



Best Practice: Training Educators to Identify Learning Needs Through Collaborative Inquiry

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CITY: NEW YORK CITY

POLICY AREA: EDUCATION

BEST PRACTICE

Children First Intensive (CFI) is a professional development program established by the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) to help school administrators and teachers use student data to inform their decision-making. This joint decision-making process is called collaborative inquiry and its goal is to improve instruction and raise student achievement.

ISSUE

As part of the Children First reforms, New York City educators were given an unprecedented amount of latitude to make instructional decisions that they believed would work best for their schools and students. In exchange for this empowerment, principals and teachers were held directly accountable for their students' academic outcomes.

At the same time, the NYCDOE provided school leaders access to an extraordinary amount of data about the performance and progress of their schools and students. This information was presented to them through the new accountability tools, which included the Progress Reports, Quality Reviews, Periodic Assessments, and ARIS. Through the use of a collaborative inquiry process teams of teachers used the data and information from the accountability tools to make decisions that helped improve student learning.

Because the tools were unfamiliar and because educators had varying capacities to understand and use this new data when making decisions about instruction, it was critical to provide intensive support. The Children First Intensive (CFI) team provided a training program to introduce educators to the inquiry process and the accountability tools equipping them to incorporate the use of student data and student work into their instructional decision-making processes.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The CFI training focused on the following core principles:

1. Establishing teams of teachers—called Inquiry Teams—that focused intensively on the challenges facing students within their schools;
2. Utilizing the NYCDOE's innovative new accountability tools as a resource for teacher inquiry teams;
3. Using granular student-level data to improve student outcomes; and
4. Incorporating a cycle of looking at data, identifying students not succeeding, further assessing these students' needs, identifying instructional strategies to address the needs of these students, taking action by implementing these strategies, and monitoring/revising the instructional strategies based on student results. And finally, integrating successful strategies and best teaching practices into the everyday work of teaching and learning in schools.



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Beginning with a pilot project in 2006, teams of teachers have learned to work together to diagnose the learning gaps of struggling students in their classrooms and to identify and develop effective strategies to meet their learning needs. The particular and innovative approach to decision-making is known in New York City public schools as Collaborative Inquiry, a concept that sits at the heart of NYCDOE's Children First reforms and aims to help educators close the achievement gap in their schools. As NYCDOE pushes critical instructional decisions to the school level, Collaborative Inquiry helps ensure the rigor and quality of that decision making. Each year New York City schools have been engaging higher proportions of faculty in the inquiry work. The goal is at least 90% teacher participation in the collaborative inquiry process.

The Collaborative Inquiry Process:

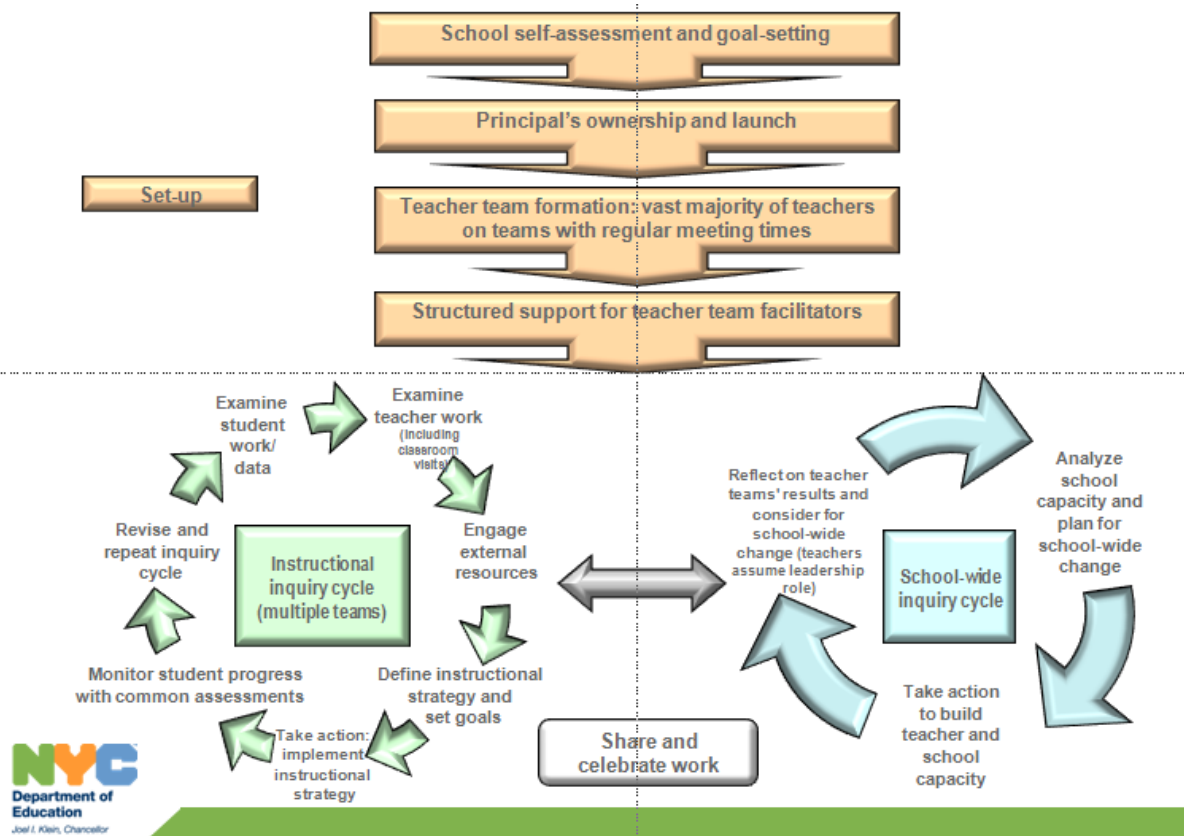
The diagram below presents the key processes supporting school-wide engagement in Collaborative Inquiry. These include: (1) the annual launch of the inquiry work by the principal; (2) the instructional inquiry cycle led by teacher teams; and (3) a school-wide inquiry process in which improvements in a school's systems are driven by the insights of teacher teams. The description below captures the typical way in which Collaborative Inquiry is integrated into a school community.

In the set-up phase, a school assesses itself based on its performance data and then sets appropriate goals. The principal engages the school staff in a presentation and/or discussion to launch inquiry, and then works with the faculty to identify structures for teacher teams, ensuring where possible that the teachers on each team have shared responsibility for a common group of students. School leadership, in collaboration with teachers, identifies a facilitator or leader on each team.

The instructional inquiry cycle often begins with teachers examining qualitative and quantitative data to develop a deeper understanding of what students do well and what students need to learn. Teachers then look at their own classroom practice and that of their colleagues to examine how curriculum and assessments align with the school's standards and student learning needs. Teacher teams then hone their action plan based on current educational research, effective practices in other schools, and input from external partners or other colleagues. Based upon student data gathered in their school, teachers develop an instructional change strategy and set measurable goals for a group of students for whom they share responsibility. The teams implement these instructional strategies through changes to curriculum (what is being taught), pedagogy (how it is being taught), and/or assessment (feedback on student learning).

Teacher teams then examine common assessment results from the group of students to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional change strategy. If the instructional change strategy has been successful, the team may move toward exploring school-wide impact; if the instructional change strategy needs revision, the team might move toward repeating the instructional inquiry cycle.

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IMPLEMENTATION

Preparing the System

The NYCDOE began an intensive citywide CFI training in January of 2007 to help prepare school administrators and teachers for the September 2007 roll-out of the Collaborative Inquiry Process and the new accountability tools. To begin, the NYCDOE hired and trained four dedicated CFI trainers, as well as a five-person CFI central team who gave "toolbox" trainings to all principals, all aspiring and new principals, all field staff, and all NYCDOE central staff. Nearly 1,800 personnel attended two toolbox trainings, which covered both the conceptual and technical underpinnings of the accountability system and the Collaborative Inquiry Process. During the first phase of toolbox training sessions, educators were exposed to Progress Report metrics; Periodic Assessment options; the Quality Review Rubric; and ARIS functionality, data cleansing, and data integrity protocols.

The second phase of toolbox training focused on understanding formative assessments and how to use assessment data during the Collaborative Inquiry Process. These trainings offered opportunities for school leaders to begin preparing and familiarizing other school personnel with the Collaborative Inquiry Process and the new accountability tools. The ultimate goal was to support principals and teachers in making curricular and management decisions to best meet the performance



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targets for which they were being held accountable.

Training the trainers

Employing a “train the trainer” model, the central team led the effort to train Senior Achievement Facilitators (SAFs), Community and High School Superintendents, Network Leaders and their team members, whose job it was to support schools in the use of data, understanding the new accountability tools and the implementation of the Collaborative Inquiry Process. It is important to note that the NYCDOE chose to focus its initial development work on the key instructional people—Superintendents, SAFs and Network Leaders—not individuals at the teacher level. By making training a priority at the most senior levels of the organization, NYCDOE was able to ensure that the ones leading were highly effective practitioners.

Implementing Coaching

The coaching component of CFI was first implemented in every school in July 2007, when the Collaborative Inquiry Process was launched. SAFs, Superintendents, and Network Leaders worked with school data specialists, teacher teams and principals. They provided inquiry teams with training and support on how to use data to identify and address the challenges facing specific student populations who were not succeeding. Teams focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the targeted student group and created instructional strategies to help overcome the instructional challenges these students faced. As teams identified successful strategies and processes, a desire grew to replicate these successes in other classrooms. Through continued reflection and investigation, the process encouraged innovative thinking on how to restructure school elements and resources to improve academic performance most effectively.

As a result of this coaching, many schools developed a deeper understanding of the Collaborative Inquiry Process and, specifically, how teachers could make use of accountability tools to meet student performance targets. This innovative model of training and support was effective because the trainings were related directly to real-time challenges schools were facing, and because they offered opportunities for professional development to school leaders. The training process also helped the key managers at the NYCDOE support principals and faculty members, and determine how practices could be changed, on an ongoing basis.

Ongoing Support

Once schools began using the accountability tools, gaps in their technical knowledge became apparent. DOE trainers provided just-in-time, ongoing technical advice that targeted specific needs that arose in schools. This ongoing support provided a full-service help-desk team as well as refresher courses over the summer as needed by school staff. Additional training was also offered to schools that were proficient in data-driven individualized instruction and were interested in looking to expand their skills in other areas of need.

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COST

The CFI budget to support the work during 2007-08 was as follows:

Item	Description	Cost
SAFs, Superintendents	60 Trainers, each associated with a network of 20-30 schools (including fringe) Note: These staff played other critical roles as Quality Reviewers and the formal supervisors of schools so their full cost cannot be attributed to Inquiry. That said, there is not simple percentage as the roles overlapped.	\$11,424,000
CFI Central team	5-person team to oversee citywide implementation (including fringe)	\$670,000
Consultants	For assistance with curriculum design	\$100,000
OTPS	Printing, training space, refreshments, technology, etc.	\$700,000
Inquiry Team per session	Funding for before/after-school dedicated meeting time for teacher teams*	\$16,081,159
	TOTAL	\$28,975,159

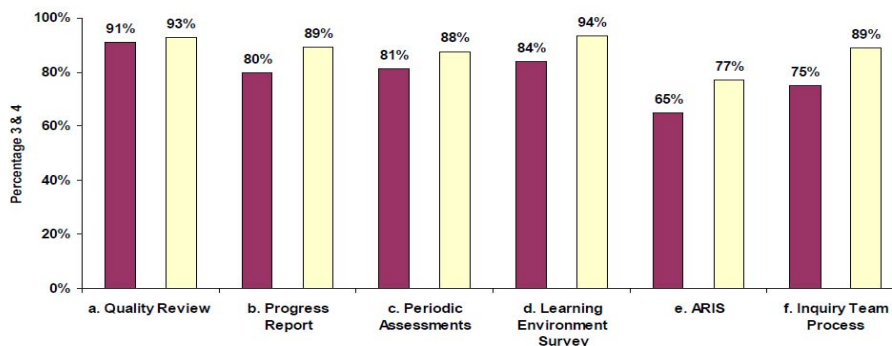
* see "Lessons Learned"

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

CFI generated the following positive results toward the ultimate goal of supporting data-driven, differentiated instruction to improve student outcomes:

- Since 2007, CFI has trained personnel at all 1,600+ schools in New York City, bringing the district one step closer to providing every child with a high-quality education.
- By November 2008, large numbers of principals understood the accountability tools as reported in the Principal Satisfaction Survey.

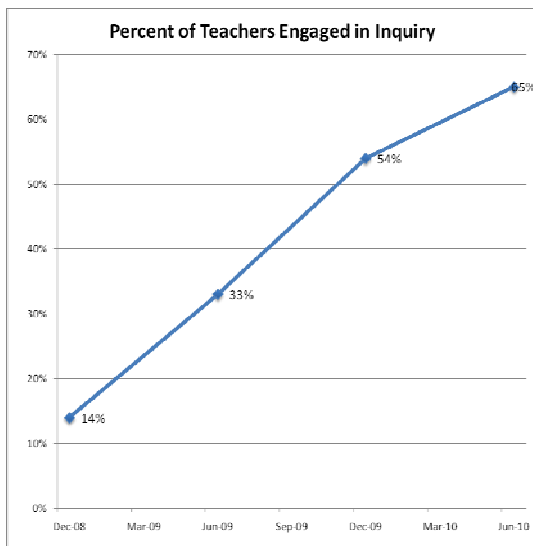
**Two Year Comparison of the Percent of Principals Understanding the Accountability Tools
November 2007 vs. November 2008**



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Note: 3 = "Clear" and 4= "Very Clear"

The percentage of teachers engaged in inquiry has grown each year:



TIMELINE

January 2007: CFI trainers trained

January 2007 – June 2007: Toolbox training rollout

July 2007 – June 2008: Coaching by SAFs, Network Leaders and Team Members delivered to every City school

Summer 2008: All initial accountability trainings completed. Support for Collaborative Inquiry implementation continues to date.

LEGISLATION

N/A

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the system's goals is to weave the Collaborative Inquiry Process into the fabric of the school as a new way of "doing business." This objective is predicated on the principle that professional development work should focus on real issues faced by the City's schools, and that for true change to occur, the principal and other school leaders must be deeply engaged in examining student work and assessment data. In this environment, principals and teachers do not formulate theories in a vacuum, but rather use their challenges they address every day in their schools as the basis for learning and transformation of their pedagogy. This process also encourages the development of leadership within the school, while supporting actual



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change at the classroom and school level.

*The goal to have 90% of teachers engaged in Collaborative Inquiry has generated the need to create time during the school day for teacher teams to meet. Since the citywide launch in 2007-08, existing structures such as grade teams, department meetings, and small learning community meetings have been used to supplement before and after-school time. As such, the inquiry team per session funding has decreased to \$11.3 million in 2010-11.

TRANSFERABILITY

The Children First Intensive training model can be replicated across all content areas. The training model is applicable to any business environment.

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