

Key Elements of Instructional Excellence for Multi-Classroom Leaders:

Adjust Instruction

Change instruction when learning slows—and to help students advance faster—based on monitoring.

“As we move forward, we really need to identify where [students are] and let them know the steps they need to take.”
—Multi-Classroom Leader Russ Stanton

Students benefit when teachers work together to give all students the instruction they need. Teachers and their teaching teams should collaborate to quickly improve instruction based on data, personalizing instruction as much as possible.

Adjusting instruction to meet each students’ needs includes these actions:

- * **Collaborate with colleagues to improve instruction rapidly for mastery and growth**
 - Regroup students
 - Reteach when needed
 - Offer advanced work
 - Personalize assignments, pace, etc.
- * **Research additional interventions aligned to each students’ need, as needed**

* **Collaborate with colleagues to improve instruction rapidly for mastery and growth**

Multi-classroom leaders (MCLs) ensure that time is scheduled and protected to collaborate with their teams to review data, discuss individual students’ progress, and adjust instruction to meet each student’s needs.

Collaboration is key, MCL Russ Stanton says, “because there are a lot of people working together, so **if we see something that’s not working for kids, we need to have that discussion together.** A special education teacher might see, ‘Hey, my kids are really struggling with this part of the curriculum,’ and we need to have a conversation together to say, OK, what supports can we put into place? So that’s why meeting daily is crucial, because those things might come up today and we’re moving on to a new topic in two days. Kids will start to fall behind if we don’t address that. It’s very important that we have those conversations daily.”

Elementary school MCL Laura Yates identifies scheduling as crucial for collaboration both within and across grades. When her math teachers for fourth, fifth, and sixth grades were unable to meet together because

of scheduling issues, Yates says, she started a **virtual meeting** for them. “They were like, ‘we miss that collaboration,’ and so, they’re currently using Microsoft Office Teams, and I post a video and I post discussion questions each week; they log on, watch the video or whatever I’ve assigned to them, and then it’s an open discussion board. They type their answers and then they’re able to answer to each other and see their responses. That’s been huge for my teams. Seeing where students came from and where students need to go is huge.”

MCL Melissa Wirth’s team used co-planning time to settle on strategies for guided reading groups to address an issue they identified in half their students. “It would not be successful unless we had a time to plan with one another; **if we’re not talking and communicating about our students, then they’re just not going to make the growth that they need to.**”

- **Regroup students**

Flexible, frequent regrouping of students requires time to analyze data coming from frequent—ideally daily—assessments and checks for understanding, but the resulting student growth is worth it, great teachers and principals say.

Incorporating both at-level and grade-level material allows students to push themselves but also meet testing requirements, MCL Ellen Rayburn says.

“We have tried to time it so that the students, even if they’re behind and we know that they will struggle with the full-strength, eighth-grade-level lesson, that that’s not what they’re missing. We incorporated 30 minutes where students are doing independent reading. That’s when the very lowest readers go to their level of literacy classes. We’ve tried not to put them in

opposition, so that in that 30 minutes, there's a lot of differentiation happening and then everyone has the grade-level text. So yes, they might be reading a fourth-grade book in [that 30 minutes], but then **they come to class and have the same opportunity** to be guided through the eighth-grade level." —*MCL Ellen Rayburn*

Expanded-Impact Teacher (EIT) Jeremy Kiesler takes care to group students by learning need on the spot, without making it obvious who fits where. His students take a quiz at either the beginning or end of each class. As each student finishes, they show him their score, and he simply pulls the level of work that the student needs that day from different parts of a pile, so "all they know is I got a piece of paper and I think that this is what everybody else is working on. And then, at the end of class, I like to bring it all back so regardless of which pathway you took, they're all going to take the same check for understanding at the end of class."

Kiesler also emphasizes mastery with his students; combined with his school's emphasis on providing multiple opportunities for remediation and tutorials on individual concepts, he says, students take more ownership of their learning and see success.

Grouping students in small groups that are frequently reshuffled creates multiple learning communities, EIT Brett Neal says. Because he teaches large numbers of students at once, Neal reworked the space so students work in groups and hold one another accountable.

"I got rid of individual desks. I got tables, and with that the whole goal was to try and **create a community** within your table," Neal says.

- **Reteach when needed**

Although teachers feel the pressure to continually move on to the next topic or concept, great teachers credit taking the time to frequently check students' understanding and quickly and creatively reteach as needed for their success in getting high student growth.

MCL Jonnecia Alford used 15-minute small-group rotations with her team to reteach concepts or lessons as needed, to stop students from falling further behind.

Many teachers cite the power of aggressive monitoring. (For more on this, watch: [Aggressive Daily Monitoring Enables In-the-Moment Adjusting.](#))

"We do **aggressive monitoring**, so I know that four kids didn't cite their evidence today, so before I send them off by themselves to do [work] wrong, I need to make sure I address that misconception in the moment—because tomorrow is too late." —*MCL Bri Waddell*

Principal Erica Jordan-Thomas saw her faculty move to aggressive monitoring as a key to quick and effective reteaching.

"It's just evolved to, 'I don't even want to know by the learn check on Friday, I want to know before they leave my class'—we are obligated to them and ourselves to not wait until the next formal assessment in six to eight weeks. We need to know every single day, and we're even pushing that—we don't even want to wait until the exit ticket, we want to be collecting data during independent practice to predict what the exit ticket might be, and then 30 to 45 minutes before class ends, [they] want to pull a quick small group to be able to do some **quick reteach before the exit ticket.**"

MCL Stephanie Roper says taking time to analyze data led her entire grade level to regroup students based on areas of misunderstanding, then reteach standards differently.

Collaborating with a teaching team also provides the time, resources, and different perspective to reteach a concept effectively. Using other educators—and sometimes classmates—to explain concepts from a different perspective can provide lightbulb moments for struggling students, MCL Brandon Warren says.

EIT Willonda Cates says the extra support provided by her MCL to reteach students helped lead to student growth.

"To have the extra support is very, very good because sometimes I can explain something to a child, but [my MCL] has **the ability to reach them in a different way** that really clicks for them."

- **Offer advanced work**

Routine—sometimes daily—assessments before a new topic or concept help determine which students should get advanced work.

"If the kids already know the lesson for today, then they have an alternative assignment," MCL Candace Butler says. "Sometimes they're doing something completely different, sometimes they're going straight to independent work—which is a little bit creative, and there is more application of that standard."

MCL Russ Stanton says offering advanced work not only challenges students who are excelling but also frees time for students who need to catch up. When a teaching team collaborates to reach all students, advanced students need not get stuck working alone, online or on extra worksheets.

Even students who are behind need exposure to higher-level work as they catch up; see the [Execute Rigor & Personalization](#) study guide.

- **Personalize assignments, pace, etc.**

Along with personalizing materials, teachers see success with allowing students to work—within limits—at their own pace, focused on mastery of concepts or standards.

The ability for students to work at their own pace is one major benefit of online learning done in limited, age-appropriate amounts.

Scott Nolt takes advantage of online time to allow his high school students to work at their own pace and to personalize instruction, so that students can go as deeply as they like into lessons that grab their attention. (For more on personalizing instruction and on Nolt’s approach, see the [Execute Rigor and Personalization](#) guide.)

MCL Russ Stanton saw that when lesson pacing called for learning multiplication, some students still weren’t mastering addition and subtraction, so his team created individualized progressions for each student based on data.

“We created an individualized learning plan for each kid. They would do that [addition and subtraction] practice in the morning and get the support in the morning so they could follow that plan, while still learning multiplication.”

Stanton’s team collaborates daily to implement personalized instruction, pacing, and goals to keep students from falling behind.

- * **Research additional interventions aligned to each students’ need, as needed**

MCL Melissa Wirth recognized that her third- and fourth-graders were far below grade level and researched ways to help her K–2 team’s reading instruction.

“My goal was to make sure that we **intervene as quickly as possible**. I’ve been doing a lot of reading and learning about different systematic, explicit reading interventions—things that are research-based.”

MCL Candace Butler researches intervention practices for her team; MCLs say this time to research is a valuable piece of the MCL role.

Note: Some quotes have been edited for clarity and length. Quotes come from interviews conducted with Opportunity Culture educators over several years; titles for each educator here reflect the role the educator was in at the time of the interview.

Learn More: Watch the [Adjust Instruction](#) 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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