

**Feeding Hungry Minds in Times of COVID  
2019 Cahn Cohort**



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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the leadership journey of Cahn Fellow Wayne Bevis and his building of a team to drive student growth. The paper provides an overview of the challenges faced and overcome to increase student-learning outcomes in the Academic Center while building robust relationships that will ensure the sustainability of the journey.

## INTRODUCTION

Our Cahn project focused on ensuring our Eagles' hungry minds were provided with personalized instruction in person and through our remote learning that supported individual growth. Our focus was selected after reviewing our student growth outcomes in comparison to other like schools. It was modified as a result of COVID to reflect the new reality of learning. The project is ongoing and has been building since October 2019. Later we will expand further and go into details of our journey and progress.

Lindblom Math & Science Academy is a public school that is part of Chicago Public Schools. Lindblom serves students in grades 7 - 12. Students come from across Chicago; however, the majority come from the South and West sides of the city. Lindblom celebrated its centennial anniversary during this project and we are proud Eagles with a century of progress and alumni support.

As a school, our mission is to be "an inclusive, challenging and supportive community that empowers students to become compassionate leaders who understand, engage and impact the world." Our students are 70% African American, 22% Latino, and 63% Low Income. Our mission was designed to ensure that our Eagles practice their leadership so they can be the corporate and public leaders to ensure that our country reflects the demographics of the youth.

Lindblom is a selective enrollment school. This requires that students must test into our 7th or 9th-grade program. Lindblom is one of 8 schools in Chicago Public that has an Academic Center. This means that we are high school plus grades 7th and 8th. Our 7th and 8th graders earn high school credit and enter high school the equivalent of a sophomore.

We are working to increase to 70%+ or higher the number of 7th grade students in our Response to Intervention (RIT) Band 221-240 students meeting their national growth goal measured by NWEA English and are looking at the **impact this problem has on climate, culture, and/or achievement**. Lindblom has an expectation amongst students, staff, parents, and the community of excellence in education. That excellence is specifically for African American and Latinx students. This expectation creates a culture of peer to peer pressure and teacher expectation of excellence. Lindblom's Academic Center (7th & 8th-grade program) has had low growth on the NWEA since student growth norms were adjusted from 2011 growth to 2015 growth norms (Figure 1). This has created a disconnect between the expectations for excellence

with the achievement outcomes as measured by the NWEA and CPS School Report Card. If the growth is not resolved, it will impact our ability to recruit students and impact our total enrollment. It also impacts our AC students' ability to be accepted at "better" high schools as the NWEA scores are an integral part of the Selective Enrollment process. Lindblom students continue to have extremely high attainment (Figure 2) but the growth in 7th grade is not being achieved (Figures 3 & 4), particularly at the higher RIT levels (Figure 5). Additionally, there is a culture amongst many teachers in both the AC and high school that standardized tests and their outcomes should be irrelevant, making their willingness to consider NWEA learning evidence very low.

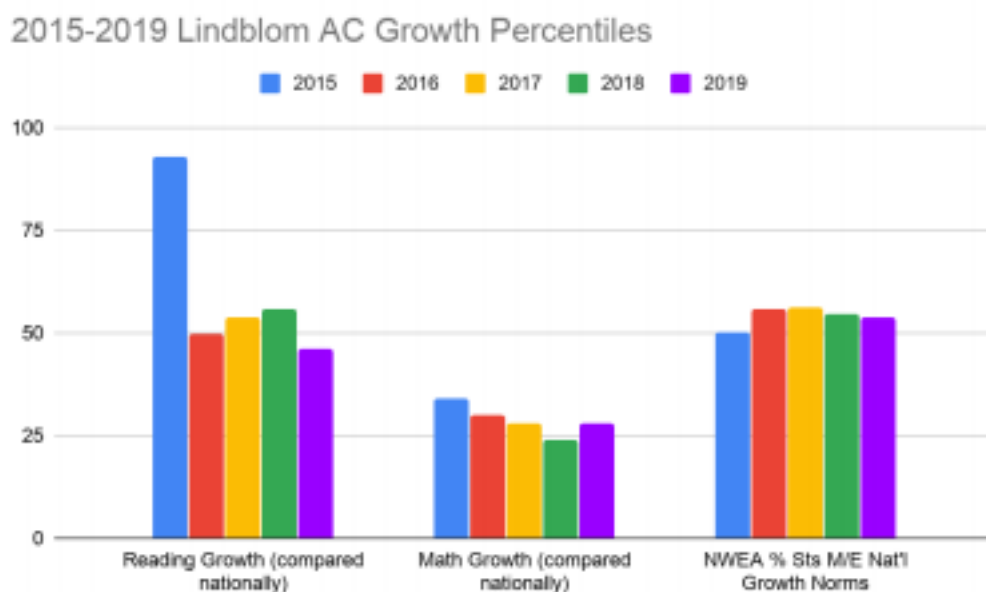


Figure 1:  
Average growth of Lindblom's AC students in Reading and Math compared to national average growth for schools with the same average pretest score and the percent of Lindblom AC students making national average growth based on their pretest scores. This data is presented by grade level in Figures 3 and 4.

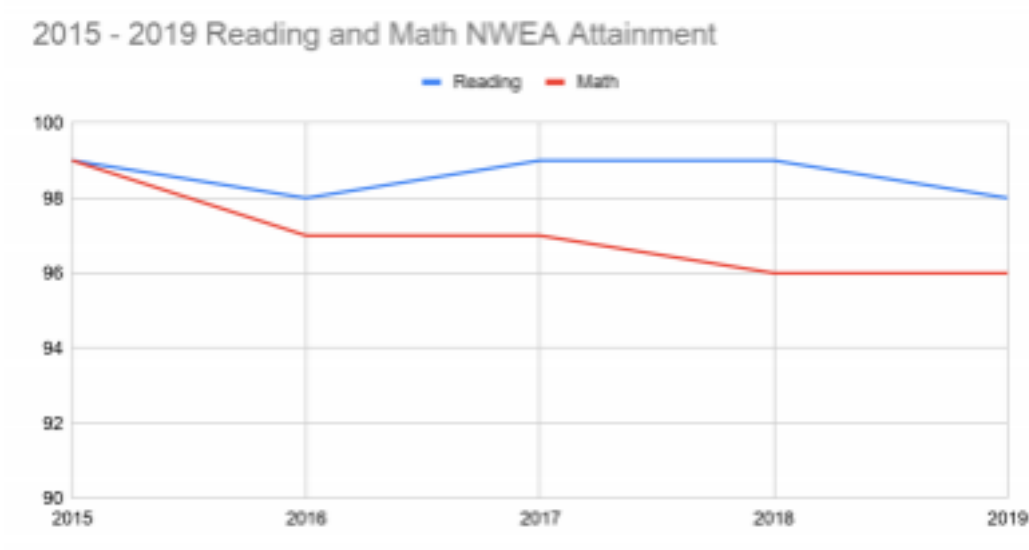


Figure 2: Average spring scale score attainment percentile of Lindblom AC students on the NWEA MAP, compared to the national average score

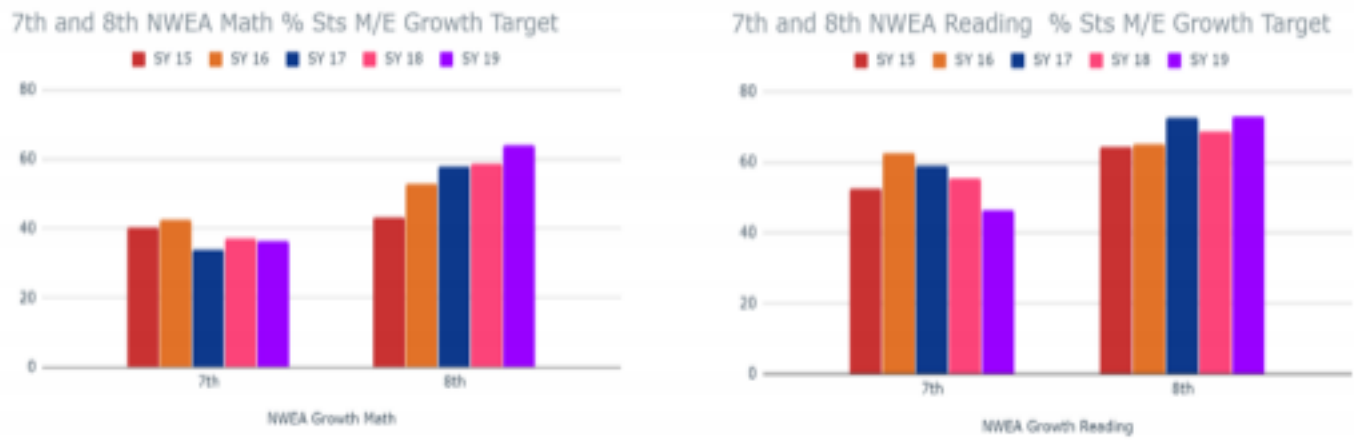


Figure 3: Percent of Lindblom 7th and 8th-grade students making national average growth in Reading and Math based on their pretest scores

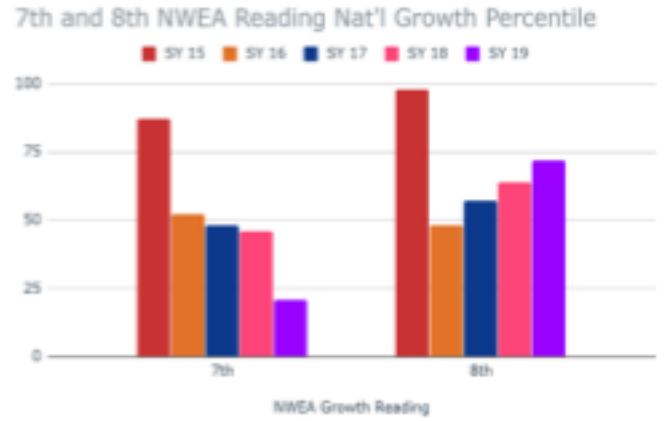
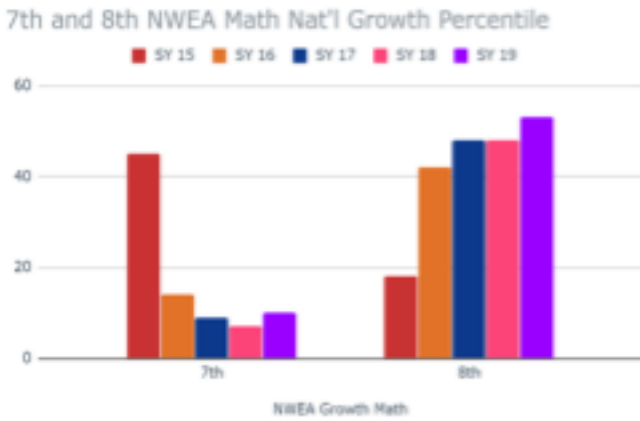


Figure 4: Average growth of Lindblom 7th and 8th-grade students in Reading and Math compared to national average growth for schools with the same average pretest score

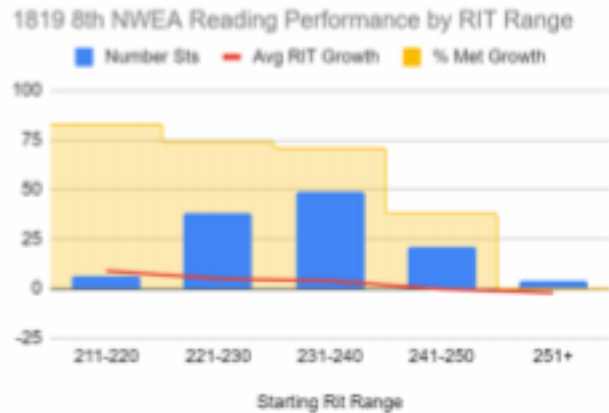
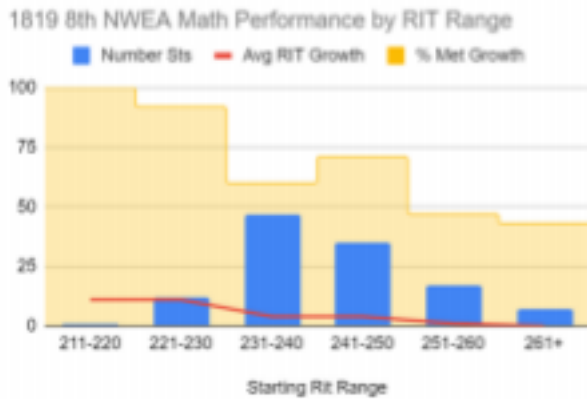
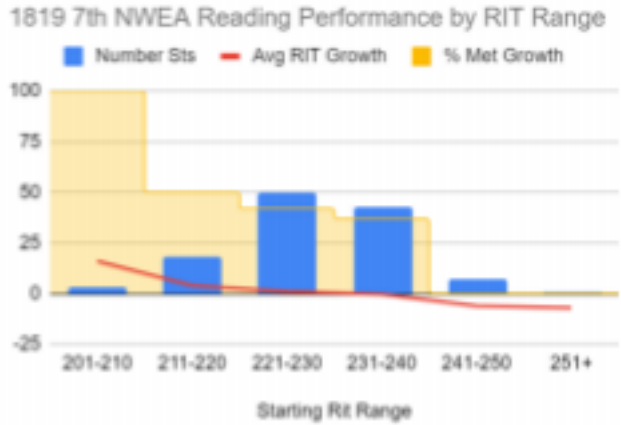
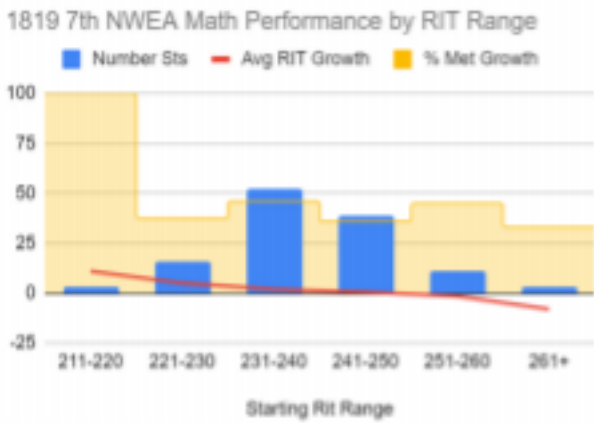


Figure 5: Spring 2018 starting RIT ranges with the number of Lindblom AC students in each range, average RIT growth in each range and percent in each range that met their growth target.

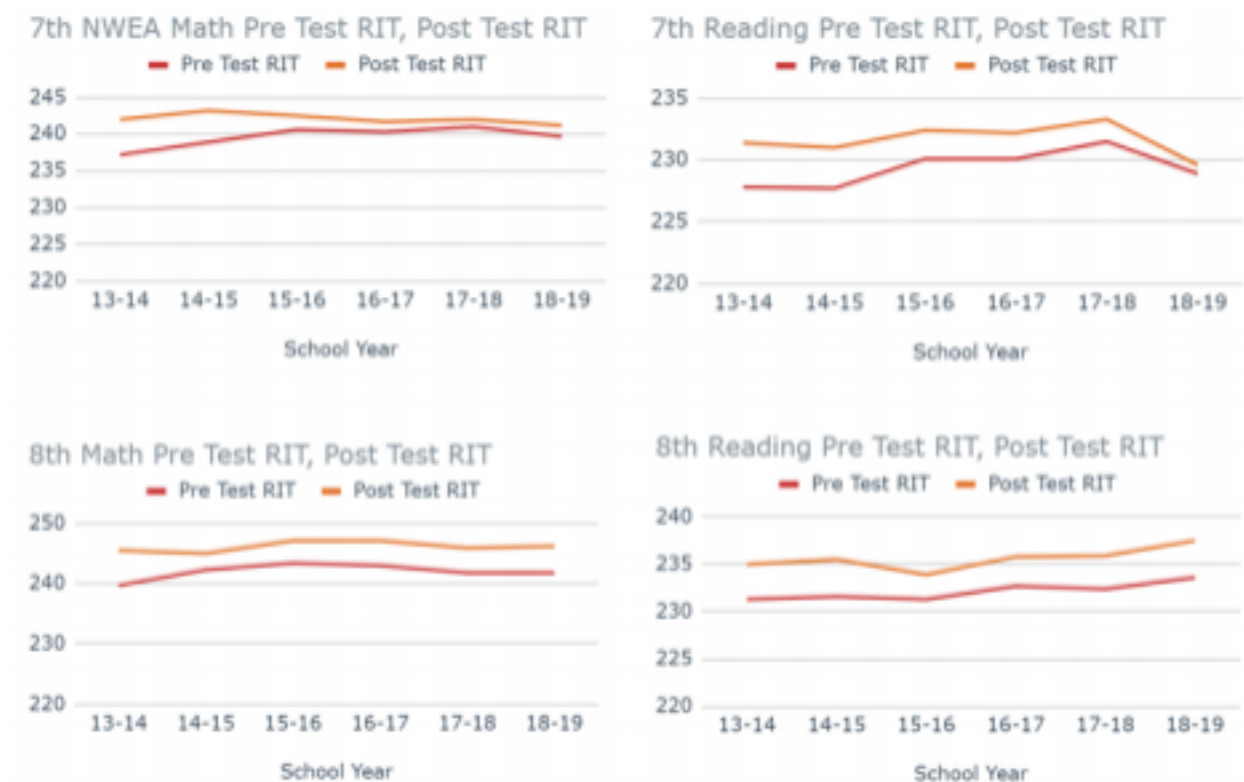


Figure 6: Average Pre and Post-test Math and Reading NWEA RIT scores for Lindblom 7th and 8th-grade students

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

*How do we better target instruction based upon individual student strengths and growth areas to ensure all are able to demonstrate the growth of knowledge and skills?*

We are utilizing this question to explore approaches to learning that takes each student's starting level of demonstrated proficiency into account. In reviewing the pre and post-test average RIT scores (figure 6) we noticed incoming 7th-grade students starting RIT scores (pre test) have gradually increased, but their post-test scores have remained relatively flat. This, combined with the data in figure 3 that shows a lack of demonstrated growth for students who start at a higher RIT band, provides an opportunity for the school to explore alternate approaches to learning that allow all students to demonstrate growth in measured skills at the end of the school year, regardless of their starting point. Additionally, by focusing on individual student growth, the hope is to build teacher buy-in, knowledge, and implementation of practices that are reflective of personalized learning.

## METHODS

Our problem will lead to the development of all Lindblom teachers and leaders as this will be our first effort to specifically personalize instruction to the individual's learning needs. The problem will begin in 7th English with the 7th Math, 8th English, and 8th Math teachers being part of the learning and design process. It will eventually lead to an expansion to the high school. These teachers will expand their understanding of and capacity to implement personalized instruction. They will eventually take their experiences and become leaders for the entire building to lead PD, share best practices, and to become evangelists to support the increased learning of all students.

This problem will expand my own leadership by increasing my understanding of NWEA and how it measures student learning and how that evidence can be used to drive future student learning. My leadership will be truly pushed as I tackle the adaptive challenges needed to gain teacher buy-in to accept and value the learning evidence provided by NWEA and to utilize that in planning targeted instruction.

We've identified multiple measures to track progress. I anticipate additional measures will be identified by the teachers once they return from the strike and our meeting pattern becomes more regular.

- NWEA attainment data
- NWEA growth data
- IXL Diagnostic Data
- IXL Usage
- LEAP Personalized Learning Survey of both students and staff
- Tracking of Classroom Targeted Assessments
- Lesson Plans that identify personalization practices & skill groups
- Class Observations w/key look for
  - Student articulation of goals
  - Targeted instruction
  - Student-driven learning

Many CPS schools utilize NWEA MAP as part of their ongoing student learning measurements throughout the school year. We are not utilizing that assessment as it was not approved as part of the CPS-CTU contract that requires annual building level votes to approve any non-required standardized assessments. IXL is being used as that ongoing student measure as it was previously used with some success and teachers are familiar with its functionality. The IXL student measures roughly align with the NWEA outcomes and as such the IXL will be the ongoing tool to monitor progress.

Why not NWEA MOY & BOY?

---IXL used due to non-approval by CTU assessment plan -- voted down

- Moved to IXL due to teacher usability - workaround from NWEA
- Gives actionable tools for students/teachers to assigned specific skills; End of year --- NWEA results
- Framing based upon SAT/PSAT/College with NWEA -- mapping tool to connect NWEA to College
- Paired with schoolwide equity discussion and to identify gaps for us to solve both academically and socially-emotionally
- Kids to College Framework --- What does a student need to get to the college of their choice?
- IL --- JORGE set up
- Khan mappers
- ILT discarded --- due to active resisters and replaced with Learning Equity Team

Video:

Student Interview of student ownership of learning before and after

<https://www.khanacademy.org/mappers>

To excite and engage staff around the goal of increasing student learning as measured by NWEA, I had to explore and identify what would motivate staff to buy into the deep work. Our staff is passionate about pursuing and ensuring equity for our students. As such, I framed the challenge around ensuring equitable outcomes for our students (almost all minority) in comparison to the national growth norms. It was imperative that we are extremely purposeful in our work so that our students have growth outcomes that are equal to or higher to their peers nationally.

This focus on equity is multipronged, through PLCs, readings, school visits, and schoolwide self-reflection. The entire school is engaging in monthly PLCs focused on defining equity and developing goals to achieve that equity for all of our students. The PLCs were purposefully designed to be cross-grade level and cross-departmental. This approach was taken to expose staff to members they would not normally interact with and to help foster a learning environment that exposes all to new experiences and points of view. The PLCs will explore our student outcomes through the lens of our school created and owned definition of Equity so we can collaboratively create urgency and goals to address identified gaps.

As a staff, we are exploring Zarreta Hammond's book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. The text study will create a baseline understanding of the importance of equity and instruction that is culturally responsive. This builds upon the Professional Development from the beginning of the year around identity and equity that was presented by the [Mikva Foundation](#).

The 3rd part of the change was to reorganize and develop a new Instructional



Leadership Team (ILT). The ILT was reorganized and rebranded as the Learning Equity Team (LET). The ILT was historically made up of department chairs and would focus on school logistics and department needs rather than student learning. The department chairs now meet separately to address those school needs. The LET team has completed a schoolwide analysis of our overall student outcomes to identify equity gaps that can be addressed schoolwide or in more narrow bands.

With the schoolwide urgency being developed, I created a new team for the Academic Center that focuses solely on Literacy in 7th grade. The Academic Center Learning Equity Team's focus is based upon the data analysis completed by the LET Team, which showed that our 7th graders' English growth was minimal when compared to national norms and with our 8th-grade growth. The team is made up of the 7th and 8th grade English teachers plus the school's English Chair, Assistant Principal, who supports grades 7-9, and an instructional coach. This specific team has been reviewing the *Culturally Response* text and creating tools to complete equity-based peer observation, task analyses, and lesson reviews. The team has identified schools with similar populations with higher growth outcomes to visit and learn their best practices.

The visits to other schools have allowed the team to identify software and other practices to explore and pilot. This includes utilizing IXL as both a diagnostic tool and an instructional supplement to support self-pacing. The visits also exposed the team to exploring options for student learning trackers that the students can own and track their own learning at the moment. The AC LET has also partnered with LEAP Innovations. This partnership has allowed us to baseline student learning experiences through the lens of student culture and skill level differentiation. The team has utilized that evidence to identify future team focuses. The LEAP Partnership will also include a 6-month learning cycle to go through the design thinking process and professional learning to expand our skills for differentiation and personalized learning.

The AC LET team has been very purposeful in completing a deep dive into our teaching and learning practices. This dive has included collecting various types of evidence to truly understand student learning experiences. As a team we:

- Developed and implemented a peer Observation Tool based upon Zaretta Hammond's research
- Used protocols to complete Lesson Plan Analysis & Feedback based upon Zaretta Hammond's research
- Completed NWEA Data Analysis
- Completed and continue to review the IXL Student Diagnostic data
- Administered to students a baseline survey from LEAP to understand student learning experiences. Need to develop teacher capacity in differentiation, increasing culturally relevant lens/approach
- Understand that students want to increase their ownership of learning

- Understand that students do not know how to track/goal set in the current format

The evidence showed a clear trend that our students were engaged in culturally relevant topics and learning activities. However, the rigor and challenge level did not match the needs of all students. This mismatch of skill growth was particularly evident with our higher achieving students. It also showed that even though we have a rubric based learning format, students do not take ownership or have a way of owning and setting their own learning goals.

While presenting and exploring the question, it has been clear that there is passion and interest among teachers to learn more about differentiation but they are currently uncertain how to explore and experiment with it. The teachers and students were clear that they want differentiation but need support in achieving differentiation.

The exploration of the question has helped me better understand the needs of both my teachers and students. I had at times assumed incorrectly that the teachers were simply opposed to the NWEA assessment and student outcomes. However, this has made it clear to me that it is a lack of understanding of what the outcomes mean and how to impact student learning in a manageable manner from that learning measure. This lesson has helped me pivot as a leader from blaming and frustration to exploring developing plans to support teacher learning.

Action	Impact/Adjustment
Schoolwide Equity PLC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Shifting focus from attainment to growth</li> <li>● Developing schoolwide definition of Equity</li> <li>● Expanding Teacher View of Equity in Learning</li> <li>● Increasing Trust/Community</li> </ul>
Reorganized Instructional Leadership Team to Learning Equity Team (LET)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ILT had been focused on Department Logistics &amp; Instruction -- Now Focused Solely on Student Learning Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Academic Center (7 &amp; 8) - AC LET</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> High School (9-12) - HS LET</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Opened Membership to All Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Previously just Department Chairs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identified &amp; Specifically Targeted Staff to Join</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Will Develop CIWP (School Improvement Plan for next 2 years) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Focus on Targeted Instruction &amp; Student Ownership</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

LET Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● LET Team reviewed student outcomes to identify Priority Areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Assessments (Internal &amp; External)</li> <li>❑ Post Secondary</li> <li>❑ Student Types for Support</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Created AC English Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Expanded Planning from just grade level (2 teachers) to include all of Academic Center (7 &amp; 8) plus School's Department Chair, Instructional Coach, Assistant Principal (Ally), and Principal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Planning had previously lived solely at 7th Grade Course Team</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Consistent Meeting Pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Equity PLC - Every 3 Weeks (Principal Directed Period) .</li> <li>● LET - Every 2 Weeks (After School)</li> <li>● AC English Team - Every 2 Weeks (Principal Directed Period)</li> </ul>

AC English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Meetings were scheduled to start at the beginning of October but delayed due to Strike</li> <li>● Principal &amp; Assistant Principal met with all team members prior to the first meeting to share data and discuss <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Resulted in urgency &amp; buy-in at 1st AC English Meeting</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Meeting 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Goal Sharing - Asset, Barrier &amp; Need to Remove Barrier Team Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Set Future Meetings to Focus on Barrier Removal</li> </ul> </li> <li>❑ Identified Schools for Visits</li> <li>❑ Identified Baseline Data to measure progress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ NWEA</li> <li>▪ IXL</li> <li>▪ LEAP Survey</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>● Meeting 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Compass Point Personality Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Allowed team members to understand how each member views &amp; responds to information and implementation</li> <li>▪ Allowed team to understand gaps in personality types as well <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· No West Team Members</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>❑ LEAP Survey Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identified Plan to Administer</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ AC Team Teachers met independently to review student data and to begin planned differentiation of student skills       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Agreed to utilize IXL for skill targeting &amp; Newsela for leveled readings.</li> </ul> </li> <li>❑ Students Set NWEA Goals after reviewing their NWEA Scores       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teachers began developing urgency</li> </ul> </li> <li>❑ Each Team Member identified a topic based upon individual growth goals to present to the team</li> <li>❑ Identified a Peer Observation Tool based upon Zaretta Hammond</li> <li>❑ Identified Look Fors at the Lee Elementary Visit       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ School Visit Debrief/Discussion</li> </ul> </li> <li>❑ Impressed by transparency &amp; student ownership of learning       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Summit Platform for the organization was nice</li> </ul> </li> <li>❑ Wants:       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online tool to track and integrate student learning &amp; student self-pacing</li> <li>▪ Students can explain what they are doing, why and how it connects to unit learning focus (&amp; how it connects to their goals as learners)</li> </ul> </li> <li>❑ Modifying Schedule for 2nd Semester to have time on Wednesdays for targeted skill instruction</li> <li>● Meeting 4       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Teacher Lead Session</li> <li>❑ Analyzed Lesson Plan using Equity Lens from Zaretta Hammond</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Meeting 5       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ LEAP Survey Result Analysis           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Will identify 2 focus points to improve</li> <li>▪ Will re-administer survey at EOY</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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## RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND FUTURE PLANS

Our team's efforts were turned on their head right when we were beginning to hit our stride in March of 2020. Our teachers had bought in, they were exploring, innovating, and trying new approaches to ensure that our Eagles were growing. However, in Mid-March CPS abruptly shut down due to COVID. This shutdown resulted in our staff and students completely rethinking what school means remotely and creating a new way of learning in a week. This rapid shift and the new constraints paused our efforts for about a month as we adapted and began to develop best practices for teaching through a screen.

As our teacher and schoolwide practices settled in and we became confident in our remote practices, we re-convened the team. As a team, we decided that we were going to continue working towards our goals and expanding upon our practices that we had developed in the classroom to work in the remote world. We knew that our data with NWEA would no longer be available but our efforts towards increasing rigor and personalization continued. As a team, we can celebrate that in remote education, the world that has continued to his very day, our Eagles are engaged with 98% attendance in our 7th and 8th grade. Our Eagles' grades continue to be just as strong as they are in person. Most importantly our efforts have resulted in more student ownership and choice in their learning. Our Academic Center's efforts to develop a menu became fully implemented with each student choosing their sides and desserts based upon their individual learning needs. Our AC's team has resulted in allowing for a menu of books for students to choose from, to both read and engage with, but also to allow them choice in how they demonstrate their learning. This menu has expanded throughout the English department in the high school. This has resulted in increased student engagement even in a time of remote learning.

Our teacher buy-in for our team has continued to grow as they collaborate, plan and give feedback to each other. This has resulted in increased culturally reflective and sustaining practices and learning that reflect our students. Our teachers have also adopted the use of IXL to monitor student progress since the NWEA is not available.

## REFLECTIONS

While the project may be ending, the journey continues. The Cahn Fellowship provided me with new leadership tools, but more importantly a new focus on relationships and adaptive leadership. My team of dedicated teachers continues to pursue our goals but they do this because of the relationships we developed and the focus on our Eagles.

COVID, without a doubt, impacted our team cohesion, our progress, and our approaches. I honestly believe that remote learning created an opportunity for a new unique approach to teaching that helped create the successes and progress that took place. We were no longer constrained by traditional teaching but completely free to develop a new ideal approach. Our team is also very excited to apply the learnings and approaches from Remote

Learning to apply to onsite learning whenever it resumes. COVID did impact team cohesion as developing, expanding, and maintaining relationships through screens was very difficult. Our team continues to thrive but I believe our relationships and cohesion were reduced due to the new format of collaboration.

My own leadership improved and expanded during this journey. I have often focused on technical solves and Cahn truly forced me to recognize the gap in my leadership regarding relationships. I now focus more on the relationship-building to drive adaptive change rather than on technical solutions. The team can create technical solutions. I as a leader need to inspire and support them so they are willing to problem solve, be reflective, and develop the ideas and changes needed for student improvements.

As a leader, I focused on the sustainability of our solutions and implementations. The team was narrow and our focus narrow to ensure that the team was not overwhelmed and to ensure that solutions created could be sustained by the team. The team continues to expand its focus in small steps but each step ensures that it is sustainable before expanding. Our Eagles are ready to soar as they leave our Academic Center and they have increased their confidence, skills, and ownership in their flight as a result of the Cahn Project. Lindblom's nest is stronger and will continue to support new Eagles every year as we continue this journey.

Ally -- Easterly Reflection

***Change is hard due to what is being LOST as a result of the change. Embrace the fear that change brings.***

In prepping for this reflection, I took a moment to glance over the numerous articles, handouts, and notes I captured during the rich Cahn Fellows professional learning sessions. When I came across the statement above that I jotted down during Jeff Young's *Leadership in School Communities* session in Gettysburg, it felt as though it jumped off the screen and hit me in the face. It is not in quotes because I'm not sure if I captured a direct quote or if it was my interpretation of the message he was attempting to convey to us; either way, it perfectly sums up the leadership journey I have engaged in over the past year and will continue to remind myself of as I press forward into the unknown that lies ahead.

My participation as a Cahn Ally combined, with the challenges faced over the past year, has resulted in my increased ability to embrace and lead change and be less afraid of what it brings. Prior to the experiences of this past year, when asked what my biggest fear is, my response was always, without hesitation, "the unknown". I feared the unknown, therefore, it was to be avoided at all costs. Change requires us to embark into the unknown, so by default, change, in my mind, should also be avoided at all costs or, only when absolutely necessary, approached with extreme caution. Without the experience as an Ally in the Cahn Fellowship and other professional learning opportunities with Cahn alumni, I realize how stuck I would be as a leader and unable to adapt to the constant state of change we are currently immersed in. From our initial sessions learning about Adaptive vs Technical problems to the reflective

“Dinner Party” to the Systems Change talks, I have had the opportunity to gather and absorb resources and engage in reflective thinking that has allowed me to improve my ability to lead through change.

Using our Cahn project as an example, we initially sought to improve student growth outcomes in math and ELA by altering teacher support, changing mindset about the role of data in addressing student outcomes, and adjusting how we use time during the school day to increase supplemental learning. Lots of change, but we crafted a clear plan informed by best practices and embarked on this journey as though we were headed out on a meticulously planned road trip with an hour-by-hour itinerary of distance, stops, and activities. Then our “trip” was disrupted when teachers went on strike during the first quarter of the school year for more than 2 weeks, and shortly after a quick sigh of relief at the start of 2020, schools shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while our nation had a moment of reckoning with the racial injustices that permeate throughout our country. Our road trip was completely and officially derailed. Our plan was useless, but we still needed to get to our destination. Thankfully, we already had established a clear vision for how we might meet our goal -- increase opportunities for personalized learning, but we had to completely rethink how to make that happen given the remote learning environment, limited teacher capacity and completely different school schedule. This all required me to be less reliant on plans and more reliant on the team’s capacity to adapt to change and find solutions that would get us to our goal of improved student growth by increasing opportunities for personalized learning. I am happy to report that we are back on track towards our destination with a regular cadence of team meetings, a willingness to adjust our practice to meet the needs of students, and an improved ability to trust the collective work of the team to reach our destination.

Given the extent of the learning and growth that has taken place within myself, my principal, our teachers and our students, I hope to extend this journey of change and begin new journeys of change (without the devastating events) indefinitely. Jeff Young was certainly spot on with his statement...Change is hard due to what is being LOST as a result of the change. Embrace the fear that change brings. I now fully understand that the uncertainty that comes along with change is not so bad when you have great leadership and a dedicated team taking the journey with you!

Kelli Easterly  
Cahn Ally, Cohort 17

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey would not have been possible without the support of my Ally Kelli. She was a thought partner, a friend, and always ensured that we focused on students. Karen Carpenter is an amazing Assistant Principal and Eagle for life who ensured that Kelli and I had the time and



space needed to grow and expand both our Eagles' staff and students' skills.

To the team of Sasha, Aaron, Mary, and Mike - who are willing and excited to continue on this journey.

To Lisa for helping me focus on my own development and not just the teams.

To the Cahn Fellowship Organization for making this learning experience possible; for pushing the focus on self-care. I have so often ignored my own health and you have helped ensure that I prioritize it.

To my Chicago Cahn Fellows for listening, supporting, and building robust friendships that I know I can always rely upon.