

Key Elements of Instructional Excellence for Multi-Classroom Leaders:

# Plan Ahead and Raise Sights

Pre-plan high standards for each grade/course—with schoolwide curriculum and lessons up to and beyond standards—to support achievement and growth.

“Children will rise to the bar that you set for them.” — Multi-Classroom Leader Hadley Moore

Teachers must convey that they believe each student is capable of far more, even when students do not yet believe in themselves. Planning ahead for high-standards, differentiated instruction supports the belief with action.

Raising sights, quality, and consistency by planning ahead includes the following:

Planning to Deliver Instruction:

- \* Articulate the vision
- \* Choose high annual standards and growth goals
- \* Choose and/or develop high-standards curricula
- \* Develop engaging, aligned lesson plans, with pre-set differentiation and frequent checks for understanding
- \* Systematize schoolwide procedures and routines

Planning to Improve Instruction:

- \* Select or develop aligned interim assessments
- \* Establish an assessment calendar
- \* Determine data systems to share progress with all
- \* Schedule time to analyze data and adjust teaching
- \* Plan for students to set and track goals

Planning to Deliver Instruction

Taking the time in the summer, when there’s time to think big, plan, and set goals is crucial whenever possible, great teachers agree.

“Those big vision-setting things have to happen in the summer, when I have time for ideas to marinate and adjust...I have time to do what needs to be done. Without that time in the summer, we would have a much slower start—we would not have the quick jump-right-in approach that we have now.” —Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL) Ellen Rayburn

“We had some [summer planning time] where we broke down the objectives and the standards...into learning targets that would help us sequence the plans later in the year, and that was tedious at the time, but it saved so much time in the planning throughout the year.” — MCL Lauren Woodworth

“One of the things that we set as a priority for us is making sure that our goals are ambitious, maybe even a little exaggerated for some peoples’ taste. ... It started with us recognizing the potential in our kids first, and then being able to basically transfer that feeling of empowerment to our students so that they’re able to kind-of take on that ownership as well.” —MCL Erin Williams

As Jimmel Williams prepares for the year, “I like to look at what the standards are, and even though I’ve been teaching eighth and ninth grade for several years, I like to re-evaluate, because I’d be crazy to feel like I was the very best, and so there’s always room to grow. I like to write out all of the objectives, match them and pair them, link them to what I feel like makes more sense as far as the order in which we do everything. And once I’ve kind of gotten through that whole process, I then set goals for each element.” —Reach teacher Jimmel Williams, on the beginning of his pre-planning process

Jimmel Williams then takes the time to find as much academic history on each student as he can, checking past scores and grades. He uses that information to set major goals for every unit, to share with students.

In her role as an MCL, Hadley Moore rewrote the curriculum for her literacy teaching team to use, with lesson plans to match. As a teacher in an urban, high-poverty school, Moore was especially focused on a curriculum and texts that truly challenged her students—something that she says her students both needed and appreciated.

“I know that children will rise to the bar that you set for them, and you shouldn’t lower your expectations just because students might be behind or they might be challenged in terms of behavior or in terms of academic success up to this point. ... One of the biggest surprises was that the ninth-grade class loved the *Odyssey*,” Moore said. “Some people might think, ‘Oh, that’s too

hard for them’...but the reality was that they connected with him [Odysseus].”

As she prepares her teaching team to set high goals, MCL Molly Whelan spends time reviewing the previous year’s results. “Then also, not only do we have a goal at the end of the year...but also creating goals for our common interim assessments because we can’t think, ‘OK, we’ve got this end goal’—we’ve kind-of got to know ‘where do we want to hit in between?’ so we don’t think that this big jump is so daunting. What are the little pieces that we can hit, what seems more feasible at different parts of the year? So, starting that also at the beginning of the year. ... **If [teachers] don’t know where we want to be, they can’t communicate that to our kids.**”

“We set ambitious goals for every year, and at the beginning of the year...it feels like there’s a lot for us to do. And so a really essential piece is **breaking it into achievable goals** for our team so that when we’re messaging that to students, then it feels achievable to them as well. ... We expect to adjust course—there are always things that we need to adjust throughout the year—but if we don’t set those benchmark goals, then we don’t know throughout, and we’re just hoping that data turns out the way we want it to—which is not the way to lead students to success.”—*MCL Ellen Rayburn*

Using the summer to plan also frees teachers to truly focus on students’ needs during the year.

“It allows you to be prepared. If I’ve already figured out my calendar...then **it frees me up to work on individual student needs**. I’m not always planning; it takes me 10 minutes to plan during the school year the next topic, because I’ve really already planned it in the summer. I’m just going to adjust it now based on these students and what I need. But it gives me more time to work with my kids individually because I’m not spending all my time planning my lessons. ... If I’m not spending time doing that, I could spend time really looking at the data and looking at the emotional needs of the students, and if something’s really not quite working with kids. So it allows me to make better relationships, because I’m not worried about tomorrow’s lesson because it’s already done.”—*Blended-Learning Teacher Lori Treiber*

In developing her curriculum and lesson plans, MCL Hadley Moore kept her focus on the critical standards her students needed to learn. “It was really, really exciting to focus on the critical standards...it’s important to integrate engaging and active lessons and activities,

[but] you really want to make sure that you are **focusing on the critical standards**, the standards they will be tested on. And so, by prioritizing those, by ensuring that the lessons completely revolve around those, we’ve made a lot of progress in terms of student growth and student mastery, and we can see that in the data.”

As a multi-classroom leader, Erin Burns takes many of these steps with and on behalf of her teaching team. Using any available data from the previous year, they set high but achievable goals for each student. Her team then uses lesson plans she created, saving them time in the school year to focus on lesson delivery.

“The **planning is everything**, it really is,” Burns says. “We’ve been able to use these materials [her lesson plans from previous years] and recycle them, and...teachers know and trust that the materials that we use are aligned and that we’re spending more time refining our independent practice and our assessments. ... My teachers love that, I think, more than anything. One of my teachers was telling me his friends at other schools are up until midnight just making materials, and he is so thankful that he has the materials and he’s focusing more on delivery.”

## Planning to Improve Instruction

Burns also **schedules assessments** based on her pacing guide for lessons, **and creates the assessments** her team teachers use, **so that they match the goals and high standards** set for students. To ensure their quality, Burns plans time to lead her team in reviewing the assessments, making sure teachers understand them and see no problem spots for students. Afterward, students go back and do their own corrections, so teachers can adjust their instruction based on the most common errors students made. Students who need it may also be pulled out for further help.

Burns and her team use an **online platform** that grades the assessments, in which she has set mastery levels, and she has a **data tracker for students** to use as well. That data will then become the basis for the team’s scheduled weekly meetings, at which they analyze the data and adjust the next week’s instruction accordingly.

To help students track their progress and share it with their parents, teachers use a variety of age-appropriate methods, such as sticker posters for younger students and data notebooks for secondary students. For more on data gathering and use to improve instruction, see **Key Elements of Instructional Excellence: Monitor Learning**.

For all of these tasks, **great teachers cite the power of working in teams led by an excellent teacher**. Schools that have a team of these teacher-leaders will have schoolwide procedures and routines for setting high standards and goals, creating curricula and assessments, tracking student progress, and communicating that progress to students and parents. Such **schoolwide consistency can help ease some of the burden on teachers**, as well as providing students with the comfort of consistent messages from all the school’s teachers and administrators.

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**Learn More:** Watch the [Plan Ahead and Raise Sights videos](#).

### Discussion Questions

1. Which actions in this element of instructional excellence are **strengths** for you or your team?
2. Which actions in this element of instructional excellence are **weaknesses** for you or your team? Think about actions you never take, fail to take as often as needed, or do not take as well as needed to achieve strong learning growth consistently.
3. What one to three specific changes will you or your team make to **use your strengths more** often or more consistently and **improve weaknesses** in the coming months?
4. Make a brief **action plan** with specific goals, roles, and time by which you will make specific changes!
5. Did your changes produce **better learning results**? If so, keep them. If not, think again about what other changes to make!

For more elements of instructional leadership and excellence, visit the [Instructional Leadership and Excellence webpages](#), which each have **video clips** of teacher-leaders who have achieved high-growth student learning; **discussion questions** for developing your team and yourself; **training links** for ongoing professional development; and other **developmental resources** including books, videos, articles, and tools

For more on an Opportunity Culture, visit [OpportunityCulture.org](#).

We’re happy to hear your feedback on this element; [contact us!](#)

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