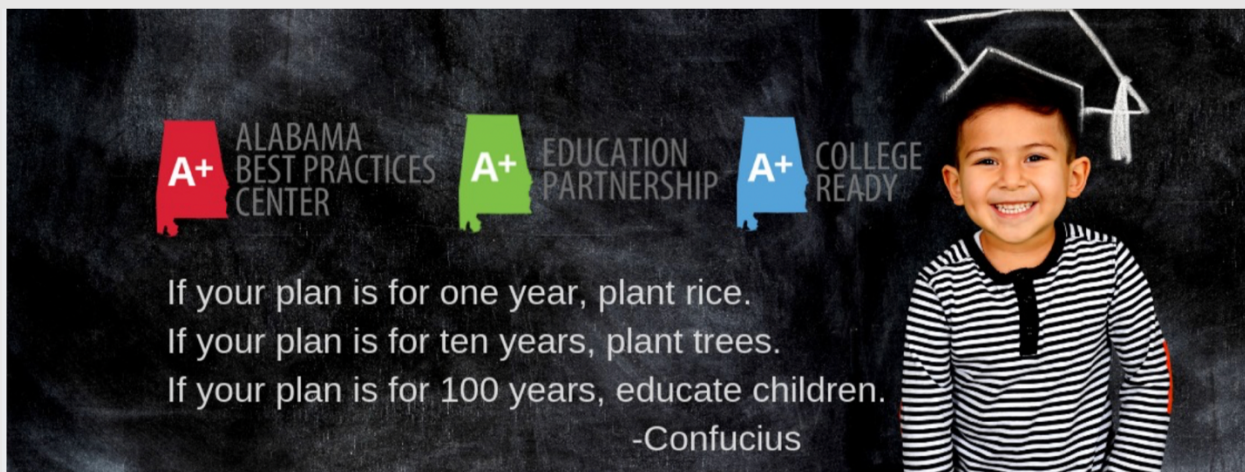


ALABAMA BEST PRACTICES CENTER EVALUATION



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Aug 2020

ALABAMA BEST PRACTICES CENTER EVALUATION



Oxford City School District Case Study

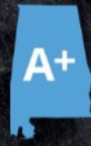
Do as I Do!



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.

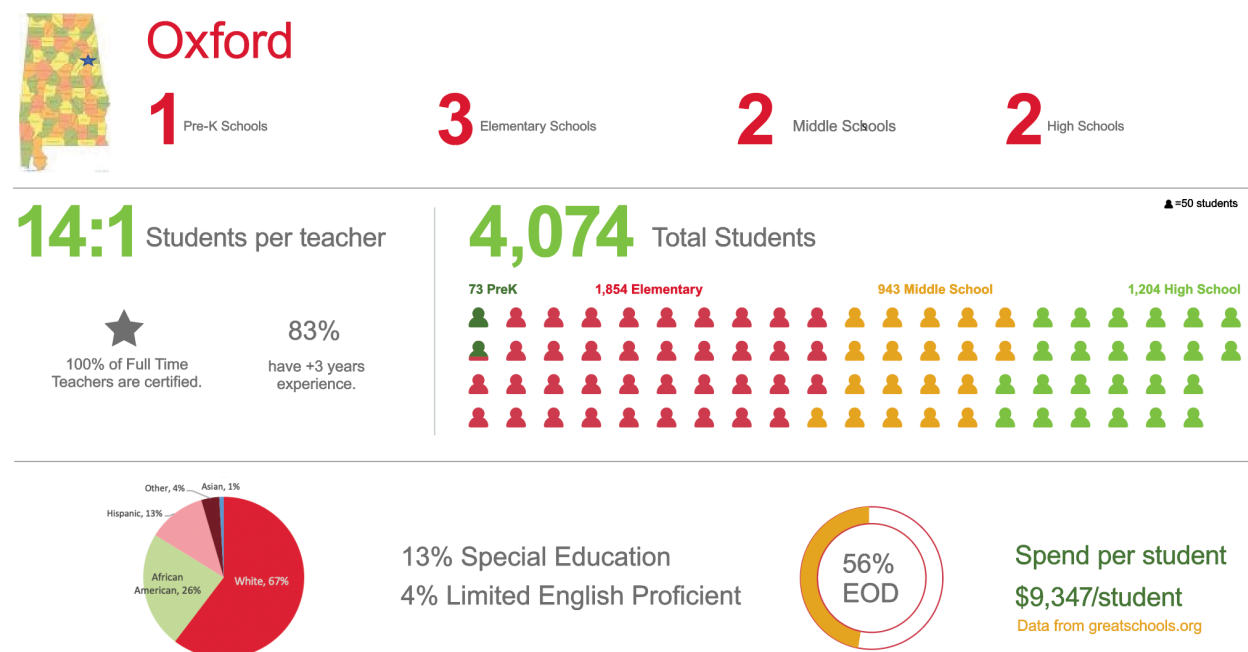
-Confucius



About Oxford City School District

Located in East Alabama, midway between Atlanta and Birmingham, Oxford City school district serves Pre-K through 12th grade students. The Oxford City school district is comprised of seven schools: one Pre-K school, four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school.

Figure 1. Oxford City School District Demographics



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

Oxford City School District's Journey with ABPC

The Oxford City School district began their journey with the Alabama Best Practices Center (ABPC) in 2011, when the superintendent joined the Superintendents Learning Network (SLN). The superintendent was involved in SLN each year until the network disbanded in 2018.

During an interview, the superintendent described participating in the SLN as seminal in the development of both his and Oxford City School district's adoption of best practices and commitment to fostering

"I had to learn to be vulnerable. That's not something that superintendents are used to being or talking about. To become a learner though, I had to be able to say, 'I don't know,' that was huge!."

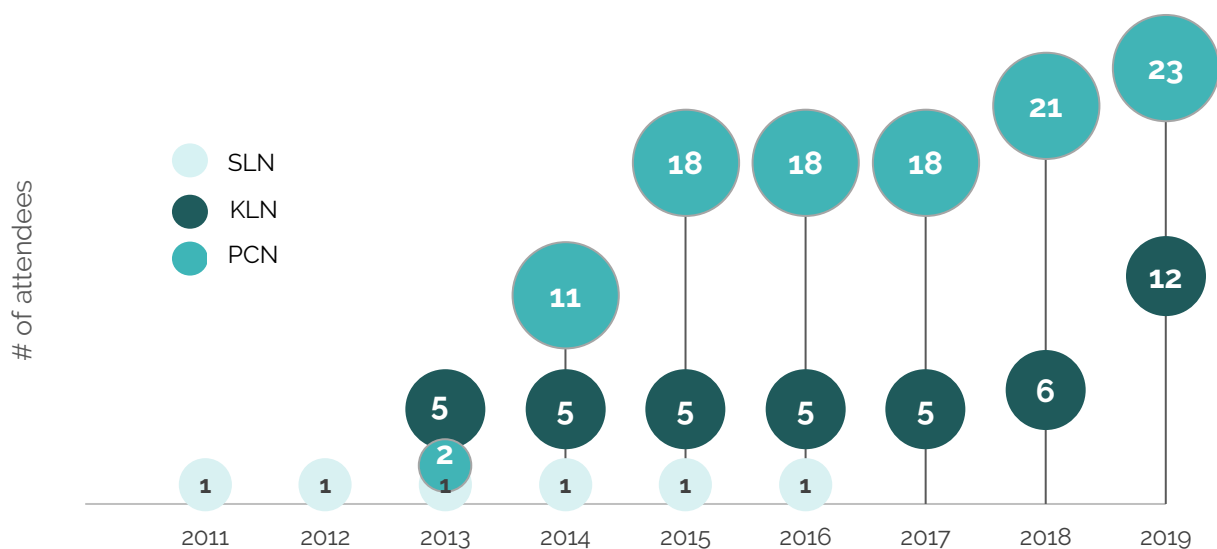
~ Oxford City School district superintendent

a learning culture. Of particular value in the SLN were connections made between the attending superintendents and creating accountability to ensure superintendents practiced what they preached.

Even though SLN is no longer in place, the effects continue - three of the members of Alabama Best Practice Center's (ABPC's) SLN are now applying what they learned in SLN to their work in state-level education leadership roles.

In the nine years since Oxford City School district began partnering with ABPC, staff have adopted a consistent pattern of attendance at the ABPC Network gatherings (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Teacher participation in ABPC network meetings increased over time, with 23 teachers attending PCN in 2019.



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

Overall, Oxford City school district exhibited an attendance pattern that built over time and then stabilized. In recent years, the pattern has been consistent: the superintendent attended the SLN until it was disbanded, a consistent group of administrators has attended the KLN, and the number of teachers attending the PCN grew substantially over the 8-year period (see Figure 2). It should be noted that the PCN consisted of a stable group of teachers with rotating additions from each school.

Placing a high level of importance on attending ABPC network meetings likely contributed to buy-in among district staff, and a shift in the district's culture, to model desired behaviors, share responsibility for implementing program goals, and ultimately influenced program success across schools.

Although attendance at ABPC is a critical component of system-wide change, a second equally important component is the ongoing sharing of that professional learning with

colleagues and others who do not attend. Here, the district members share both formally through the 'turn around processes' described later, and informally through meetings, discussions, and observations of the work. In these ways all or nearly all members of the district participate in ABPC professional learning, creating a *continuous learning district*.

Key Practices, Successes, & Opportunities

The following were identified as key practices, successes, and opportunities for Oxford City school district.

Key Practices

Data gathered from the site visit suggests that staff from all schools within the Oxford City school district are effectively engaging in the following practices. These practices have helped drive the positive culture shift observed at Oxford City Schools:



Implementing meeting systems and procedures



Learning from observing others during walkthroughs and instructional rounds



Daily collaborative planning time for all core content area teachers



Shared leadership and decision making



Focus on student learning above all else



Key Practice: Shared Vision

The Oxford City school district shines in having a shared vision and a strong commitment to implementing that vision.

From top to bottom this team is on the same page with a shared understanding of where they are going and how they will get there.

Responsibilities are also shared; superintendent, district and school administration, teachers and students are all walking the walk and talking the talk.

"We are focused on what's best for students!."

~ Oxford City school district teacher

Key Strategies

In the course of the site visit we observed several additional practices that contributed to high levels of success:



Effective modeling of all practices at all levels of the system



Consistent use of data to guide practice and decision making



The Oxford City school district has had a culture change that includes a clearly articulated and consistent vision

"We do not add lots of different programs, we look at our data and implement pedagogical best practices".

~ Oxford City school district teacher

Oxford City School District: Intentionally Planning for Best Practices

Best practices do not happen overnight, and that holds true for the Oxford City School district. This section of the report describes the ways in which school and district staff intentionally worked to embed best practices learned from ABPC.

Oxford City school district staff consistently described how they effectively implemented this multifaceted, ongoing system of best practices.

Slow and deliberate rollout. First and foremost, staff described that implementation was deliberately slow and thoughtful. At each juncture, staff planned and practiced each new element before implementing districtwide and moving on. For example, the superintendent attended SLN for two years before he brought on a team to attend KLN meetings.

Another deliberate tactic was that while the PCN teams stayed small and built over time, the KLN and SLN teams remained the same. This was intentional so that the superintendent and the KLN teams could practice the procedures, skills, and thought processes themselves before asking teachers to try them, and well before classroom implementation. The sidebar lists (and we will later describe) the key practices Oxford City school district staff adopted.

"We need to be the cheerleaders about new practices until a critical mass of others are excited about implementing them."

~ Oxford City school district administrators

During the implementation rollout, school and district teams continuously examined the data to ensure their targets were in line with their shared vision: "Is this what is going to be best for student learning?" On average, the team described that they would spend one to two years learning a concept or

skill prior to implementing.

When staff were ready to implement, they followed a deliberate path (Figure 3).



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

Oxford City school district commitment to practicing the knowledge, skills and mindsets learned in the ABPC Networks were observed during our site visit. The skills and mindsets we observed were:



Focused Vision: "Is this what is going to be best for student learning?"



Shared Leadership

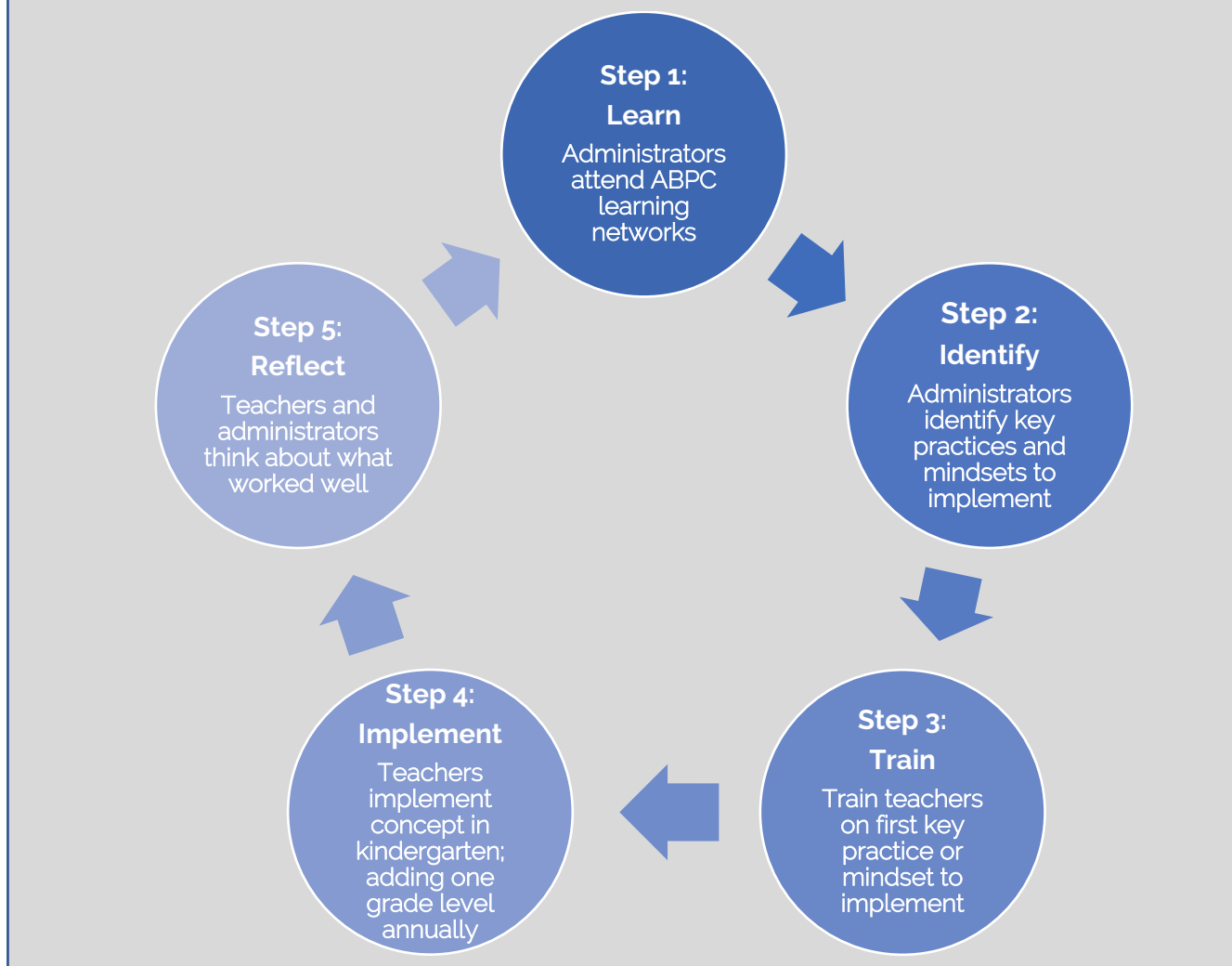


Shared Accountability



Continuous Learning for All

Figure 3. Oxford City school district staff use a deliberate method for implementing each new mindset concept and practice.



At each point when a new grade or group integrated a skill or mindset, there was time for reflection and learning to ensure the best practice was well understood by those implementing and was grade-level appropriate. This process created a sense of shared responsibility for effective implementation, allowed for slow, methodical implementation, and ensured that all staff were knowledgeable of, and comfortable with each concept prior to implementation. By school year 2019-2020, students who first began with the new mindsets and skills were reaching high school.

Culture change. In conversations with Oxford City school district staff, many described a culture shift as integral to effectively implementing best practices. Changing culture within a school system is slow and difficult. In order to shift the culture, all district and school staff had to first change their own mindsets. They were then able to model desired behaviors for others.

Staff were intentional about these changes and monitored progress, allowing for time to reflect, pause implementation or stop implementation completely if a concept was not working or if there was not enough buy-in from staff.

Detailed Results: Oxford City School District Site Visit

A two-day site visit was arranged to better understand the ways in which the procedures, systems, pedagogy and mindsets learned from ABPC network gatherings manifested in the daily practices within the Oxford City school district. In this section of the report, we share in detail what was learned from this visit.

Following an initial interview with Oxford City school district administrators, the evaluation team created a plan for qualitative data collection and site visits. Specifically, evaluators requested documents and other online and pictorial evidence of program implementation to use in analyses.

Next, evaluators interviewed teams of teachers, school administrators and the Instructional Partners (IPs) to gain insight into their perspectives of program implementation. Evaluators visited all six schools in the district, spoke with teachers from every grade level, observed a professional development for English teachers, attended high school collaborative planning time, attended grade level teacher meetings, and attended an administrator meeting led by the superintendent.

In this next section, we describe the findings from our 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.



Procedures for Meetings, Professional Learning, and Student Learning

Using common procedures and protocols was key to the successful implementation of all meetings and professional learning sessions. Based on the work of Leithwood & Seashore-Lewis (2012) and DuFour & Fullan (2013) Oxford City School meetings have an agenda that is rigorously followed and uses timers to keep the agenda on target.

Meeting activities include multiple modalities for learning and focus on a critically important topic. During meetings, school staff shared the responsibility of keeping meetings on track and continually revisited their shared vision. When school staff were in doubt about the centrality of a topic, they asked, "Is this going to help students learn?" or "What is the central idea here?" or "What do we want [students] to get out of it?"

Importantly, all meetings observed (which included three collaborative teacher meetings, two grade level teacher meetings, one professional learning session for English teachers, and one professional meeting for administrators) used these same practices. This consistency across group and meeting type suggests the truly embedded nature of the best practices Oxford City school district staff have inculcated into their culture of learning.

Additionally, espousing standard procedures guaranteed that there is no wasted time in meetings. Indeed, meetings began and ended on time and were focused on student learning. In the space set aside for collaboration in the high school (Figure 4), physical reminders of meeting procedures, such as posters, were prevalent (Figure 5).

Figure 4. The high school collaboration space is an innovative meeting space used by high school teachers, students and community members.



Creating a physical space exemplifying best practices related to collaborative meetings and shared responsibility reinforces the district's shared vision related to this goal.

The high school collaborative meeting space is a large windowed area with several different areas designated for meeting. These areas have a variety of seating configurations including small and large meeting tables, couches with smaller tables, and bar spaces. Some of these areas are private and some are public, making for ample areas for different meeting types.

Although teachers use this space during their daily planning time, it is also used by students to study, meet and hang out. Additionally, the space is available to the general public community for meetings and gatherings. Recently, this space was used by the mayor and other community leaders who met to hear feedback from the Oxford high school students about changes being made in their approach to learning.

Figure 5. One key practice, consistent meeting practices and procedures, is emphasized with physical reminders of these policies which are posted in meeting areas.

OES PLC Process

Questions

1. What do I want students to learn?
2. How will I know if they get it?
- How will students have access to learning?
3. What will I do if they don't get it?
4. What will I do if they do get it?

☐ What do I want students to learn?

- ☐ Yearly Goal
- ☐ Unit Goal
 - ☐ Standards
 - ☐ Proficiency Scales
- ☐ Self-Assessment

☐ How will I know if they get it?

- ☐ Unobtrusive Assessments- **Powerful Tasks**
 - ☐ Identify the planned cognitive demand.
 - ☐ Evaluate, create, apply, analyze, make meaning, find patterns, compare patterns, argue, defend, strategic thinking
 - ☐ Identify the planned engagement qualities.
 - ☐ Learning with others, novelty and variety, interdependence in roles, independence of ideas, create a real-life example, the audience I want to influence, produce a product, expression of concepts or ideas.
 - ☐ Identify the planned academic strategies.
 - ☐ Similarities and differences, summarizing, note-making, non-linguistic representation, generating/testing hypotheses, identify and extend patterns, create a new representation, personalize or make unique decisions about content.
- ☐ Obtrusive Assessments- Audit and reflect on assessments as compared to proficiency scales and standards.

☐ What will I do if they get it or if they don't?

- ☐ Work Sample Analysis
- ☐ Action Planning
 - ☐ Small-Group
 - ☐ Tutoring Options
 - ☐ Toolbox Lesson
 - ☐ Enrichment Opportunities- Level 4 on

Similar meeting agenda posters, procedures and structures were observed in classrooms and other meeting spaces, again reinforcing the importance of these plans and procedures throughout the school. In doing so, staff from all Oxford City schools established a clear shared vision of how to conduct meetings, regardless of participant or meeting space. Embedding standardized procedures and practices helps create the culture shift necessary for true programmatic change to occur. During focus groups with students, many echoed teachers' experiences with meetings, stating that these procedures (e.g., wait time for thinking, multiple learning modalities, and appropriate pacing necessary for student processing and learning) kept them engaged and reduced wasted down time during class.



Instructional Rounds and Walkthroughs

ABPC Networks include a practice called Instructional Rounds (IR) where district teams can formally visit each other's schools and learn about new ways to implement best practices. In the course of our visits, all three of the other districts indicated that they had visited Oxford City schools to engage in Instructional Rounds. **Oxford City School district staff not only conducts IRs with other visiting districts, but also with students, parents and community members.** IRs have a formal process where the participants who visit each classroom have a practice they are looking to see (called a 'look for'), noting when and where they see it. After classrooms are visited, there is a debrief session where the observers discuss what was seen, how it can be applied to other contexts and how it can be improved.

Walkthroughs are a similar practice that is at times less formal. **Most walkthroughs are done by the Instructional Partners as a way to observe the teachers they support by providing feedback and encouragement.** Instructional Partners have a checklist they use to determine what they will observe. These items are determined by the teachers who are

being observed and at times by the practices that the district and school are working to implement. Instructional Partners note that the key to successful walkthroughs are **to first develop a good relationship with each teacher** by listening to their needs and goals and supporting them in achieving them. Instructional Partners and indeed the entire school district staff, work to be certain that walkthroughs are a risk-free environment supporting teacher growth. Similar to the IRs, walkthroughs include written feedback and a reflective conversation about the observation. Instructional Partners have a regular schedule they follow for walkthroughs with new teachers to introduce them to the mindsets and practices the district adheres to. With experienced teachers, they have regular meetings to determine how the teachers would like to be supported.



Regular Collaborative Planning Time and Reflective Practices

During the site visit the research team attended four collaborative planning meetings. These meetings consisted of one high school meeting involving all core teachers grouped by content area, one elementary school meeting with third grade teachers, one elementary school meeting with fourth grade teachers, and one middle school meeting with sixth grade teachers.

After participating in these observations, it was clear that providing this time to teachers drove program success. Recognizing the importance of collaborative planning meetings, Oxford City school district's superintendent worked with the school board to secure funding for additional non-core content teachers. Doing so freed up time in core area teacher's daily schedules to meet, plan, analyze student work and develop assessments aligned with the district's priority standards. Another factor integral to the success of collaborative planning time was consistent utilization of the aforementioned meeting protocols. All observed meetings and protocols had a laser focus on student success. Finally, administrators modeled best practices related to collaborative meeting time. Indeed, during our observations of various planning time meetings, administrators were sitting in on meetings or offering assistance as needed to support learning and provide resources where needed.

"...You have to be careful how much planning time you take from instructional time. It has to be a balance. You need a lot of time with students in this system too."

~ Oxford City school district teacher

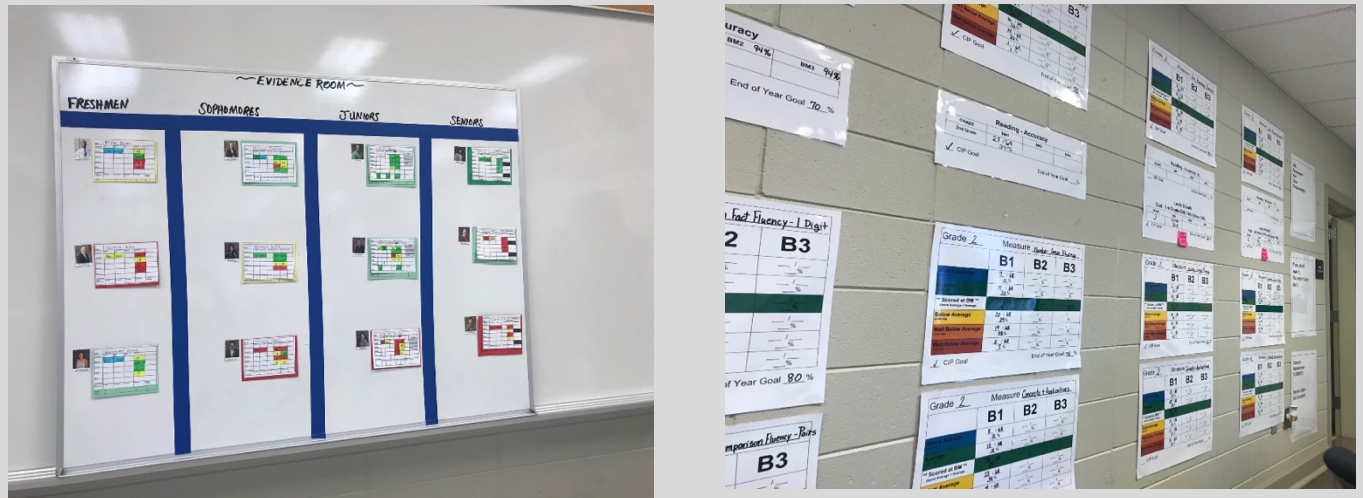


Consistent Use of Data for Student Learning

Oxford City school district teachers and staff routinely used data to improve their instructional practices. Each school had a data room where data were displayed for analysis. Teams met regularly to examine new data as it arrived and planned for celebration and improvement. Data rooms varied in their content and focus. Data were also examined during teachers' daily collaborations, as well as during professional development and administration meetings. The images below depict the use of data and data rooms at the

high school and elementary school levels (Figure 6). Data were also consistently used during professional development and lesson planning.

Figure 6. Staff at Oxford City Schools are used to seeing data displayed in their data rooms (elementary on right and high school on left). This familiarity with data allowed staff to work comfortably with the data instead of fearing it.



Note. Data were aggregated in the elementary school example (right) and were fake in the high school example (left) to protect student identity.

Data Use in Planning Time. During discussions with Oxford City school district staff and observations of activities, we noted that teachers used data during their planning time in a myriad of ways. Most frequently, teachers used it to determine what to teach, when to reteach and when to move on. Teachers also used data to design curriculum and determine which content was critical and which was extraneous. Data were used to examine the effectiveness of pedagogical methods and to formatively assess students' knowledge during class. In this way, teachers were creating their own ongoing professional development embedded within their collaborative meetings. They were given ample time to observe, reflect, and refine their teaching and implementation strategies in real time.

Similarly, administrators used data to track progress at each grade, class and individual teacher level. Administrators used it to design or find appropriate high-quality professional development and to determine the pace at which to implement new elements of the ABPC network learnings.

"We do not add lots of different programs, we look at our data and implement pedagogical best practices."

~ Oxford City School teacher

Oxford City school district staff implemented a large portion of their professional learning via job embedded professional development. This professional development was often in the form of teacher observations, co-teaching, model teaching, data discussions and planning for student learning. Finally, teachers also chose a professional development based on their own assessment of their needs.



Data Use in Action!

The following describes how elementary school staff used data to drive instructional planning during a meeting.



Six elementary school staff were in attendance during this meeting. They were comprised of 4 teachers, the Instructional Partner (IP) and the principal.



Teachers started the meeting by reviewing their lesson plan and the 30-60-90 day action plan created for their content and grade level. Staff then read each item on the lesson plan and the 30-60-90 day action plan and rated where they thought they were on the Powerful Task Design rubric (see Figures 6 and 7). One teacher reported what they have been doing with regard to each item on the plan, using classroom work and formative assessment data to look at the progress of individual students. The data were analyzed by student and by level on the Powerful Task Design rubric. The teachers looked at students moving between the levels and came up with ideas for how to celebrate growth.



The teacher leading the meeting asked several discussion questions to spark conversation and collaboration:

"What are the areas for growth?", "Can we work on [these reading concepts] in science too?", and "What about the EL students, do you notice growth for them?"

Teachers discussed each of these questions, pointing to student and classroom data to strategize how to help the different groups of students.



Next, teachers analyzed a reading task and the accompanying discussion questions for the task (which required analysis, synthesis, and critical thinking). All teachers then looked at where the task fell on the Powerful Task Design rubric in terms of level of rigor. While engaging in this activity, one teacher read the rules for powerful tasks to ensure staff were in agreement on where the reading task fell on the rubric in terms of level of rigor.



The teachers asked each other, "What are the acceptable responses?" To determine student understanding, teachers asked, "What do [students] struggle with? Can we link this to something they have done before?" Another teacher read the grade standards. Teachers also looked at the 4th grade standards to get where they are going to.

Two teachers built a response together while two other teachers analyzed how they would use the response. For example, teachers asked, "Is it student friendly?" and, "What does this part mean?" Teachers discussed the response until they came to agreement on how to categorize the example on the rubric and how to ensure students could understand the example.



Student-Centered Teaching Strategies

Oxford City school district teachers employed many strategies to ensure students were engaged in learning. It should be noted that the research-based strategies Oxford City school district staff used were not age dependent but rather strategies that were more holistic approaches that could be modified for younger (or older) students. Student engagement strategies were used to improve student learning. The following strategies were discussed during focus groups and observations:

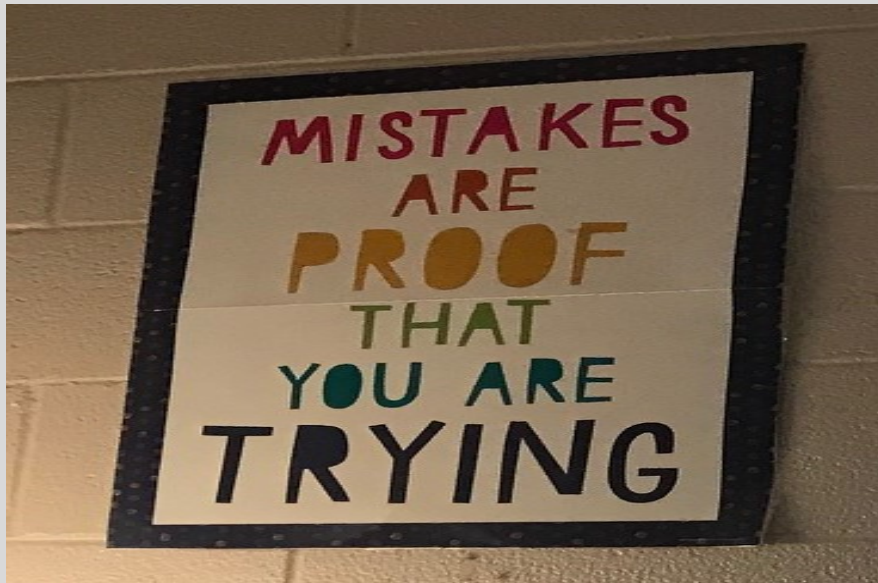
"You haven't learned this YET!"

~ Oxford City school district teachers



Creating a learning environment where it is expected that learners try and fail and try again (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Elementary schools display posters to reinforce a growth mindset



Using a set agenda or lesson plan including high level questioning techniques that force learners to engage with the material, think critically and explain their thinking



Posting learning targets prominently in student friendly language so that students know the purpose of their learning. Asking students to self-assess (Figure 8) where they are on a 1-4 scale (mirroring the Powerful Task Design scale) several times throughout the lesson (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Fourth-grade Oxford City school district teachers created a self-assessment for students to monitor their progress on specific skills

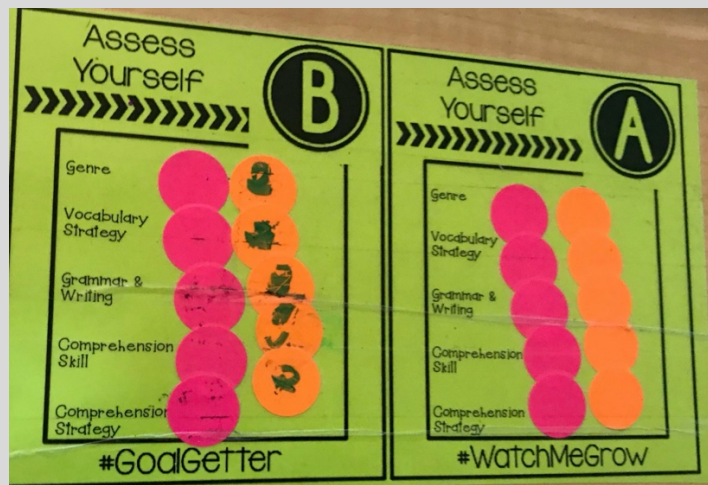
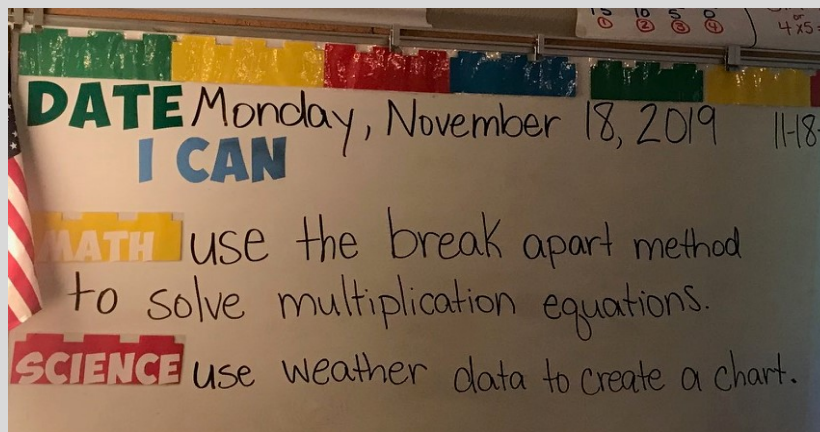


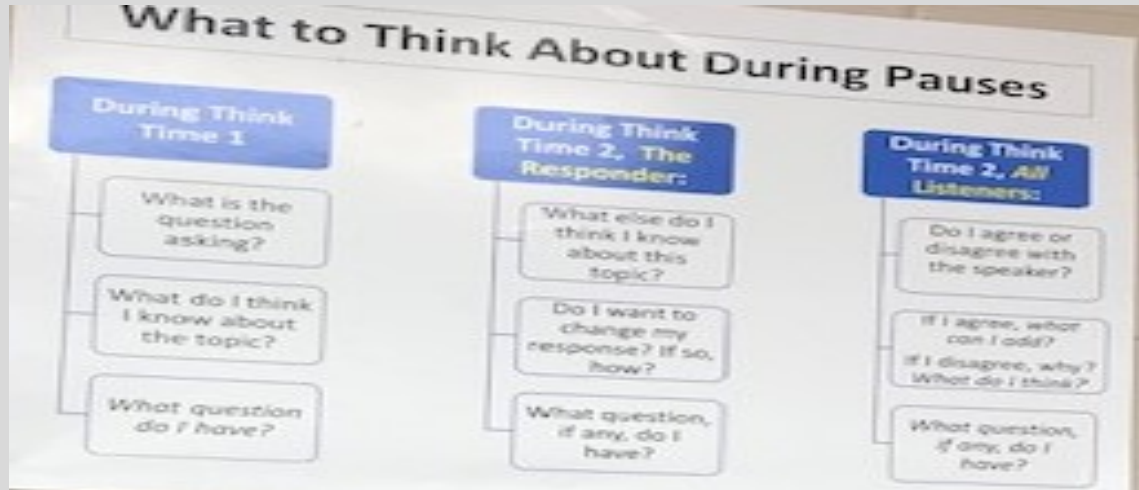
Figure 9. Oxford City school district elementary school teachers use a poster of learning targets as a method of reinforcing these targets among their students.





Pacing the class so that learners stay engaged- neither too fast nor too slow- and using a variety of learning activities so that students learn in many modalities (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Oxford City school district teachers used a Three Pause Chart (Walsh & Sattles, 2016) including example questions for students to use during lessons



Powerful Task Design. Teachers used a strategy called Powerful Task Design (Antonetti & Stice (2018) to plan for their lessons in such a way as to understand the qualitatively different levels involved in the process of mastering each concept and skill.

Figure 11. Teachers used the Powerful Task Design rubric (Antonetti & Stice, 2018) in lesson planning to monitor student progress in the lessons.

The Powerful Task Rubric					
		The "Rigor Divide"			
	Power Component	1	2	3	4
Cognitive Demand	Bloom – Revised Taxonomy Examples	Recall Name the steps	Understand Inter with the steps	Apply/Analyze Infer with text support	Evaluate/Create Argue, defend, or justify
	Antonetti/Garver/Stice – Meaning	Repeat accepted meaning	Restate or reproduce accepted meaning	Making meaning: Find patterns Find use for patterns	Compare patterns Add/combine/ignore patterns
	Webb – DOK (Assessment)	Recall	Skill/Concept	Strategic thinking	Extended thinking
	Stein/Smith – Mathematics	Memorization	Procedures without connections	Procedures with connections	Making sense
Connected Learning (Tech)	Antonetti/Stice	Retrieve Copy & paste	Click here, click here, click . . . Prescriptive Learning Accessible Learning	Control-Interests power learning Question, share, contribute, Link, provide feedback	Produce, create Experiment, Design
Academic Strategies*	Similarities and Differences	List facts about A and B	Parallel facts about A and B	Compare or contrast by trait	
	Summarizing/Note-making	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	

All teachers planned their curricular units using a format that delineated the rigor level of each task on a rubric using a 1 to 4 scale (1 indicated low rigor, and 4 indicated high rigor;

Figures 11 and 12). Each task in a unit was then rated for its level of rigor and teachers used the plan to ensure they taught all priority standards while providing adequate rigor. Teachers then collected and analyzed student work to understand where each student was on the rubric, how many students were at each level, and how to reteach lessons based the types of mistakes their students made. All units were posted in an online repository shared with all teachers in Oxford City school district.

Figure 12. Lesson plans followed the Powerful Task Design rubric (Antonetti & Stice, 2018) to help strategize instruction.

Math Domain: Operations and Algebraic Thinking		
Topic: Solve Multi-Step Word Problems Determining Which of the 4 Operations to Use		
OA.1; OA.2; OA.3 – Ch.2 - 5; Pre-Test, Mid-Point Test, Post-Test, Travel Times Powerful Task		
Grade: 4		
Score		Sample Activities
Score 4.0	In addition to Score 3.0, in-depth inferences and applications that go beyond what was taught. - Create a multi-step word problem using 3 or more of the four operations. - Write out the equation correctly and solve to match the word problem. - Link to OA.1-3 Level 4 examples https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Lkxv7GdqvUuVQcRbPvYvWt1fYvYdMcCpCtBvEd/edit	
Score 3.0	3.5 In addition to score 3.0 performance, in-depth inferences and applications with partial success. The learner will: Solve multi-step word problems determining which of the 4 operations to use. - Interpret a multiplication equation as a comparison, e.g., interpret $35 = 5 \times 7$ as a statement that 35 is 5 times as many as 7 and 7 times as many as 5. - Use drawings and/or equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem, determining multiplicative comparison from additive comparison. (Embedded MP 4) The student exhibits no major errors or omissions.	Sarah bought 7 purses. Each purse had 12 pockets in each. She is going to use 1 pocket in each to hold her keys. How many pockets in all will she have to fill with things?
Score 2.0	2.5 No major errors or omissions regarding 2.0 content and partial knowledge of the 3.0 content. There are no major errors or omissions regarding the simpler details and processes as the student: The learner will: Recognize and understand content specific vocabulary such as: equation, estimation, reasonableness, sum, difference, product, quotient, remainder. The learner will: Understand the four operations procedures such as: - Partially solve word problems using the four operations with whole numbers. - Represent these problems using equations with a letter standing for the unknown quantity. - Assess the reasonableness of answers using mental computation and estimation strategies including rounding. However, the student exhibits major errors or omissions regarding the more complex ideas and processes.	$3 \times b = 15$ $b = 5$ Mr. Brown has 10 students. Mrs. Tap has 12 students. Each child will get 2 popsicles. How many popsicles do they need in all?
Score 1.0	1.5 Partial knowledge of the 2.0 content, but major errors or omissions regarding the 3.0. With help, the student can perform Score 2.0 and 3.0 expectations. Even with help, no understanding or skill demonstrated.	

Clear Focus and Vision Districtwide

As articulated throughout this report, the Oxford City school district has experienced a deep culture change driving the positive outcomes experienced by teachers and staff. Paramount in this culture shift is the clearly articulated and consistent vision that was visible and widespread across all schools. Throughout our observations, teachers, administrators and staff clearly articulated this vision.

"We are focused on what's best for students."

~ Oxford City school district teacher

As a participating ABPC school district, staff selected the structures, mindsets and practices to implement as well as the pace and level of implementation. Oxford City school district staff worked diligently to pace implementation appropriately for their students and staff, generally beginning implementation strategies with the superintendent and district administration for at least a year before rolling it out to school administration, then to teachers and then students. Critical to effective implementation and teacher buy-in was that the superintendent and district staff modeled practices before others were asked to adopt them, thereby increasing staff buy-in.

During school site visits, evaluators noted widespread implementation of key practices integral to shift the culture in Oxford City school district. For example, during observations we found evidence of students in kindergarten through 8th grade using learning targets, self-assessment of learning, rigorous task design, wait time, quality questions and other

high-quality teaching and learning techniques. During communication with staff, teachers, students and administrators, it was obvious that Oxford City school district's vision was clearly articulated along with the critical mindsets, knowledge and practices being implemented as part of this vision. It is important to note that because these practices are being implemented from the early grades up, high school teachers are just beginning to practicing these strategies and will fully implement these strategies in the classroom within the next three to four years.



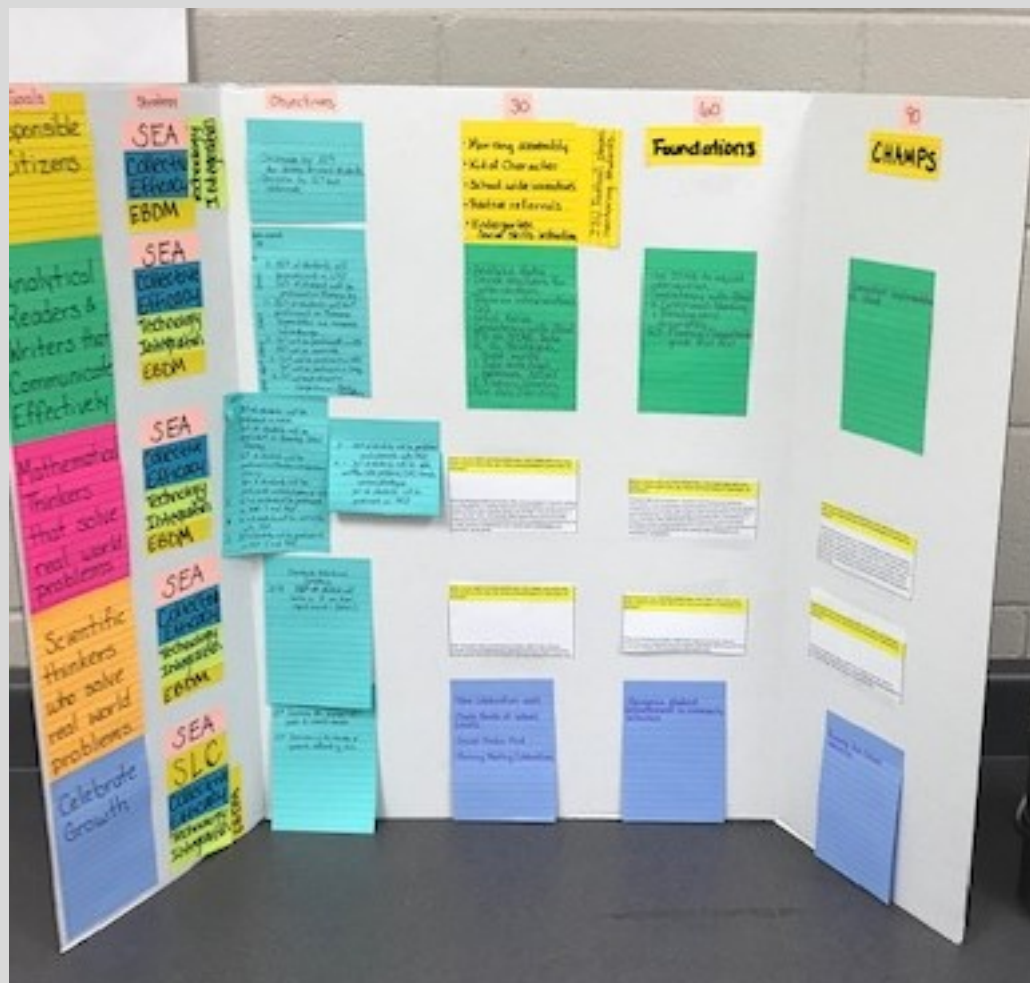
Shared Leadership, Responsibility, and Decision Making

Oxford City schools district staff implemented a collaborative improvement process using a 30-60-90 day action plan to track goals and outcomes. The plans are built from the collaborative improvement process that happens formally three times each year. As part of this process, Oxford City school district staff invited community stakeholders to attend planning meetings to provide input into its final form. The plans were posted prominently in data rooms and meeting rooms and were re-visited on a regular basis to be certain that the district and schools are focused on the goals and meeting them. Doing so not only created community buy-in, but also modeled behaviors and processes that were integral to the culture shift necessary to effectively implement these strategies. This iterative process also highlights the importance of shared responsibility at the community level, ensuring that all family and community stakeholders were involved in the decision making related to student learning.

In addition to **sharing decision making with the community**, practices gleaned from ABPC network meetings included sharing leadership and responsibility across all sectors of the school district. That is, administrators, teachers and students were given responsibility for their own learning and the learning of those with whom they are charged. Teachers sharing a group of students (by content or grade level) were encouraged to work as a team and brainstorm how to improve their teaching and thus students' learning. Students were observed keeping a data folder with all of their work and met regularly with their teacher to analyze progress and plan for improvement. Teachers and students also met with their parents several times a year to explain their work.

Additionally, newly implemented instructional pedagogy included discussion questions that encouraged analysis, critical thinking and active learning. These techniques encouraged engagement at the administrator, teacher, and student level.

Figure 13. Oxford City School staff created 30-60-90 day plans and shared them with community members, increasing buy-in for program implementation across students, staff, administrators and parents.





Opportunities for Growth:

Critical to truly focusing on learning, sharing responsibility, and fostering collaboration among staff, district leaders at all levels identified key areas for growth. The following is a list of those opportunities:



Turnover. Teacher and staff turnover have forced Oxford City school district staff to determine how to bring new staff up to speed quickly. Oxford City school district staff focus on cultural immersion so that new hires understood the need and desire to fit in to the Oxford City school district culture. Although these strategies worked, attrition is often an issue in education and schools/districts should plan for it.



"We have to fight the bossy". This administrator described this mindset as creating a belief system that supported collaborative and shared learning rather than, "telling people what to do." Oxford City school district staff continued to focus on shared leadership and shared responsibility, even though administration conceded that this is difficult.



Shared ownership. Each day, teachers worked hard to go deeper with student ownership. Similar to challenge two, teachers needed to allow students to take responsibility and lead their own learning. One teacher said, "This means teaching in such a way that the students get to take responsibility for as much of their own learning as they can."



Celebrate more! At Oxford City schools, staff worked to find ways and times to celebrate. Celebrations created excitement for learning and are a way to have everyone continue to be motivated to improve. Oxford City school district staff do not want to get so involved in the work that they forget to celebrate.



"Be the energy until our people take it up themselves." The superintendent and administration described themselves as cheerleaders when they have to be, until a critical mass of others is excited about implementing these practices.

Summary

In the nine years since Oxford City School district began partnering with ABPC, staff have experienced a culture shift in the way they think about learning, model behaviors, and embed those strategies in all aspects of teaching and learning. During the site visit, all staff and students could clearly articulate the shared vision, and pinpoint many of the key practices and strategies necessary to achieve those goals. In doing so, staff from Oxford City school district truly walk the walk and talk the talk of Alabama Best Practice Centers, and it is exciting to see where they will go from here.