

Improvement Science in Practice: Finding solutions through iterative testing Winter 2021 Cohort Focus Areas

Participants in **Improvement Science in Practice: Finding solutions through iterative testing** choose a problem area in which to focus their improvement activity during the course. The four problem areas described below have been identified for the Winter 2021 Cohort¹. As part of the registration process, participants will be asked to rank these problem areas in order of preference and indicate if one or more are not applicable to their role in their context.

Participants are encouraged to consider the following when prioritizing the focus areas:

- Is the area connected to your regular work each week?
- Is this an area where you have agency to test out small changes on a regular basis throughout the course?
- Do you have knowledge of current practice in this area in your system?

The focus area will provide a context for the practice-based learning participants will experience as they conduct iterative cycles of testing during the course. It is not critical that this focus area connect to a current improvement effort participants are part of beyond the course.

I. Providing effective feedback to adults

Effective, actionable feedback can be an important resource for improving practice. Feedback relationships may exist between a coach/mentor and a coachee/mentee, between a supervisor and employee, and between peers, and that feedback may be shared as part of a formal process or an informal interaction. Providing feedback in a way that it is experienced as supportive, useful, timely, and meaningful is most likely to support growth but can be challenging to deliver in any system. This group will focus on practices related to giving feedback to adults to improve professional practice. Participants who opt into this group should be in a position to regularly provide feedback to others in any of the capacities described above.

¹ Teams that are currently working on an improvement project or within a NIC and have developed a Theory of Practice Improvement (driver diagram) may request to focus on an area in their theory for course activities. Please contact professionallearning@carnegiefoundation.org with the subject line “ISP Focus Area” to pursue this option.

2. Increasing student attendance

Students need to be present to access all of the benefits of interactive teaching, whether attending class in person or in a virtual teaching environment, and students who miss school suffer academically. Student attendance, and in particular chronic absence, is influenced by factors in the school learning environment as well as those that extend into students' lives outside of school. While some of those factors may be best addressed through systemic solutions, individual instructors can also take action in ways that influence whether students are present for instruction consistently. This group will focus on those actions that an individual teacher can take to identify students who are accumulating absences before the issue becomes chronic, and to respond to students in ways that motivate their consistent attendance and participation in learning opportunities. Participants who opt into this group should be in a position to regularly engage with a consistent group of students and to both track and act in response to their presence in the learning environment.

3. Student agency for learning

To successfully navigate the challenges of the world that students are facing, students need to build the abilities to think and reason critically, to problem solve, and to make sense of non-routine tasks. In order to thrive academically, students must choose to persist in their efforts in the face of rigorous learning challenges, or act with agency. There are a number of factors that contribute to student agency, including students' sense of belonging, understanding that their learning has value, specific strategies and know-how to succeed academically, and the belief that they can learn and achieve. This group will focus on building student agency to engage in rigorous learning challenges by developing a growth mindset and improving a sense of belonging. Participants in this group should be in a position to regularly interact with students in learning settings around formal assignments.

4. Providing effective teacher feedback for student learning

High quality classroom teaching involves the continual assessment of student learning through the application of a range of practices and tools to monitor student understanding. In addition, exemplary teachers not only adjust their instruction in response to their students' learning needs, but also find ways to deliver feedback to students to improve students' performance on a given task or learning goal. Effective feedback can be a powerful tool to help motivate and catalyze student learning. However, research and practice have shown that the content, manner, and timing in which teacher feedback is delivered to students determine the effects -- positive or negative -- that the feedback has on a student's ability and motivation to use it to advance their learning. Participants in this group will focus on the practices and processes associated with the delivery of effective feedback to students. Participants who opt into this group should be in a position to regularly formatively assess student performance and provide feedback for learning.