IN SEARCH OF RIGOR

How one Minnesota school district is addressing a district-wide challenge: to take every school, teacher, and student from good to great.
Our Mission

Learning Sciences International, West Palm Beach, Florida, promotes excellence in public education by researching and developing next-generation pedagogical models, data systems, and professional development for K-12 educators at the school and district level. Our research department is committed to producing high quality and objective research dedicated to producing evidence-based results, ultimately facilitating sound policy and best practices in education. Built on a foundation of expert research, Learning Sciences identifies, develops, and disseminates cutting-edge resources in educational best practices. With a staff of expert practitioners, consultants, and researchers, our goal is to support all K-12 educators to be highly effective, lifelong learners, and in doing so, to significantly impact student growth and achievement over time.
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In 2014, Minnesota’s Princeton Public School District adopted a district-wide initiative to transform and align an entire school system with one goal: to educate all students to a level of rigorous learning that would prepare them to meet national standards and succeed in college and career. The foundation of this transformation was Demonstration Schools for Rigor, developed by Learning Sciences International. The initiative was comprised of three pillars: 1) an evidence-based model of instruction, Essentials for Achieving Rigor, that set in place a system-wide instructional model specifically designed to ensure rigorous pedagogy and learning aligned to standards in every classroom; 2) a series of Leadership Academies for school and district administrators to ensure clear and aligned leadership objectives in a tightly coupled system; and 3) the groundwork and support for a district-wide cultural shift that would embrace second-order change and the growth mindset necessary to achieve deep and sustained results.

This report documents Princeton PSD’s journey in its first year of implementation, the challenges faced and the lessons learned, and suggests how Princeton’s journey may prove a useful model for district transformations nationwide.
Introduction

In 2014, Minnesota’s Princeton Public School District joined Learning Sciences International in an initiative that would transform the district: the Demonstration Schools for Rigor. The goal of the initiative was to significantly improve the level of pedagogical rigor in every classroom in the district. It was a goal that would require an unprecedented intensity of focus and district-wide alignment, from the superintendent’s office, through curriculum and human resources, to the entirety of principals, teachers, and students from preschool students to graduating seniors. As Princeton School Superintendent Dr. Julia Espe would put it, the initiative required that the entire district be “all in,” with every educator and staff member willing to devote 100% of their energy and focus to what would promise to be a highly challenging project. The initiative required courage, collaboration, perseverance, and honest reflection. Even more importantly, it required that every educator in the district let go of routinized procedures and embrace a growth mindset.

The Demonstration Schools for Rigor initiative was developed by Learning Sciences to address the critical need in U.S. public education to develop today’s students for tomorrow’s challenges. Common Core State Standards and other rigorous state standards had considerably raised the bar for the kind of learning expected of public school students. The shift to college and career readiness meant that students now needed to learn to problem solve, analyze, generate and test hypotheses, collaborate, and apply their problem-solving skills to real-world scenarios—the same sorts of problems they would encounter in their working lives well into the future.

The foundations of the initiative rested on a new model of instruction developed by Learning Sciences in collaboration with Robert J. Marzano to specifically address a gap between the goals of new college and career readiness standards across the United States and teacher preparation to reach these rigorous new goals. From 2011-2014, Learning Sciences collected and analyzed more than two million data points from classroom observations across the nation to create a National Teacher Practice Profile.¹ The findings of this analysis were troubling: They indicated that once again the U.S. public education system was falling short of national goals. In spite of a nationwide movement to implement standards for rigorous learning and critical thinking, less than 6% of observed classroom lessons were devoted to learning activities related to higher-order critical thinking skills. Teachers, it seemed, were woefully underprepared to teach at the level of rigor required by new standards.² Furthermore, a survey conducted by the Education Week Research Center in 2014 found that most schools perceive that they are fairly well prepared to teach the new standards. However, classroom evidence says otherwise.

To address this need, Learning Sciences in collaboration with Robert Marzano developed an evidence-based model of instruction, Essentials for Achieving Rigor, a system of standards-based planning, research-based instructional strategies, and monitoring for learning, data analysis, and collaboration, to help teachers plan and teach in standards-based classrooms.

Armed with this evidence-based instructional model, teachers would gradually shift from traditional pedagogy to student-centered classrooms focused on analysis, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Classrooms would become more learner-centered as students began to take increasing responsibility for tracking their

¹For a full report on this data, see Teaching For Rigor: A Call for a Critical Instructional Shift, www.marzanocenter.com/essentials
²As with the 1983 report, A Nation at Risk, Learning Sciences analysis of U.S. classrooms called for a critical shift in instruction and leadership if students were to be prepared to compete in the 21st century global marketplace.
own learning, and all lessons would be planned and assessed with precise alignment to rigorous state standards. With new emphasis on grade-level collaborative lesson planning and formative assessment, teachers and students would know, from minute to minute and lesson to lesson, how they were progressing toward standards-based lesson targets and unit goals. As students moved toward ever-increasing levels of cognitive complexity, they would also be applying their learning to practical real-world problems and solutions.

“We are preparing our students for a world we cannot imagine” had become a mantra for forward-looking education leaders. The reality continues to be, however, that few teachers have been fully prepared to make the instructional shifts necessary to teach students these new skills, and few administrators are likewise prepared to fully support the rigorous pedagogy essential to success. As a result, courageous leaders are stepping up to new conversations about what is required to learn and lead together for deep implementation.

**Showcases for Effective Learning**

The Demonstration Schools for Rigor initiative develops, with a program of deep support and coaching, model schools across the United States that function as learning laboratories and demonstration sites, places where other educators can visit to see rigorous teaching and learning in action. With their focused alignment of leadership development, teacher leader coaching, teacher training in the Essentials for Achieving Rigor model, and technology supports for classroom formative assessment, instructional planning, collaboration, and reflection, Demonstration Schools have become the model for innovations in 21st century school improvement. Demonstration schools were piloted in more than 20 U.S. schools during the 2014-2015 school year, in small rural districts such as Princeton, but also in large urban districts like Palm Beach County, Florida.

The four Demonstration Schools in the Princeton Public School District are implementing the Essentials instructional model, along with an intense, focused schedule of professional development, coaching, and Leadership Academies. Princeton is also unique in that the entire district will function as a Demonstration District, with schools modeling the change process at elementary, middle, and high school levels, each with its individual set of challenges. Schools like those in Princeton are linking arms to address this courageous work together, and the district has already begun to receive national attention. As Espe had hoped, the district is all in.

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1Princeton’s Demonstration School Initiative was the focus of WCCO-TV Channel 4’s “Life to the Max” program, which aired May 16, 2015.
Ready for Transformation: Princeton Demonstration District

Dr. Julia Espe was hired as Princeton District Superintendent in 2012, after seven years as assistant superintendent at St. Cloud Community Schools. She had previously worked as a principal, curriculum director, and instructor. Espe is also co-founder of Math Masters of Minnesota, which emphasizes critical thinking and problem-solving skills in mathematics. “I’m fortunate to be in a place where everybody makes decisions based on what is best for students,” Espe says. “That is the foundation for everything we do.”

Explaining why she embraced the Demonstration Schools for Rigor initiative, Espe says, “We are good, but we needed to look at how we could shift our practices to become more effective, more evidence-based. We have to grow. We expect kids to come into our classrooms and be ready to learn. We expect them to be ‘all in.’ What we’re doing is shifting that responsibility to our professional development, so that as teachers and leaders we are all ready to learn. Because if we’re not all in, if we don’t have that growth mindset, then we’re not going to move the needle.”

Administrators would have to schedule non-negotiable “sacred time” for planning, classroom visits, collaboration, and reflection. Princeton teachers and administrators would analyze formative classroom data and act upon it, shifting instructional strategies as necessary to ensure success for all students. Ultimately, the schools would be ready to demonstrate their expertise, inviting districts around the Upper Midwest to visit and learn from their progress.

Moving the Needle

When Espe took over as superintendent, the student achievement numbers indicated room for improvement. In 2013-2014, Princeton High School students were 35.5% proficient in mathematics, as compared to a high school math proficiency average of 49.8% statewide. At the middle school, math proficiency was slightly better at 54.5%, but it still fell below the statewide average of 60.5% for middle schools. Princeton North Elementary’s math proficiency rate beat the statewide average slightly, at 65.3% against the state’s 60.5%.

Princeton schools were also falling below statewide reading proficiency averages, with the exception of North Elementary, which nudged ahead of the state’s 58.8 percentage rating by less than a single point.

“As Demonstration Schools, Princeton’s schools would be expected to make measurable progress toward improving planning, collaboration, classroom pedagogy, and reflection. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) would be devoted to collaboratively creating goals and scales, planning units aligned to standards, mapping out lessons, and creating common assessments.

“If we’re not all in, if we don’t have that growth mindset, then we’re not going to move the needle.”
Espe says that Learning Sciences offered Princeton the opportunity to "step up and help lead this transformative process, knowing that it required second-order change."

"My role is to keep the vision, to remind people where we're going, and to hold all of us accountable," Espe says. "If we express we don't want to change as adults, then that's a real message for our students, isn't it?

"Every adult's job is to help with influencing each other and our classrooms, nudging people forward and encouraging them. How can I support you in your journey to learn?"

Few superintendents are as hands-on in guiding school improvement as Espe is, right down to frequent school visits. She says she feels lucky to be able to make instructional rounds with the teachers and coaches in Princeton schools. "I get to look for evidence. I get to go on all instructional rounds. I get to talk to administrators. I get to talk to teachers so that I really know what's going on. I can go out in the district and see the work that's being done. And the comparison between when we started to now is immense. We are making progress. People are talking about learning goals and scales, about monitoring student progress and engagement. It's all about deliberate practice. You really have to hone your skills."

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Espe says one of the big Aha! realizations of the Demonstration School initiative is the laser-like focus on practicing skills learned in the professional development trainings. It's a demanding schedule for the teachers, but it's producing results. "Our journey has been intense this year. We'll have an all-day [professional development] session to give us the instructional tools every 60 days, and then in between, everyone is expected to practice those new skills with their students. I used to go to conferences and learn something new, and then I'd come back and put it on the shelf and never use it. But now, this is intentional learning. You learn all day. You practice what you've learned. We do instructional rounds where we're looking for the skills that we learned in our last professional development session. We also have monthly leadership retreats with administrators where we talk about where we are [and] what we need to do as a district and in our buildings to support people. It has been so intentional, so intense, and so good."

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School Board Chair Deb Ulm sees the transformation happening as well. “Our superintendent is in classrooms with principals and teachers. We like that! Princeton Public Schools knows its core business: teaching and learning. The board is very supportive.”

And it’s not only the teachers and administrators who are aligning themselves. The Demonstration School initiative has filtered even into the district’s planning of curriculum, human resources, and business directors. Custodians do “custodial rounds” to assess how to best support student learning. HR staff know what to look for when making teacher and staff hiring decisions, searching for “people who are really reflective, who are autonomous learners, who want to keep growing,” Espe says. “It’s really good stuff.”
A Practical Application of Research

Espe maintains that the Demonstration School initiative is not so much different as it is deeper. Looking at the program that way helps teachers see that they’re not making a radical shift, so much as exploring and deepening many of the best practices they already know and have studied for years. “What’s so nice is, the research I have always relied on is all aligned with the Demonstration School program,” Espe says. “Learning goals and scales, formative assessments, teacher clarity, feedback, monitoring students, relationships, practicing and deepening—it all fits together. This is a practical application of research.”

Building Expertise and Leadership Capacity for Tightly Coupled Systems

Espe and Princeton school administrators, including principals, assistant principals, and teacher coaches, are also getting intensive support to develop their leadership skills via Learning Sciences Marzano Center Leadership Academies, led by Learning Sciences Director of Minnesota Leadership Development Dr. Rebecca Koelln. The Leadership Academies, which invite Instructional Leadership Teams from across Minnesota, build regional communities of practice and are designed to develop, improve, and support teachers and leaders through the effective leadership and teaching practices throughout the system.

Each of the five days of Leadership Academy provides leaders time to increase their leadership capacity to influence, motivate, and advance continuous improvement through a deep dive into responsible leadership at all levels of the system. Teachers and leaders explore three central tenets of their personal approaches to leadership: a sense of vision, an orientation toward action, and a facility for persuasion. Leaders identify current and future opportunities to be second-order change agents as they influence
The Minnesota Leadership Academies have helped Princeton administrators examine and understand educational practices (the what) and develop the capacity (the how) to support those practices. The academies focus on helping leaders understand how to create a readiness for change.

Aligned and effective implementation strategies at multiple levels are essential to any systematic attempt to improve teacher and principal effectiveness. The Minnesota Leadership Academies have helped Princeton administrators examine and understand educational practices (the what) and develop the capacity (the how) to support those practices. The academies focus on helping leaders understand how to create a readiness for change, a critical component of both initiating and scaling up the use of evidence-based practices and other innovations in education.
The Princeton School District had been working on school improvement for two years before they decided to embrace the Demonstration School initiative. Teachers and administrators in the district had already received training in Learning Sciences Marzano Teacher and School Leader Evaluation Models; they had also been attending Leading Forward Leadership Academies to support that implementation. So they were already familiar with many of the 13 essential pedagogical strategies developed by Robert Marzano in the Essentials for Achieving Rigor model.

The Demonstration Schools for Rigor Initiative would build on the learning of previous years, which emphasized student-focused, data-driven schools. The next critical step was to develop and sustain a culture of rigor.

What is a Demonstration School?

A Demonstration School for Rigor is, by definition, one in which all teachers are planning and delivering lessons that require all students to learn complex content while working at increasing levels of autonomy as they take ownership of their own learning. One of the problems districts face as they prepare for new, more rigorous academic standards is that principals and teachers simply do not know what rigorous instruction looks like. They know the standards, but how will they translate those standards into real teaching in real classrooms? Teachers and school leaders need guidance in how to plan for rigor, how to deliver it, and how to determine the impact of instruction on student learning.

This pedagogical guidance is particularly crucial to keep achievement gaps from widening under college and career readiness standards. If teachers merely try to teach harder, assigning students more difficult problems, advantaged students will move ahead while at-risk students will continue to fall below the mark. Like most teachers who are working harder than ever, working smarter includes a set of evidence-based strategies that guide planning, delivery, monitoring, reflection, and revision, all with an emphasis on supportive collaboration.
The teachers and administrators crowded into a small conference room at North Elementary are getting ready to make group instructional rounds as part of their Coaching for Implementation Day, one of the major components of the Demonstration School Initiative. School leaders and coaches from all of Princeton’s schools attend both training and coaching days. Here today are principals Barbara Muckenhirn from the high school, Dan Voce from the middle school, Greg Finck from South Elementary, and John Beach from North Elementary, along with Dr. Espe and Director of Human Resources Stacie Vos and a handful of teacher coaches. Last week, they completed a Learning Sciences training on Monitoring and Measuring, which helps teachers deepen their focus on monitoring for the desired effect of student learning and measuring that learning through formative assessment. Today, teachers, administrators, and coaches will put what they’ve learned into practice.

Some of the teachers who’ve been selected for observations today are understandably nervous about being observed by this large group—with only a week to practice their new skills and prepare a demonstration lesson, they’re not yet 100% confident.

Learning Sciences Director of Minnesota Leadership Development and Senior Consultant Dr. Rebecca Koelln reminds the nervous teachers that this is a learning experience for coaches. “Think of it this way,” Koelln says. “We’re a learning laboratory. You teachers are allowing us to be the learners, and we appreciate that. Without being able to come in and see what you’re doing, we couldn’t learn.”

Espe adds, “This is not like the old days, where you might be showing off a very polished lesson. We’re bringing in eight or 10 people a week after a training on new skills, so we don’t expect to see perfection. We’re just expecting to see people trying out the learning that we’ve had. That shows a level of professionalism that we’ve never seen before.”

The teachers have been practicing formative assessment strategies to track student learning as it’s happening, to make shifts in instruction as necessary, and to know when to move on to the next chunk of the lesson. Students have also started to measure their own progress on scales posted on classroom walls or kept in their notebooks and to collaborate on presentations to demonstrate their knowledge.

Koelln’s role in this session, as the Learning Sciences coach, is to keep the Princeton educators focused on their own learning targets. Everyone in the room will act in some capacity as a coach for Princeton teachers as they learn to monitor and measure student progress.

“What skills do you need to effectively support teachers in their learning?” Koelln asks the group. “I want you to think about where you are in your own learning as coaches today.”

Foundations of the Standards-Based Classroom

Koelln reminds the assembled educators that the goal of monitoring and measuring is to help students develop a real understanding of where they are in their learning, and why. Tracking student progress is not to label students but to help them identify the skills they need
to learn to reach state standards. Students who have a large stake in their own learning are far more likely to be successful at test time, and the teachers are already noticing great results.

“I learn a lot because the kids are very open and honest about where they are in their learning,” one teacher says. “I’m seeing a lot more participation in class, a lot more [students] asking questions if they don’t know something. They know I’m checking into what they know. It’s been very positive for me in the classroom. I’ve grown, and I know they have, too.”

Another teacher agrees. “They’re taking much more ownership. And I tell them, ‘OK, if you know it, you’re going to have to demonstrate it for me tomorrow.’”

“Before we head out to observe in our classrooms,” Koelln says, “there are some things we want to think about. How do we structure classroom activities within our targets to reach rigorous learning? I’d like you to look for that today.”

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Vos is beaming. “I am so impressed with the depth of knowledge you coaches have in regard to your teachers. You really have worked with them; you have background knowledge. I also love seeing the contrast of different teaching styles. It was a nice way to honor different styles of teaching within the realm of what we’re doing.”

Even so early in their training and coaching, these classroom teachers are already demonstrating one of the crucial foundations of the rigorous classroom: student-centered learning, where students are clearly working harder than their teachers, deeply processing knowledge and demonstrating proficiency.

As pizza is brought in for the group, Superintendent Espe concludes the session with a summary statement designed to launch her principals and directors into the next round of actionable steps. Her notes to teachers and leaders serve as constant reminders that she is “all in” as the number one learner.

“We are making progress this year that I have never seen in my whole career. I’ve been in many districts and seen many programs, but I cannot believe what I’ve seen this year with this instructional model.”

“I’m always trying to think of ways to get the school board to honor the work being done here,” she says, “so that they realize what a difference this model makes. Today was such a great day. To see the wonderful work being done by students and teachers—we are making progress this year that I have never seen in my whole career. I’ve been in many districts and seen many programs, but I cannot believe what I’ve seen this year with this instructional model. You’re learning it, you’re practicing it, you’re talking about it. You’re using the learning goals and scales, and the kids are engaged with their learning. I’m close to retirement, and I can finally say, this is the way to go.”

Instructional Rounds: A Powerful Driver of Growth

“We’ve had a lot of growth at Princeton High School. The most powerful piece we’ve had in our building is the observational rounds. What we decided in our building last year was that we wanted to put in place that opportunity for all of our teachers so that they could come along faster and have those same kind of rich experiences that we leaders were having. Two of our teachers put together a schedule where 86% of our teachers do rounds, including all of our non-tenured teachers.

And it’s very exciting to be able to do that. The three administrators collaborate on a weekly basis around teacher feedback, observations, and instructional rounds. That’s a very different culture than most of us have had in our experience”.

—Barbara Muckenhirn, Principal, Princeton High School
Conclusion

Demonstration Schools for Rigor provide opportunities for school leaders and teachers to experience rigorous teaching in all phases—planning, delivery, reflection, and adjustment—and to understand how rigorous teaching impacts student learning. These schools will also provide opportunities for school leaders and teachers outside the schools to observe leading and teaching for rigor in action, putting the standards in a practical context that can be replicated. From Princeton School Superintendent Julia Espe's perspective, Princeton School District could become a resource for the entire state of Minnesota and perhaps beyond, a model of high quality leadership and instruction. Espe and Koelln agree that the schools in the Princeton district demonstrate a readiness for accelerated transformation of leadership, teaching, and learning. It’s a readiness for transformation they hope will eventually spread far beyond the borders of Princeton School District, preparing students for a perhaps unknowable, but certainly successful future.

Would your school or district like to be part of the transformation? To learn more about applying to become a Demonstration School for Rigor or about implementing the Learning Sciences Essentials for Achieving Rigor instructional model, visit us at http://www.marzanocenter.com/essentials or call us at 877.411.7114.

Learn more about our Demonstration Schools for Rigor at http://www.learningsciences.com/demo-schools
What Princeton Educators are Saying

“One of the most powerful aspects we have been involved with is the instructional rounds. What I really like about the instructional rounds is the powerful conversations we have afterward. This is my 24th year being principal, and I have never been involved with such rich conversation around education on a continuing basis.”

—Greg Finck, Principal, South Elementary

“Just this year from the beginning of the year, it has been a huge shift in terms of the evidence we see in the classrooms with the learning goals and scales. And now we’re talking about formative assessments, monitoring student progress. You can see that from North and South Elementaries, to our building, to the high school, that’s really when you know that progress is really being made in all the buildings, all the way down to early childhood.”

—Dan Voce, Principal, Princeton Middle School

“Walking into all the classrooms and seeing how we have progressed together in our learning, taking those observations and developing them into thoughtful questions to help foster the growth piece—that has been huge. It takes time and practice, there’s an art to it. But having those instructional rounds and being able to learn from others’ classrooms, and to sit down with teachers side by side and work on it together, it’s been amazing. Are there some next steps? Yes. Because if you don’t purposefully try to plan and go forward, you move backward. But it’s exciting to see how we’ve progressed in our learning together.”

—Sarah Marxhausen, Assistant Principal, Princeton Middle School

What Princeton Teachers are Saying

“The strategies have helped us provide for students a clear learning goal connected to the standards. They have also made students aware of what their learning goals are, and that has been really beneficial.”

“The change I’ve seen in student learning is that now students are more focused on goals that pertain to the things they are supposed to be learning in fifth grade, rather than being ambiguous.”

It’s been a positive change for both teachers and students.”

“I see a lot of students being brought into the act of teaching, sharing more information, more back and forth. Students know the purpose of what they are going to be learning. This is creating a more self-directed student.”
Appendix A
Becoming a Demonstration School for Rigor: Princeton Style

The two-year process for Demonstration Schools in Princeton includes a menu of training, coaching, and practice:

1) Preparation of the principal, faculty, and staff for the journey (Kickoff)
Princeton began with a day-long kickoff meeting with district leadership, school principals, the school leadership teams, and Professional Learning Community (PLC) team leaders to introduce the process and goals of the program.

2) Training and coaching of the principal
Princeton principals are participating in Essentials for Achieving Rigor training along with the leadership team, teacher leaders, and teachers. This training consists of five sessions: Teaching Foundations, Guiding Deeper Thinking, Facilitating Complex Learning, Goals & Scales, and Monitor & Measure.

3) Coaching for Implementation Days
Each of these five Essentials trainings is followed by Coaching for Implementation (C4I) days. During each C4I companion coaching day, Learning Sciences Director of Leadership Development Rebecca Koelln guides principals and their leadership and PLC team leaders in classroom walkthroughs. The team looks for implementation of the Essentials strategies presented during the previous training, identifies the level of implementation, and discusses feedback to help teachers enhance strategies to improve student learning. A secondary goal of the coaching days is to significantly increase the skill of teacher coaches. Koelln notes that these coaching days function as a learning laboratory.

4) Leadership Coaching Through Marzano Center Leadership Academies
Each of the five days of Leadership Academy provides leaders time to increase their leadership capacity to influence, motivate, and advance continuous improvement at all levels of the educational system through a deep dive into responsible leadership. Teachers and leaders explore three central tenets of their personal approaches to leadership: developing a sense of vision, an orientation toward action, and a facility for persuasion. Leaders identify current and future opportunities to be second-order change agents as they influence others, go beyond challenges and uncertainties, and increase their self-confidence to renew commitment to self, peers, and the community. The Academies motivate and tap the intrinsic drive to create change and the will to develop the skills and practices that matter most in daily leadership practices.

In each session, leaders have the opportunity to:

• Connect with prior learning to learn how to influence others
• Use processes and content to demonstrate responsible leadership for the common good
• Apply systems thinking and engage in analyzing complex situations
• Connect with self and others through an intentional community of practice
• Cultivate a creative, innovative, and caring learning environment
• Embed evidence-based approaches into personal and professional life
• Engage and influence networking and accountability to share results and impact
• Advance systems of change/growth by starting with self

5) Side-By-Side Coaching for Principals
Principals receive a half day of side-by-side coaching with a Learning Sciences consultant every two weeks. During these coaching sessions, the Princeton leadership and coaching teams jointly observe classroom instruction, debrief on the dominant strategies observed, and discuss effective ways to provide actionable feedback to teachers to improve instruction. In particular, the team is observing to gauge whether teachers are tracking student learning and if they are celebrating student success in attaining learning targets.

6) Training and Coaching of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)
Princeton PLCs receive half-day reviews of leading indicator data and coaching. These sessions focus on improving the PLC’s impact on instruction in all classrooms, ensuring the calibration of units, lessons, learning goals, scales, and common formative assessments to high levels of rigor.

7) Training and Coaching of the Teachers
All teachers in the schools will be trained in the Essentials for Achieving Rigor- Strengthening Instruction series: Teaching Foundations, Guiding Deeper Thinking, Facilitating Complex Learning, Goals & Scales, and Monitor & Measure. The Essentials for Achieving Rigor is a progression of professional development designed to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills of effective teaching practices that lead students to higher levels of rigorous learning. In each session, teachers will have the opportunity to strengthen the instructional strategies they currently use by practicing intentional planning to monitor for student evidence of the desired result of those strategies. Teachers will also uncover other strategies and criteria required to teach the knowledge and skills students need to reach rigorous standards. These hands-on sessions will allow teachers to create a toolbox filled with instructional strategies and resources.

All principals will ensure that teachers have time reserved for supportive accountability so that strategies learned are transferred to classroom implementation. To improve instructional practice, teachers will:
• identify a strategy to strengthen
• make a plan to implement this strategy
• reflect on the desired result of the strategy/student impact
• involve their mentors and peers in planning and reflection of implementation