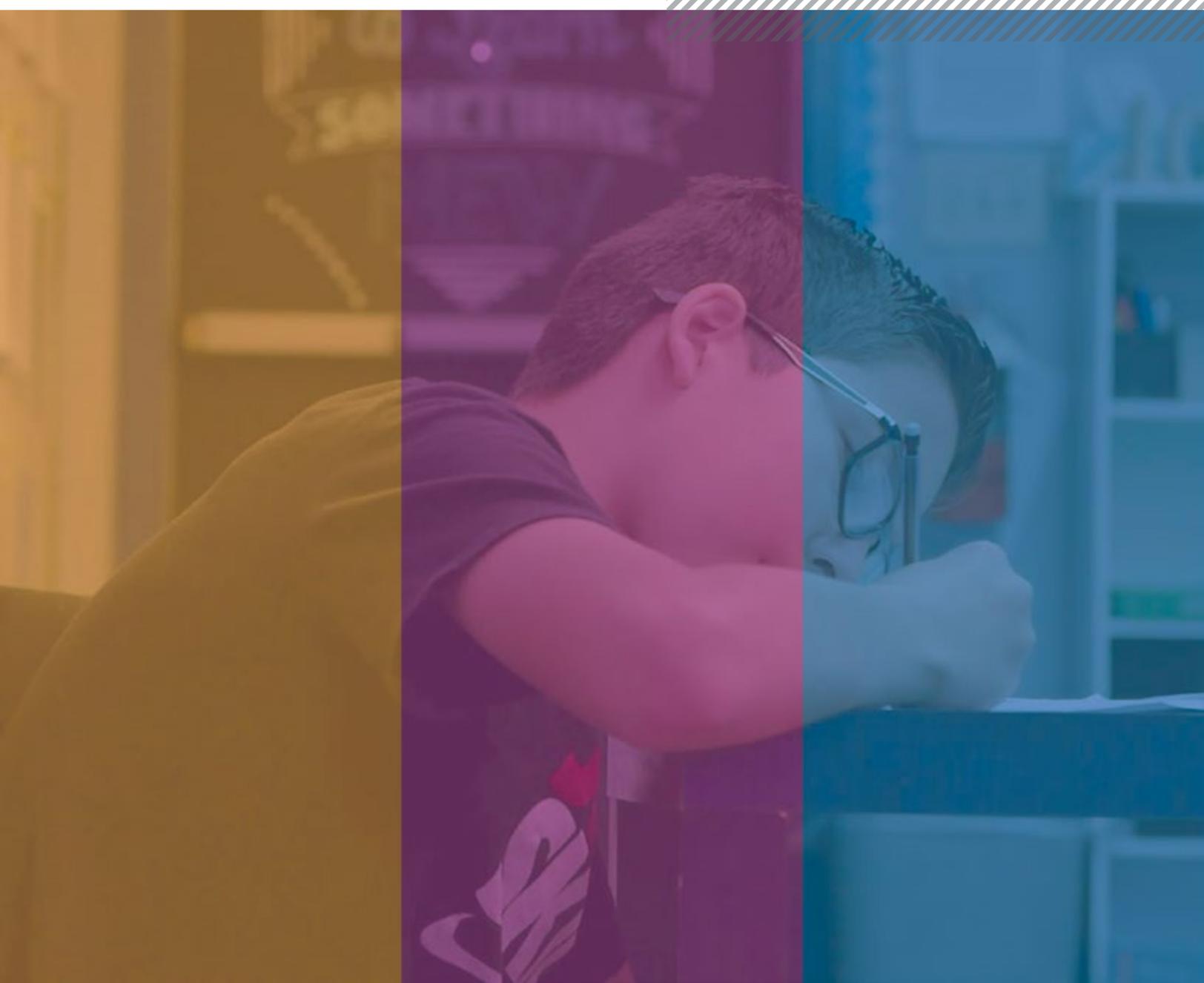CTQ
INFORM. INSPIRE. INNOVATE.

DEEPER LEADERSHIP FOR EDUCATORS,
DEEPER LEARNING FOR EVERY STUDENT:

A LOOK AT THREE DISTRICT APPROACHES

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Making the grade in academic achievement tests matters. But a rapidly changing world and workforce demand that young people master more than basic skills.

It's essential they develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets necessary to participate in the global economy and contribute to a more civil and just American society. (See Box 1.)

> **1** Deeper learning is an umbrella term for the skills and knowledge that students must possess to thrive in the 21st-century global economy as well as participate in America's civic life. At its heart is a set of competencies students must master in order to develop a keen understanding of academic content and apply their knowledge to problems in the classroom, on the job, and in life in general.
>
> William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Making this vision a reality requires making deeper learning accessible to every student. Students from historically disadvantaged communities, including students of color and from lower-income communities, are less likely to access opportunities for deeper learning.[1] As a result, they're at further disadvantage in attaining college and career readiness and high-wage and professional employment[2], a cycle which intensifies inequity over time.

If deeper learning is essential for future success of students and society, why isn't it a more common approach in schools? Deeper learning represents a highly complex and personalized approach to Structuring student learning — one at odds with how most educators have been prepared and with how they themselves experience the P-20 education system as students and later as teachers and administrators.

For deeper learning to take hold fully, sustainably, and at scale, three things must be true:

1. **Conditions must be right.** Systems that support, structure, and incentivize educators' behavior must shift to prioritize and actively support deeper learning goals. Teachers face an "ecosystem of constraints" including "externally imposed curricular requirements, overly narrow standardized testing benchmarks, and metrics that colleges use in admissions processes."

2. **Capacity must be built.** As we point out in our 2016 paper, educators must experience deeper learning principles in their own professional learning and receive explicit support

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[1] American Institutes for Research (2016). Does deeper learning improve student outcomes? Results from the study of deeper learning. Washington, DC: AIR.
[2] The College Board (2017). Education pays 2016: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society. New York, NY: Author.

to translate those principles into their own practice. Put simply, teachers cannot replicate for students what they haven't seen themselves.

3. **Equity must be a requirement.** Public schools increasingly serve large proportions of students from historically disadvantaged populations — and require new thinking and actions. Equity in deeper learning demands thinking differently about (1) people and time; (2) tests and accountability; and (3) role of central offices in professional learning.

What does growing deeper learning look like?
The Center for Teaching Quality's recent work in a small rural district in South Carolina (Clarendon 3), a midsized urban district in California (Pomona), and a large urban district in Kentucky (Jefferson County) offers insights and opportunities to better understand how deeper learning is rooted more deeply into the learning and work of educators and ultimately students. These three districts have begun to rethink professional learning and leadership by attending — in different ways — to the questions of educator capacity, system conditions, and educational equity. While none of them has developed the perfect system, their work to date demonstrates that every district can choose to enable and enact deeper learning for its educators and students. Together they begin to help us see what a system of teacher leadership for equitable and deeper learning outcomes might look like.

	CLARENDON SCHOOL DISTRICT 3 (SOUTH CAROLINA)	POMONA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (PUSD) (CALIFORNIA)	JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (JCPS) (KENTUCKY)
Context	Small rural	Mid-sized urban	Large urban
Schools	2 (50% Title I)	41 (75% Title I)	169 (60% Title I)
Students	1,256 (27 foster youth)	23,185 (255 foster youth)	98,361 (1,000 foster youth)
Teachers	76 (67% with advanced degrees)	1,953 (% with advanced degrees unavailable)	6,738 (85% with advanced degrees)
Free and Reduced Lunch %	70%	86%	62%
English Language Learner %	Negligible	29%	10%
Ethnicity	67% White 25% Black 6% Hispanic	87% Hispanic/Latinx 4% Black 3% Asian 3% White	42% White 37% Black 12% Hispanic

Clarendon School District 3, South Carolina

Walker-Gamble Elementary (WGE) had been struggling to find ways to both raise achievement and close persistent gaps. While the district is majority white, it serves disproportionate numbers of low-income students in an rural community with few resources. (For more on WGE's context and approach, see the case study.)

The state's accountability system, which includes a large number of K-8 and end-of-course assessments, has been a driver in the district (and across the state) for teachers to focus their instruction on the practices believed to improve test scores — primarily, an emphasis on basic skills instruction. In 2016, first-year principal Allen Kirby and Superintendent Connie Dennis questioned whether continuing this approach actually brought them closer to achievement and equity goals. They understood that pursuing elements of deeper learning (locally termed "student-led learning") within their schools required developing and tapping into educator expertise in new ways.

Principal Allen Kirby and his colleagues host learning labs and invite other schools to visit Walker-Gamble Elementary to hear and see how collective leadership operates.

WGE joined a network of schools — supported by the SC Department of Education and the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) — across the state to pilot models of collective leadership (see Box 2) to drive innovation in teaching and learning. In 2018, the effort scaled to include the neighboring secondary school. Prior to joining the Collective Leadership Initiative (CLI), teachers had strong personal ties but had few professional ones. School schedules, structures for PLCs and professional learning, and other conditions left little time to build a shared language around instructional practice, engage in collaborative learning and improvement

efforts, or engage in other research-based best practices for improving collective efficacy, instructional quality, and student learning.

> **2 Collective leadership**
>
> Collective leadership is a set of practices that ensure that team members participate in important decisions that impact student learning and schoolwide success. A study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation found that collective leadership has a stronger influence on student achievement than individual leadership — and administrators do not lose influence when teachers gain it.

Connected to CLI, WGE educators engaged in the process of earning CTQ's micro-credential on Assessing How Time is Currently Used, which served as a catalyst for teachers and administrators (including Superintendent Dennis) to learn together as professionals.

Importantly, this process didn't stop at building teacher capacity. Administrators like Kirby and Dennis made sure that their practice was informed by student-centered deeper learning principles. They, alongside WGE's assistant principal Nancy Moore, joined learning experiences with teachers to demonstrate that new, deeper learning-aligned instruction was a priority. They also worked with teachers to change schedules, meeting protocols, and other structures to set the right conditions for new practices to persist and spread. Perhaps most importantly, teachers began to open up their classrooms to one another — and began to deprivatize their teaching practices.

> After completing the micro-credential and working with my colleagues, I learned how to change my teaching — increasing the amount of time students communicate with each other, working one-on-one or in smaller groups, and helping students communicate (about their learning) through writing.
>
> — Teacher, Walker-Gamble Elementary

Two years later, Walker-Gamble's needs, resources, and staff haven't changed. But how the school uses what it has and the extent to which innovation and best practice are leading to results have changed. Now every quarter, students and teachers set data-informed personalized learning goals. Weekly one-hour sessions in a Personalized Learning Lab now give students time for targeted follow-up through gamified and hands-on learning experiences; online assessment offers real-time data on progress to guide the next day's work. Teachers reported improvements in collective efficacy — a leading factor in student achievement growth — on a staff survey, and student grade retentions have decreased by four points in the last year alone. Administrators reported that scores on formative assessments, which teachers are more likely to believe to be accurate, have soared this past year. **The school experienced a fourfold increase in the percentage of fifth graders who exceeded expectations on SCReady**.

In Clarendon 3, we see how a superintendent, principal, and teachers focus more intentionally on learning together as colleagues, increasing engagement in learning for both students and adults. Progress on deeper learning and equity is occurring in a district that by most standards lacks capacity for rapid improvement. It is small, rural, and serves mostly students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL), all characteristics shared by other small districts in a region that struggles to set and meet basic skill improvement as well as deeper learning goals. We wonder how this small district can influence other communities by informing how the field thinks about capacity for change and the challenges of racially-driven economics and politics of school reform along South Carolina's I-95 corridor.

Pomona Unified School District (PUSD), California

In 2012 PUSD was identified as having Significant Disproportionality for "overidentification of African American students for Special Education and related services" and had longstanding challenges with Smarter Balanced assessment results that lagged well behind the state average. Beginning in 2013, the district drew upon the state's Local Control Funding

Formula (LCFF) to address both the academic and social-emotional learning needs — initially spending new money on programs that were shut down during the recession — then shifting to engaging educators and parents in order to rethink school leadership models for more comprehensive student support. (For more information see infographic.)

Much like many other districts in California and across the nation, PUSD offers a range of workshops on the six professional development days (four school-directed and two district-directed) included in the collective bargaining agreement for teachers' professional learning. Four of those days are under the control of the school, and the others are directed by the district. On the surface, their professional development appears to be quite traditional. However, teachers are beginning to have opportunities to take charge of their equity-focused professional learning: leading workshops related to instruction, social-emotional learning, assessment, and technology integration to address the needs of the district's highest-needs students. Over the last several years, about 40 different teachers in a district of about 1,900 certified educators have been engaged in a variety of new work as leaders — integrating new pedagogical approaches to serve the district's most vulnerable students.

In response to the Significant Disproportionality designation and in alignment with the 2020 Strategic Plan, PUSD has invested most of its teacher leadership efforts in addressing the social and emotional development needs of students through Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which includes collection and review of behavior data to drive decision-making. This work has spread to 27 schools, drawing on the expertise of teacher specialists as PBIS coaches. These coaches train colleagues on evidence-based methods that include strategies around the classroom environment, predictable class routines, and student expectations. Additionally, to test the waters for more personalized teacher-led learning, PUSD supported more than a dozen teachers who piloted micro-credentials related to PBIS, technology, and Next Generation Science Standards. Associated Pomona Teachers (APT) has been instrumental in piloting micro-credentials to advance more voice and

choice in professional learning, including having their president participate in and earn a micro-credential.

Four years after pilot schools began PBIS implementation, the number of discipline referrals has decreased by 48 percent, out-of-school suspensions have decreased by 61 percent, and in-school suspensions have decreased by 76 percent. This translates into more than **200,000 recaptured instructional minutes** available for students.

DISCIPLINE REFERRALS	OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS
48%	61%	76%
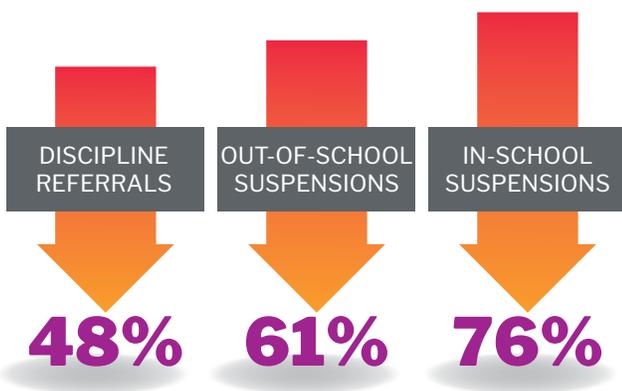
Perhaps the most powerful experiment in teacher-led learning can be found in the sixth-grade co-teaching classroom of Paula Richards and Jamie Santana at Armstrong Elementary. Three years ago, these two seasoned educators went to administration with the idea of physically removing the wall between their classrooms in order to learn together and create the

Co-teachers Jamie Santana (L) and Paula Richardson have opportunities to co-teach and spread their expertise to colleagues.

time and space to be able to spread their expertise to colleagues in their school and district. In visiting their classroom, one sees the seamless work of students leading their own learning with one another while one teacher tutors a small group of children and the other works with visiting educators. For students, their classroom is a model for flexible

learning spaces and peer-to-peer support. For teachers, the new professional learning structure allows for experimenting with researched-based and cross-curricular instruction, spurring high-quality, results-oriented collaboration.

> We could not become great without opening our classroom doors and just allowing people in, and then planning and leading with each other. What a colleague can do for another, well, the improvement is going to be 75 percent faster than what a principal can do simply alone and by her or his title.
>
> — Cynthia Sanchez, Principal
> Armstrong Elementary

And this approach is positively impacting student outcomes. **Student achievement is two times higher in co-teaching classrooms where two teachers share classroom responsibilities so they can help develop and spread best practices in their schools and districts**. Recent analysis of the co-teaching model shows that **the achievement gap is closing** between white and minority students. African American, Cambodian, Filipino, Latinx, and Native American students were twice as likely to score a 3 or 4 on the CA Dashboard based on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CASSP) than their peers across the district. However, we wonder how the culture of teacher-led learning and leadership in a few schools can spread across all 41 in the district.

Jefferson County Public Schools, Kentucky (JCPS)

Like many urban districts, JCPS has struggled to close achievement gaps. In 2018, JCPS had 18 schools that were classified as priority schools, accounting for more than 41 percent of the state's lowest performing. Additionally, annual teacher turnover rates in the district hover at an average of 12 percent and nearly three times that rate in priority schools. Teachers point to how their efforts to teach students are undermined by student trauma and mobility.

JCPS has operated under regular threat of state takeover as well as a growing movement to privatize public education, driving its willingness to consider solutions that emphasize personalized and deeper learning strategies. In 2015, the district launched its Vision 2020 strategic plan with a focus on deeper learning for every student that was to be fueled by increasing the capacity of teachers and leaders and improving school culture as well as technology, community engagement, and access to public school choice. Over the last several years, the district has honed in on aligning teaching strategies and assessments that promote not only student mastery of academic knowledge but also development of deeper learning skills and dispositions such as creativity, critical thinking, and self-regulation as well as persistence, empathy, and responsibility.

Students at Watson Lane Elementary engage in deeper learning strategies.

In 2018 under new superintendent Marty Pollio, the district refreshed the 2020 plan to provide a more laser-like focus on how the district will improve learning, culture, and infrastructure. The district sponsors a wide range of professional development offerings, housed in a library of resources available to all educators and staff in several divisions
and departments (including funding about 75 instructional coaches, resource teachers, goal clarity coaches, and more). The district's union, Jefferson County Teachers Association (JCTA), has been instrumental in working with administrators to support more personalized and deeper learning and has been involved in forging stronger labor-management collaboration.

Additionally, the district has accelerated opportunities for its 6,500 teachers to begin learning more often, if informally, from one another.

50% Teacher Engagement

JCPSForward has engaged at least 50 percent of the district's teachers through an effort funded under the auspices of a Next Generation Learning Challenge grant. About 50 teachers developed and demonstrated expertise in creating personalized, proficiency-based deeper learning assessments and then used virtual communities of practice and periodic in-person sessions to scale impact.

Watson Lane Elementary, a high-needs school of 300 students, is an exemplar for how the work has helped deeper learning become embedded within a school. Principal Sean Russell repurposed Title II funds to engage teachers in learning about differentiated instruction, personalized learning, and technology and then to share learning with colleagues. Much like Kirby at WGE, Russell orchestrated shifts in funding and redesigned the school schedule so teachers have at least five hours of PLC time each week defined by them, plus three hours a month of teacher-led staff meetings (and another one hour per month for vertical teaming). As a result, the school quickly developed a highly sophisticated collaborative culture, locally dubbed "Watson Lane University," where teachers can learn together via "bite size," a series of modules related to differentiated instruction, personalized learning, and

JCPS teachers learn from one another via video conferences.

technology — building joint lessons and assessments tied to student standards.

However, Russell's embrace of teachers as leaders of collaborative learning is more the exception than the norm in the district. When he arrived just a few years ago, "most teachers taught in very traditional ways" and "kids were not engaged." He continued, "There were great misconceptions about best practices as well — including performance assessments, community building in classrooms, and even what PLCs were and could be."

We wonder how this large urban district, with both a history of innovations in professional development and efforts to address race-based inequities through desegregation, can find the political will necessary for teacher-led deeper learning reforms. Can central office administrators and principals, in the face of high-stakes accountability, develop the mindset needed to do so? Can the advent of micro-credentialing serve as a catalyst for transforming the teaching profession, or will it be yet another program for teachers and principals to implement?

Identifying practices to root deeper learning more firmly

Each of the three districts described here — Clarendon 3, PUSD, and JCPS — fits a profile that might describe dozens or hundreds of other districts around the country. Their stories and challenges aren't necessarily unique. That's helpful as we begin to think about identifying and making sense of promising patterns in their work.

But we are also aware that the challenge in bringing any good idea to scale — and indeed part of the point of deeper learning itself — is not overcommitting to simple formulas for success. While these districts' starting points and stumbling blocks are not unique, the ways in which they've harnessed goals around building conditions, capacity, and equity into deeper learning is.

At the close of each section above, we've posed key questions about potential gaps in each district's approach that may impact their future success and the success of other districts following similar paths. Two follow-up papers, Deeper Leadership for Educators, Deeper Learning for Every Student: Enabling conditions, building capacity, and harnessing equity and Deeper leadership for educators, deeper learning for every student: Tools to advance your work, help us analyze key takeaways for other districts and then consider how best to apply them in varied contexts.
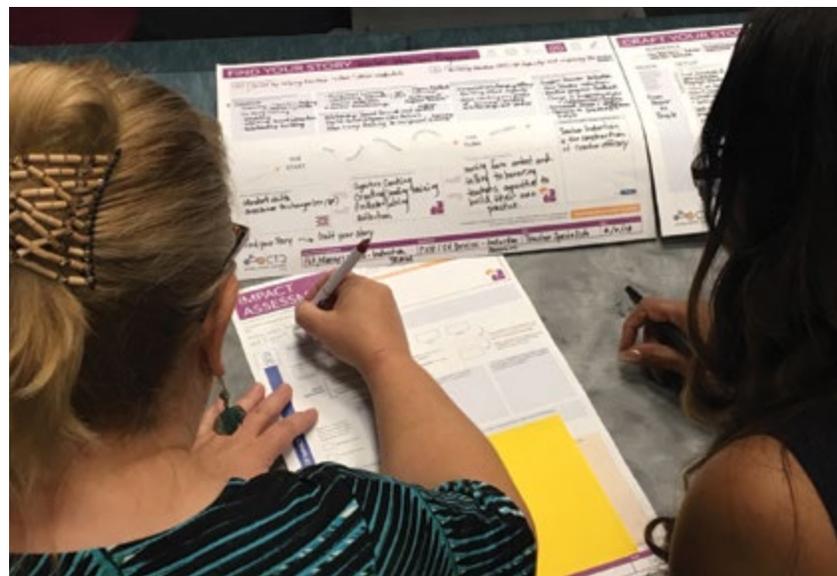
PUSD educators use CTQ's suite of tools to craft their stories of impact.