Rhode Island Professional Learning Case Example:
Bristol-Warren School Professional Learning Audit: Digital Learning Initiative

In 2018 the Rhode Island Department of Education adopted a new set of Professional Learning Standards (RIPLS), designed to inform high quality professional learning practices statewide. The RIPLS Audit Tool was created to support RIPLS implementation. It provides a framework for analysis, allowing district, school or teacher teams to reflect on and interpret current professional learning practices in light of the standards, and to set goals and identify strategies to improve professional learning practice.

This case example provides *one model* for how a district used the RIPLS Audit tool to analyze a current professional learning initiative and to inform future professional learning for this initiative. This specific case is meant to spark dialogue and generate ideas to apply the audit tool in a range of settings.

Case Example Context:

Location: Bristol-Warren School District
Professional Learning Topic: Digital Learning Teams (DLT), a district-wide initiative that supports school-based teacher teams to lead site-based professional learning to deepen the use of classroom digital learning practices.
Participants: DLT teams, comprised of 3-5 teachers and/or administrators from each of the district's six schools (four elementary, one middle, one high)
Meeting Facilitator: Assistant Superintendent
Meeting time frame: 2 hours

Meeting Design:

The meeting addressed each of the meeting elements outlined in the RIPLS audit tool, which include conducting an overview of the RI Professional Learning Standards, use of the audit tool to analyze a specific professional learning program, and analysis of findings to establish next steps. In this case example, teachers worked in their site-based DLT teams to analyze practice against each of the 8 Professional Learning Standards. The protocol involved an individual self-assessment, followed by a shared review of evidence, and finally developing a final consensus rating for each standard.

Results of Team Discussions and Findings:

Through the analysis of each standard educators from different roles engaged in collective reflection around the impact of key professional learning strategies, the use of evidence, and systemic issues that impacted program implementation. The following questions surfaced during the audit:

How can we better leverage data practices to inform professional learning?

Reviewing evidence in light of each standard stimulated discussions around how to enhance professional learning practices, particularly around the foundational systems-level standards related to goals, data and resources. Some teacher leaders, for example, who were involved in creating and delivering professional learning activities, had not previously been asked to consider ongoing analysis of data to inform professional learning at their site, or their role in supporting effective allocation of

resources. In one DLT, for example, teacher leaders brainstormed how they can more effectively utilize the data they do collect to inform future professional learning, and, ways to bring greater teacher voice into the planning process.

What are effective ways to create a shared vision around specific professional learning initiatives?

Teacher leaders wondered how to engage teachers more fully in establishing a shared vision for new instructional practice, how teachers' use of new technologies aligned with other school initiatives, and strategies to guide ongoing cycles of new learning, feedback, and reflection. Focused at the classroom-level, they wondered what must be in place to develop shared knowledge of content and common instructional practices, and how that could take shape within their project, which allowed teachers to opt-in. At the school level, this raised questions of ownership and buy-in for new improvement strategies, and how to develop a learning culture that supports cycles of ongoing improvement - which teachers identified as a key component of their professional learning design.

Who is responsible for ensuring effective professional learning?

It was unclear to teacher teams who has the primary responsibility to ensure that professional learning is aligned with the standards. For example, in standard 6, who is ultimately responsible for establishing structures that support teachers to learn in ways that include opportunities for practice, feedback and reflection on learning? Teachers wondered if that is a grade-level, building-level or district-level responsibility. Teams also wondered how to create a "shared responsibility" for professional learning, and how to best clarify roles and responsibilities to collectively guide adult learning at their sites.

Teacher and Team Reflections:

Individual teachers reported the following take-aways from their use of the RIPLS Audit Tool:
- Through the process of going through the standards, we thought we were doing lots of things well, but we realize there is more to do.
- This process helps us stay focused and stay accountable to the original goals we established for our site.
- The use of the standards, particularly standards 1-4, supported the teams to explore measures of both teacher and student learning to inform professional learning

Summary:

Through the use of the audit tool, educators came to better understand the specific characteristics of high quality professional learning.

Working in small site-based teams helped teacher leaders explore their role in applying the RI Professional Learning Standards to their site-based professional learning activities.

Focusing on one professional learning initiative supported analysis of teacher learning activities. This also raised discussion of specific evidence that was being collected, or could be collected, to inform ongoing professional learning.

DLT teams considered a range of new strategies to move their practices forward on key indicators. In particular, there was a consistent focus across teams on improving practice on systems-level indicators, including the use of evidence to inform ongoing professional learning practices, and attending to strategic resource allocation that is sustained over time.

The protocol outlined in the RIPLS Audit Tool deepened educators' understanding of the RIPLS, and provided opportunities for analysis of evidence to deepen understanding of current practice. Teacher teams were able to follow the protocol with light touch facilitation and took on self-selected meeting roles (timekeeper, recorder, & facilitator) to ensure they met the intended session goals.