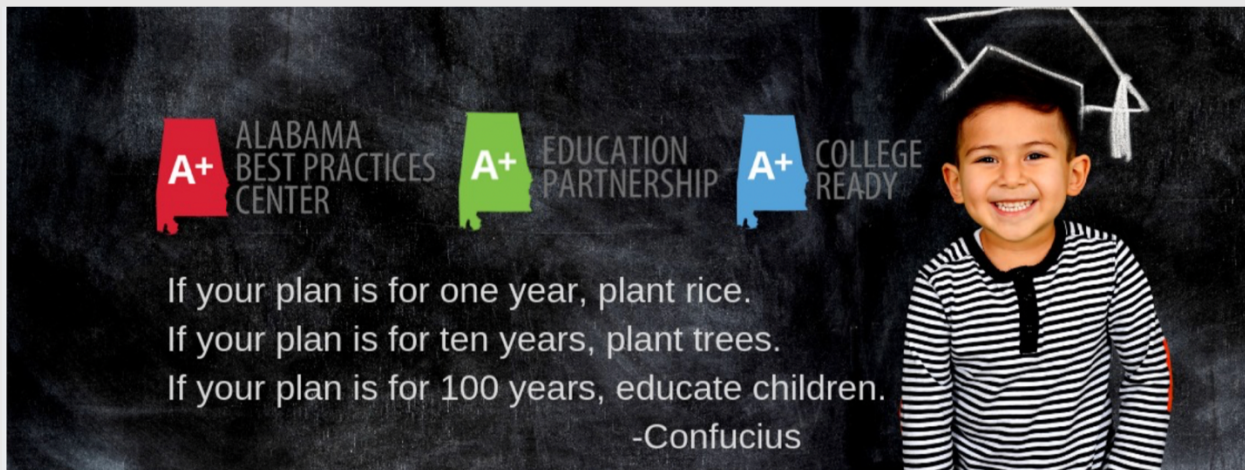


ALABAMA BEST PRACTICES CENTER EVALUATION



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ALABAMA BEST PRACTICES CENTER EVALUATION



Florence City School District Case Study

Making it Our Own!

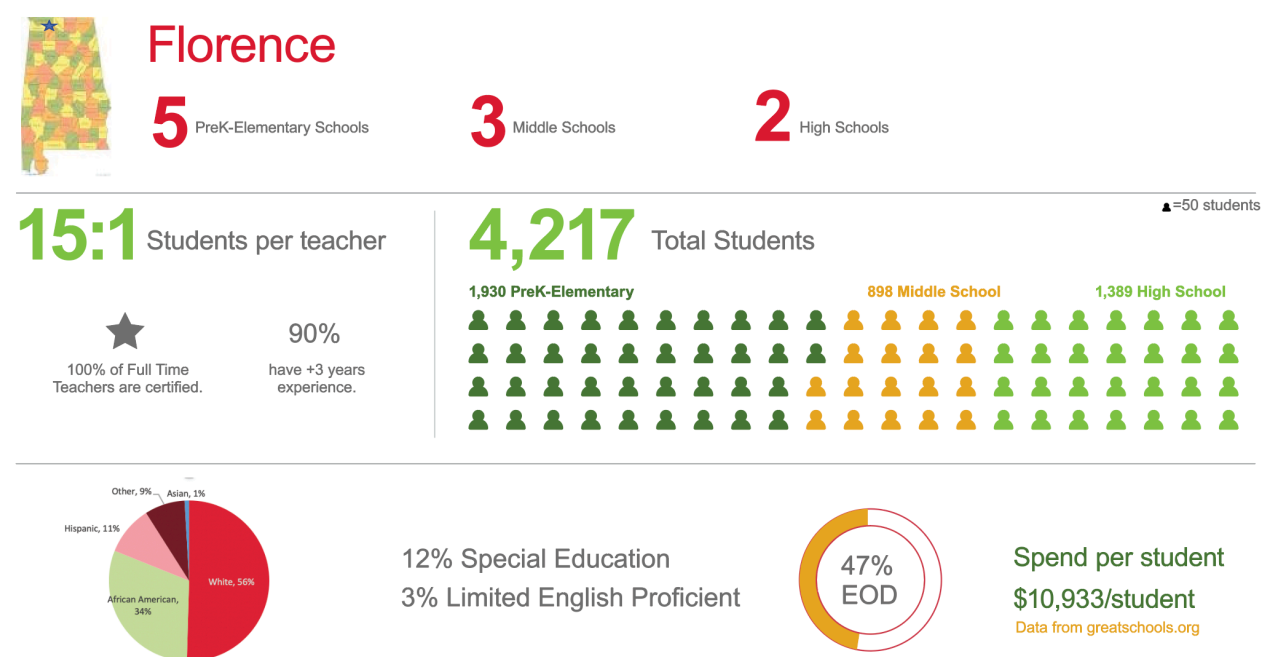
A banner with a dark, chalkboard-like background. On the left, there are three icons of the state of Alabama, each with an 'A+' grade. The first is red and labeled 'ALABAMA BEST PRACTICES CENTER'. The second is green and labeled 'EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP'. The third is blue and labeled 'COLLEGE READY'. Below these icons, there is a quote in white text: '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'. On the right side of the banner is a photograph of a young boy with a joyful expression, wearing a black and white striped shirt and a white graduation cap with a tassel.

About Florence City School District

Florence City Schools is located in the Shoals area of northwestern Alabama and situated along the north side of the Tennessee River. Florence City school district serve just over 4,200 students in grades pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. There are nine schools in the system including five elementary schools, two middle school, and two high schools.

Students from Florence City school district are 56% White, 34% African American, and 11% Hispanic (Figure 1). Additionally, half of Florence City's students have been identified as economically disadvantaged, 12% of students qualified for special education services and 3% were identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP).

Figure 1. Florence City School Demographics



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

Florence City School District's Journey with ABPC

Florence City School staff began their journey with the ABPC Networks in 2013. Initially, a small group of district leaders participated in the Key Leaders Network (KLN) and a small group of teachers attended the Powerful Conversations Network (PCN). The current superintendent was a district administrator in 2013 and in that role attended a KLN gathering. They have continued to attend KLN throughout Florence's participation in ABPC (Figure 2). Although supportive of Florence City School staff's participation in ABPC network gatherings, the previous superintendent did not participate in the Superintendent Leadership Network (SLN; Figure 2).

While district and campus staff have continued to attend the ABPC Networks (KLN and PCN, respectively), staff attendance has fluctuated over time (Figure 2). Despite this fluctuation, **a stable core group of staff members have attended KLN since 2013.**

In 2015, Florence City School staff developed their own in-house professional development, Falcon Learning Conversations Network (FLCN), which was modeled in part after the ABPC Networks.

"The KLN changed how we looked at what instruction was. [These meetings] took me from in your face to [answering the question] 'what is instruction doing for your kids?' And looking at how we grow leaders. [Attending the KLN] changes your mindset about data. What do we do daily and how does that impact students? "

~ Florence City school district administrator

Because participation in ABPC learning networks gatherings is limited, school district staff must determine an effective way to 'turn around' the learning from these meetings so all staff can learn the practices and implement them. FLCN was Florence City school district's staff's answer to the 'turn around' process. This key practice is described in more detail in a later section. Initially, Florence City school district staff collaborated with the ABPC leadership to develop a multi-day professional learning and data analysis meeting that was held locally so all teachers and administrators could participate.

"We are one district with seven schools in it, not seven separate schools."

~ Florence City school district administrator

The creation of the FLCN exemplifies Florence City Schools' commitment to professional learning for all their staff, as well as their approach to customize content for their district.

Florence City Schools' leadership has taken the general

themes, concepts and skills they learned in ABPC network gatherings and reimaged them to fit the unique needs of their staff and students.

In contrast to the other spotlight districts we observed as part of this project, which utilized the resources provided by ABPC with fidelity, Florence City school district staff have applied them more flexibly. At times staff used the exact process modeled in network gatherings, and at other times they created new ways to approach the same principles to fit better the

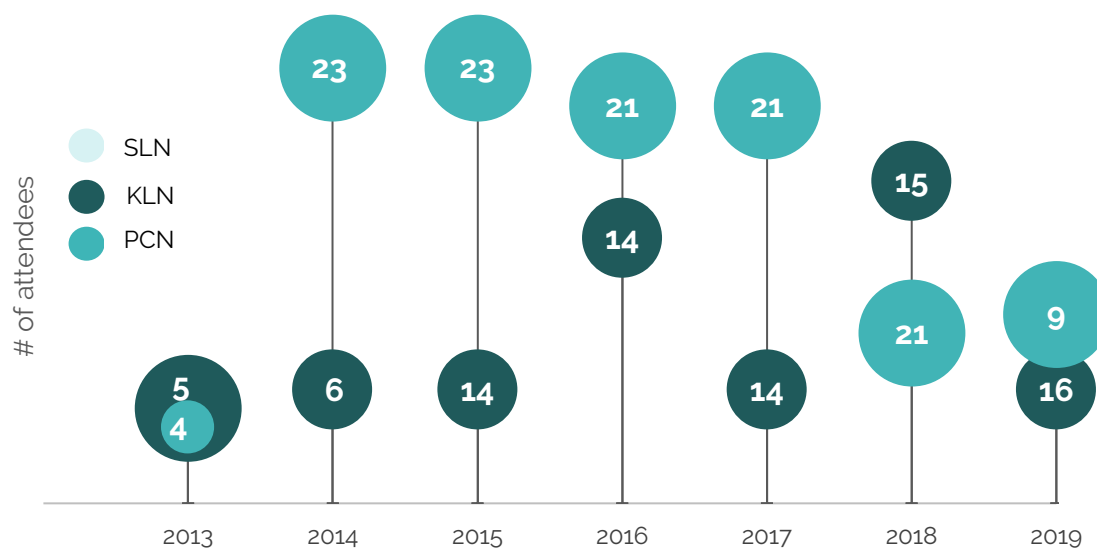
context of their district. For example, Florence City school district staff have added new approaches to learning walks and have patterned their data meeting process from a collaboration they developed with the University of Virginia (UVA). As mentioned previously, creating the FLCN also embodies this approach.

Florence City school district is unique among the spotlight districts examined, because they have partnered with many outside entities to create a blend of resources, skills, and approaches that speak more directly to the specific needs of district and campus staff.

Florence City Schools staff told us they were hooked on ABPC strategies from the beginning and as a result experienced significant changes in student and staff behavior. District leaders used these positive changes to take the work deeper and partner with other external agencies to implement classroom observation strategies, data analysis in meetings, and cognitive coaching strategies.

Florence City Schools has had steady participation over the past five years with ABPC, with participation declining somewhat in 2019 for PCN (see Figure 2, below).

Figure 2. Although Florence City School District's superintendent did not attend the SLN, several staff attended the PCN and KLN, with PCN participation waning in 2019.



Source. Florence City Schools Network attendance data

Note. SLN = Superintendent Learning Network; KLN = Key Leaders Network; PCN = Powerful Conversations Network

Key Practices, Other Strategies and Opportunities

The following were identified as key practices, successes, and opportunities among Florence City Schools.

Key Practices

Data gathered from the site visit suggests that all Florence City Schools staff were effectively engaging in the following practices:



Purposeful **common planning time** (CPT). The frequency of CPT varies by school level and content area but occurs at least weekly at the high school level and daily at the elementary school level.



Annual **focus areas for professional learning** and implementation. These foci help staff prioritize implementation of new practices.



Falcon Learning Conversations Network (FLCN). Developed by Florence City Schools leaders, FLCN is a quarterly day long professional learning. FLCN is modeled after ABPC network gatherings.



Student engagement. Data notebooks and student-led conferences are used in all schools.

Other Key Strategies

During the course of our site visit, the evaluation team also noted additional successful practices. Some of these strategies came directly from ABPC network gatherings, while other strategies were created with other experts or developed internally by Florence City School staff:

Customized Practice:



Data Days

ABPC Networks focus a lot of attention on using data regularly. Florence City Schools customized this ABPC practice by creating Data Days. Held four times a year, Data Days are used to intentionally do a deep dive into student and staff data. Each meeting focuses on one of four different aspects of student learning and instruction:

- Assessment
- Analysis
- Action Plans
- Culture

Teachers and campus and district administrators bring data and student work to discuss, analyze, and problem solve. These learnings are then integrated into regular practice.



Formative assessments are used at all campuses. They help teachers know what students need to know and when they need to reteach a concept right away.

"We are so much more intentional about [our work] now."

~ Florence City school district teacher



Intentional, ongoing professional learning. Florence City school district administration and teachers are intentional about learning. Through careful study and data analysis, teachers know what is important to focus on to improve student achievement and keep their focus on that strategy.



Effective cognitive coaching strategies. Florence City school district Instructional Partners (IPs) are well trained and understand how to have "hard conversations" with teachers; collaboratively working with teachers, rather than instructing them, in ways to improve their teaching.



Meetings are focused on improving instruction, not on management or other issues. The superintendent noted that this was part of Florence City school district staff members' very fiber, "We walk an instructional walk."

"We walk an instructional walk."

~ Florence City school district superintendent discussing focused meetings



Data Days are held four times each year and are district wide. School teams meet to examine data and determine how to use the information to improve instruction.



All schools use the **Whetstone system to record observations and feedback gathered during learning walks and classroom observations.** These observations are conducted regularly by the principals or assistant principals of each school.

Detailed Results: Florence City Schools District Site Visit

Throughout the two-day site visit, evaluators visited three of the nine schools in the Florence City schools district, observing one school from each school level. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with representation from seven schools and included teachers, principals, assistant principals, and Instructional Partners (IPs). Evaluators attended walkthroughs at one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. Evaluators also met with the district head of professional learning to collect documents relevant to the observational study. In this next section, we describe the findings from the site visit, focusing on the themes, ideas, procedures, and practices that were central to the ABPC Network learnings over the course of the past 7 years.



Common Planning Time

One of the ABPC best practices integral to program success is Common Planning Time (CPT). In conversations with Florence staff, they pointed to a key feature of common planning time a reliance on a fixed agenda that is focused on student learning. During our observation of a CPT in Florence City school district, we saw an agenda that included a learning target for the

"Our conversations are different now. Meetings are about what we are doing instructionally."

~ Florence City school district administrator, discussing common planning time

meeting, plans for upcoming data days, a discussion, and analysis of exit tickets (or formative assessments). As part of the meeting, teachers brought exit tickets for group

discussion. Exit tickets were scored for student understanding of a particular concept using a high, medium, and low scale.

Teachers led discussions about their findings related to students' performance and asked their colleagues for feedback. Using these ratings as a guide, teachers discussed whether students in a particular group were making a common error and if they should re-teach the concept to the entire group of students or provide targeted feedback to the specific group of students with lower scores.



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

Florence City Schools were unique among the schools we observed in our deep dive. District staff effectively used the following ABPC strategies as a springboard to create and implement best practices unique to Florence City School district's needs:



Common planning time



Focused professional learning



Falcon Learning Conversations Network (FLCN)



Instructional Partners



Student engagement



Learning walks



Data Days

Figure 3. An agenda from a common planning time meeting; highlights the intentionality behind these meetings.


FLORENCE
HIGH SCHOOL

Common Planning Time
Wednesday, December 11, 2019

Learning Targets:

- I can align both the standards and rigor of benchmark tests, classroom assessments and exit tickets.

Before: *Academic Planning Program*

- 90 Day Plan/ AMP/ Whetstone

During:

- Common Exit Ticket Presentation
- Math Course of Study Discussion
- Thursday, December 11th
- Monday, December 16th

After:

- Benchmark Schedule:

Friday, 12/13	Monday, 12/16	Tuesday, 12/17 *Early Release	Wednesday, 12/18 *Early Release
1st, 5th Virtual Health & Virtual Science	2nd, 6th Virtual English	3rd, 7th Virtual Social Studies	4th, 8th Virtual Math

- December 12 - WorkKeys (12th)
- December 17th
- Data Day, Department Meeting, Reteach Plan and Benchmark Analysis Meetings
- March 10 - ACT (11th), ASVAB (10th)


FLORENCE
HIGH SCHOOL

Common Exit Ticket Schedule

Dec. 4	Discrete Math, PreCal AP ELA 11, AP ELA 12 APUSH 10 Earth Science, Physical Science
Jan	Geometry, Algebraic Connections ELA 10 Government/Economics Physics & Chemistry
Jan	Algebra II w/Trig, Algebra II ELA 11 USHI 10 & USHI 11 Anatomy & Environmental Science

Focused Meetings

In addition to CPT meetings, Florence City school district has other types of regular meetings that demonstrate the same level of intentionality and focus. Principals meet monthly to make connections to the work they are doing at their schools. Much of this work is related to the concepts learned from the ABPC Networks and elsewhere.

"I have learned to be intentional. Whatever you do, you have to be intentional. What do you want students to know? And we do that in our CPT. "

~ Florence City school district principal discussing common planning time

Collectively, the way in which meetings are held has changed dramatically because of implementing ABPC meeting protocols. Integral to Florence City school district's culture, staff reimagined the monthly principal meeting to embed ABPC best practices. As a result, these meetings now allow principals and assistant principals to have a set time to meet and discuss ways to

tweak learning to fit the specific needs of students and staff at their school. The revamped meeting structure has helped principals "stay focused and on topic so time is used efficiently and effectively." Administrators noted that attending the KLN gatherings and reading the book, *Internal Coherence* (Forman et. al., 2017) were vital to staff reimagining their meeting structure.

"We are learning how to take all the different parts [we are learning] and make them into a quilt so they are not separate. They all work together."

~ Florence City school district administrator discussing one function of common planning time



Professional Learning

Continuous learning is a hallmark of Florence's work toward systemic change. District leaders have developed many coordinated processes to provide professional learning for all teachers, administrators, and staff. ABPC's Networks have been a consistent venue for knowledge, skills and support. The superintendent had positive things to say about their work with ABPC, "We were hooked from the start. We got there fast because ABPC helped

"ABPC best PD of my whole career- plus they are always available to support and provide help anytime."

~ Florence City school district staff

us to springboard into all the later work, like working with UVA, because they built scaffolds." The superintendent also appreciated that ABPC provided a cohort of like-minded people across the state to whom they could go with questions and share practices.

Monthly Principals' Meetings help to keep campuses on track and to hone each skill or mindset. In addition, the district has four annual Data Days where staff examine data, plan for improvement, and learn new skills. Although the structure of the Data Days was provided by the Florence City school district principals, analyzing data is a key skill also supported through the ABPC Networks.

Another key strategy for professional learning is that Florence City Schools chooses a focused topic for professional learning each year. This addresses one of the more challenging aspects of district wide change: pacing. To inculcate staff to all of the new skills and knowledge, to be able to plan when and how to provide information about each topic, and to be certain the skills have taken hold before moving on is an enormous undertaking. Staff from Florence City School district determined the best way to do so would be to choose an annual topic. As part of the process, the annual topic leads into the following year's topic, an approach the ABPC Networks also use. Teachers indicated that focusing their learning on an annual topic was extremely helpful for adding new knowledge without feeling overwhelmed. During interviews, teachers stated that they had tackled formative assessments, learning targets, exit tickets and were learning Kagan Structures (Kagan Online, 2020) as part of their focused professional learning strategies. In regard to learning Kagan Structures, one teacher mentioned that they "learn one Kagan Structure each month."

"We were hooked [on implementing ABPC best practices] from the start. We got there fast because ABPC helped us springboard into later work, like working with UVA, because [ABPC] built scaffolds."

~ Florence City school district superintendent discussing the development of professional learning opportunities

One principal described Florence City school district's professional learning process in the following manner: "Last year we worked on establishing a purposeful common planning time (CPT) and this year on coaching the teachers using the Whetstone feedback and Walk Through system. In CPT this year we are using a common exit ticket and analyzing student answers to that. We encourage them to meet more than once a week, but once a week with me is required."

The administrators could see how beneficial the ABPC Networks were but needed to have a broader reach to all the teachers and administrators in the district. To create and sustain system wide change they needed a forum for all to learn. Having the teachers and administrators who attended the networks teach their peers felt daunting. One teacher explained this fear in the following way, "When I went to PCN I had no idea how to take that [the learning] back and only having one planning period with my content area. The IP helped share it school wide, but I had no idea how to share it with my department. I was the only teacher to go [from my school] so how would it get to the rest of the grades or contents? And then plan the pacing and the content to be implemented, it was overwhelming." To combat this feeling, the Falcon Learning Conversations Network (FLCN) was born.

"Last year, we worked on establishing a purposeful common planning time, (CPT), and this year on coaching the teachers on Whetstone feedback and Walk Through system. In CPT this year we are using a common exit ticket and analyzing student answers to that. We encourage [teachers] to meet more than once a week, but once a week with me is required."

~ Florence City School principal

Highlighted Promising Practice: Falcon Learning Conversations Network (FLCN)



Falcon Learning Conversations Network (FLCN) is the Florence City Schools' answer to a tough question school districts across the country face: "How do we provide high quality professional learning for our teachers and staff while making good use of scarce resources?"

After years of sending teams to ABPC Networks, staff from Florence City Schools and ABPC staff developed the FLCN using principles of high-quality professional learning gleaned from ABPC. FLCN is presented locally so that all teachers and staff can attend, rather than the select few that were represented at ABPC networks. It is important to note that the FLCN did not replace ABPC network attendance; instead, some staff attend the FLCN in addition to attending ABPC Network gatherings. Florence City Schools staff also developed the FLCN to translate and turnaround all the information that teams learned from ABPC Network gatherings without overwhelming those who attended the gatherings. In creating the FLCN, IPs and administrators worked directly with ABPC staff to create a collaborative learning experience for all Florence City School staff without incurring travel expenses.

"FLCN came [about] because we wanted all teachers to have a great PD experience."

~ Florence City School IP discussing FLCN

"I feel like when I would go to PCN and try to bring it back a lot would get lost in translation. I thought I didn't do as good of a job getting the point across."

~ Florence City School IP discussing FLCN

The FLCN occurs four times each year taking a full instructional day to train all staff on the districts' goals. As one principal stated, "[FLCN's are] a way we communicate our expectations." In the gatherings, new materials necessary to implement best practices or build upon existing strategies are shared. Data are a critical feature of the meetings, with data

discussions driving the selection of session topics and helping steer the conversations during each session. As an added feature, all of the materials shared during the sessions are

stored online for future use. (<https://www.teachlearnconnectfcs.org/flcn-resource-materials.html>).

Initially ABPC staff helped design and conduct the FLCN in collaboration with Florence City school district staff, with their support waning over time. Currently, Florence City School staff have taken full ownership of the FLCN with ABPC staff providing support on an as-needed basis. For the most part, FLCN sessions are separated by elementary and secondary school levels, with some sessions available for staff from all school levels. While most of the learning opportunities are facilitated by the IPs and other Florence City Schools staff, experts are also invited to present on specific topics.



Instructional Partners' Diverse Role in Professional Learning

One key piece of the professional learning support system at Florence City school district is the role of the Instructional Partner (IP). Each campus has its own IP who is critical to teachers' professional learning and ongoing support. To sustain these crucial positions, Florence City school district staff have committed to funding these seven positions 10 months per year. This financial obligation indicates the level of commitment the Florence City school district superintendent and Board of Education have had to improve student learning.

IPs have many duties, with the majority focused on professional development and support for teachers. **IPs use cognitive coaching techniques to partner with teachers and support teacher driven learning in a dialogical manner.**

In addition, IPs attend the ABPC Instructional Partners Network (IPN) with their campus principal four times a year. Three of these meetings are gatherings specifically for IPs and principals to learn and plan together, and the fourth is an Instructional Round (IR) in which staff are invited to visit other districts implementing ABPC strategies to see ABPC best practices in action.

One coaching challenge the IPs encounter is having hard conversations with teachers. IPN retreats help IPs envision coaching as a partner with the teacher rather than from the top down. One IP described their experience learning these skills as, "life altering in all the best ways and not just [at work], but how to help people be self-governing, in any type of relationship."

In the Florence City school district, the IPs have a district administrator who supports their work and also provides additional professional learning for the IPs. The Florence City school district website includes a resource section for IPs including blogs, videos and links to books and research. The IPs meet twice monthly with their district administrator who provides reflection pieces to advance their learning and improve their coaching skills. The IPs also regularly engage in book studies, and in 2019-2020 they studied the Impact Cycle by Jim Knight.

"IPN retreats are where we learned to be an IP, about partnership principles, and what our roles should look like. We went alone [to IPN] at first and then we started going with our principals and it made a good partnership with our principal and we got to plan with them, how to [coach and partner with them], twice a year for several years. That is where we learned what being an IP could be like... more how to work with the adults in your building. I also learned ways to position myself as a partner. In this role you are not above people. I learned a lot about that."

~ Florence City school district IP discussing IPN



Student Engagement

Many of the best practices implemented in Florence City school district are focused on improving student learning. A critical strategy to improve students' experiences in school is to help them become more engaged in and responsible for their own learning. To increase student engagement, Florence City School staff use the following skills and techniques:

- Learning Targets
- Data Notebooks and Student-Led Conferences
- Kagan Structures
- Equitable Participation
- Quality Questions

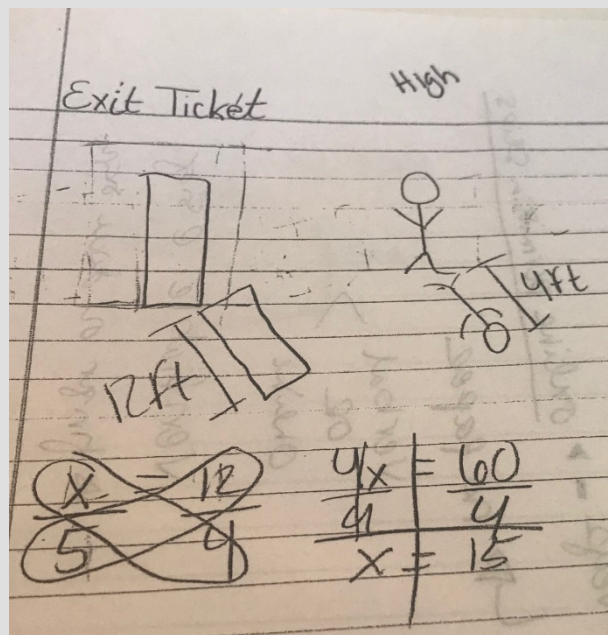
"Once we limprove student engagementl, then teachers will not be doing more than their share of the work. That is part of the problem, teachers do the heavy lifting of the learning, and let students sit back and "receive" it. When students are engaged, they are doing the heavy lifting!"

~ Florence City school district principal discussing ABPC strategies to improve student engagement

Teachers use formative assessments, questioning techniques and exit tickets (Figure 4) to better understand how and what students are learning and when students need extra support.

Teachers said they liked using formative assessment and questioning techniques with their students because they provided real-time information on when and where students needed support. One teacher explained how they "used to teach and give a test and if you did bad, [then that was] too bad [for the student]." Thanks to the intentional strategies Florence City school district staff have implemented, that thought process has shifted. During focus groups with teachers, they often described themselves as more intentional about their teaching now than they were before using these strategies. Teachers felt that in addition to having a better understanding of students'

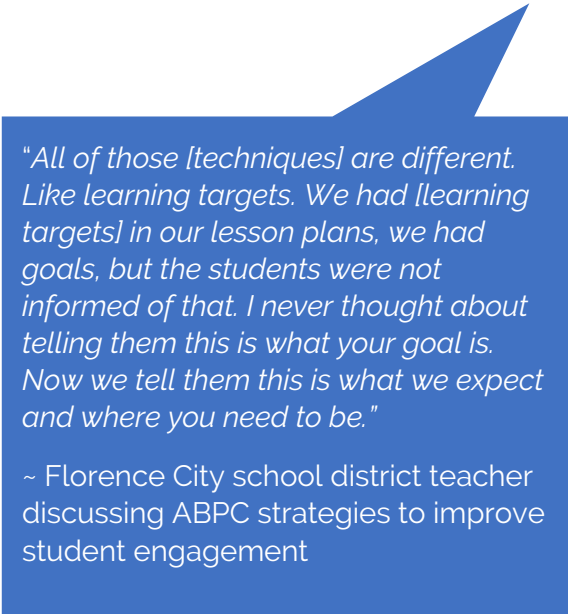
Figure 4. An example of a students' exit ticket.



knowledge prior to a test, students themselves are more aware of what they need to learn prior to taking a test now than they were prior to staff implementing APBC best practices. In this way, students have truly taken ownership of their own learning.

This culture shift was evident in the widespread use of learning targets and Kagan structures to encourage student participation and engagement. Some teachers used popsicle sticks to determine who should answer questions, while others used techniques like, "Think, Pair, Share" or "Think Time" to encourage students to explain their thinking to each other and to the teacher.

Although these techniques looked different across grades and classrooms, the effective use of these skills and techniques was frequently observed across all schools and grade levels.



"All of those [techniques] are different. Like learning targets. We had [learning targets] in our lesson plans, we had goals, but the students were not informed of that. I never thought about telling them this is what your goal is. Now we tell them this is what we expect and where you need to be."

~ Florence City school district teacher discussing ABPC strategies to improve student engagement



Student Engagement in Action

The following is an example we observed in a 4th grade English classroom.



As we entered the classroom, the teacher said, "Do you need to discuss anything about these questions? Do it with a partner now."



The teacher displayed several sentences on the overhead projector and asked students to correct grammar.



To get the students started, she prompted them in the following way, "There are lots of problems here." She called on students to find the problems. Students stated the problems aloud and the teacher corrected the sentences on the overhead. As she corrected the sentences, she restated the student's answers using the technical vocabulary, effectively modeling the use of scientific vocabulary. For example, she used words like 'homonym' and 'conjunction' as she restated students' answers.



To further the discussion, she suggested, "If you haven't found a problem [in the sentences] that's when you should discuss it with your partner," encouraging students to use the Kagan Structure of "Think, Pair, Share". This process continued until all issues were found. The teacher used a voice that was positive and encouraging. She modeled persistence to encourage students to get all the answers, and she moved quickly through the lesson effectively keeping students engaged with her pacing.

In the final "Lightning Round," she used students' name cards to randomly select which student answered each question. As students answered, she used the questioning technique to extend their learning. "Yes! We talked about this rule, in order to capitalize *Reading* what do we need?"



Learning Walks/Teacher Observations

Another critical strategy Florence City school district staff implemented to effect change in their district were Learning Walks (LW), teacher observations and Instructional Rounds (IR). Collectively, these terms are used to describe a system of observing teachers in action to learn new techniques, to see certain practices in action, and provide observed teachers with collaborative feedback as they work to improve their practice. Initially, Florence City School district staff used a different district-developed rubric for the classroom observations. Teachers described this rubric as too cumbersome to gain teacher buy in, and the district worked to find one that was both informative and easier to use, landing on the Whetstone system.

Although teachers were not fans of the initial rubric, they appreciated the learning they acquired. In describing conducting Learning Walks, teachers shared how they would see a routine that they might already use, but in a different way, or see many ways a teacher might present a Learning Target and then get new ideas. Teachers were also concerned that if they did not observe a routine or practice on the form, they might be held accountable for not doing it.

"Honestly when we did [observations] and we had the form, it was not helpful for teachers because there was ZERO feedback. Now we have moved into a different format, so you get feedback right away, although of course it's not teachers in there it's principals or the iP. But now you get feedback immediately. I like that a lot. It was good for us to go into classes and see what [other teachers] are doing, but you would ask, 'Do you have any suggestions for me?' And that form was so long and in 10 minutes there was no way you could observe everything on that form."

~ Florence City school district teacher discussing original observation rubric

"Just seeing how [teachers] are all doing stuff differently and you could take it back to your class and try it out."

~ Florence City school district teacher discussing observation process

Additionally, principals indicated that they were often looking for different things on the Learning Walks, as compared to looking at the same practice across all grades and campuses. One explained how he planned to examine this 'look for' data and present it for discussion at the next Data Day. After using the Florence City school district's learning

walk rubric for a period of time, the superintendent researched other technical solutions to the challenges that teachers and other school leaders experienced (e.g., the rubric was too long, there were too many strategies to observe, inconsistent observation protocol). To address this, Florence City school district staff currently use [Whetstone](#), a classroom observation tool and includes support materials called *Get Better Faster*. In this system, principals do 3-4 walkthroughs per week, entering the feedback online. To ensure all teachers are observed, principals rotate observed teachers and content areas, trying to see each core content area teacher at least once every 20-30 class days. Principals first examine the teacher's lesson plan and consult the *Get Better Faster* scope and sequence to determine the lesson's progression. They use this scope and sequence to conduct the observation and provide feedback for improvement based on focus area. Instead of looking for areas of weakness, principals find the highest level of work during an observation and direct their comments to that. Because the system is online, it allows observers to share

their feedback instantly with teachers regarding what they observed and opportunities for growth. In this dynamic system, the teacher can have a dialogical coaching conversation with their principal. Teachers and principals can also use checkboxes to signify which notes can be shared with different staff members, and which parts of the scope and sequence they focused on during the observation.



Data Days

Similar to other ABPC school districts, a practice Florence City school district staff implemented was embedding data use in all meetings and decision-making processes. Relying on data is a key strategy in ABPC Network meetings and is one of the techniques all of the spotlight districts used. Similar to other ABPC spotlight districts, Florence City school district staff data use has become embedded into their daily work. We observed staff using data during regular learning walks, in daily collaborative planning time, and even during formative assessments in classrooms. As with other Florence City school district practices, administrators have taken the initial training provided by ABPC and tailored it to their school district's needs. Most notably, were the changes made to Florence's Data Days which were streamlined based on work the staff did with the University of Virginia (UVA).

"The data says a lot I don't have to. I can ask questions and that stirs dialogue."

~ Florence City school district IP discussing data use

"I surveyed the principals to see what they were focusing on in the observations [Whetstone] rubric. Everyone was focusing on different things. I am going to bring this to the next Data Day so we can talk about it and see if we want to make a change."

~ Florence City school district principal discussing what they will bring to the next Data Day meeting

Data Days are convenings that occur four times each academic year. During Data Days, district and campus staff meet in school level teams (i.e., elementary, middle and high school) and look at a variety of data addressing the progression of student learning within each campus and grade. At the elementary school level, staff routinely examined testing data gathered from Dibels, Scantron, and other school-specific benchmark tests. These data were then used to backwards plan for instruction in the

subsequent nine weeks. Staff from all school levels examined attendance and discipline data. At the middle and high school levels, in addition to examining assessment, attendance, and discipline data, staff examined students' progress on college applications or SAT/ACT test taking.

During Data Days, teacher observation data from the Whetstone system is often examined. Conversations with staff suggested that they all felt the process of examining data, talking about how to use it, and what it meant was instructive and helped to keep implementation focused and steady. Findings from the overall school data, strengths, weaknesses and

recommendations for improvement from the Data Days discussions are what drive professional learning topics.

Opportunities for Growth

In addition to the successes staff from Florence City school district have experienced, district leaders noted the following areas as opportunities for growth:



Leadership and contextual changes. In the last few years there have been many state and local level contextual changes, a new governor and superintendent, and as leadership changes so do the beliefs about education. District leaders are looking to have critical conversations with state and local administration about how to keep key practices going while simultaneously attending to changes in focus and regulations that frequently occur.



Sustaining best practices within Florence City Schools. A problem endemic to all public education is attrition. This challenges district leaders to effectively maintain the same level of excellence and motivation to implement ABPC key practices. To retain staff and promote continuous learning, Florence City Schools leaders have created an innovative incentive system. Specifically, the district will pay for the education of teachers and administrators who want to gain additional certificates or educational levels if they will commit to stay with the district for three years after completion.



The diverse role of Instructional Partners. In Florence City Schools, IPs support teachers through cognitive coaching, modeling effective teaching strategies, and supporting teachers' ongoing learning. However, IPs also manage some student testing and often serve as the liaison between teachers and school administrators and between their campus and the district. Some of this tension comes when new principals arrive and are uncertain of the IP's role and how it fits within their school. Although IPs also attributed this to a lack of clearly documented job duties, administrators note that they have a written job description. Opportunity exists here to revisit this role and provide clarity about the function of IPs at each school.

"For me part of the challenge is the title itself [Instructional Partner]. We have coaching but trying to balance all the district responsibilities you can't be fully invested in coaching because they put so much on us. I wish coaching were a bigger part of my day. We are literally helpers to anyone in the building with anything. I want to be a partner with anyone who needs me. It makes for a hodgepodge. Be helpful, be helpful at all costs and that builds a relationship."

~ Florence City school district IP discussing their role

Summary

Each of the spotlight districts we observed had its own unique way of implementing the practices learned from ABPC gatherings. Nowhere is this truer than at Florence City school district. Throughout their partnership they have looked to ABPC as a source of skills and information and then continued to examine these to determine the best way to implement for *their students*. Critical elements of the systemwide change efforts observed at Florence City school district included Common Planning Time, continuous examination of data to make informed decisions, and becoming a “learning district” by focusing on ongoing professional learning for all.