

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.

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!](#)

Acknowledgements

This vignette was written by Sharon Keschull Barrett of Public Impact. Thank you to Emily Ayscue Hassel for editing, and Beverley Tyndall for producing the *Instructional Leadership and Excellence* video clips that accompany this series.

©2017 Public Impact, Chapel Hill, NC.

Public Impact encourages the sharing and copying of these materials, but we require attribution for all use. **If you adapt the materials, you must include on every page “Adapted from OpportunityCulture.org; ©2017 Public Impact.”** Materials may not be sold, leased, licensed, or otherwise distributed for compensation. See our [Terms of Use](#) page or [contact us](#) for more information.

Please cite this publication as: Public Impact: Barrett, S.K. (2017). *Key elements of instructional excellence for multi-classroom leaders: Plan ahead and raise sights*. Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact. Retrieved from https://opportunityculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Plan_Ahead_and_Raise_Sights-Public_Impact.pdf