



VIRTUAL

INSTRUCTIONAL
LEADERSHIP
CHALLENGE

TRANSCRIPT

MODULE 6

From Individual Improvement to Organizational Learning

Welcome to Module Six of the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge, Aligning Teacher Practice Organization Wide. In this section, we're going to review some of the key ideas from each module of the challenge and we're going to bring it all together to help you identify ways to take the work that you're doing with individual teachers and transform that into organization wide improvement.

Now, at the very beginning of this program, I shared with you six core beliefs that informed the design of the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge. And I want to go through those now that you've had the chance to see the full program and get a sense of what it means to practice evidence-driven instructional leadership and to have evidence-based feedback conversations and to see the whole iceberg of teacher practice. Let's review some of these core beliefs that we started with.

First of all, I believe in the core of my being that instructional leaders belong in classrooms. There is no better way to be an effective instructional leader than to be where the instruction is taking place on a regular basis, to get into classrooms. And of course, if we can't do that in person, we've got to find alternatives which we'll review in just a moment.

When we get into classrooms, number two here, I believe that one of the most powerful things that happens is that we build relationships and we come to understand teachers at a much deeper level than we could if we only got into classrooms, you know, once or twice a year for those formal observations and then interacted with teachers outside of the classroom. There's something powerful that happens in the relationship between a teacher and an instructional leader. When that instructional leader invests the time to get into that teacher's classroom on a regular basis for low stakes purposes, you know not just the formal evaluation but really just the formative and ongoing learning that we can do together.

Third, I believe that seeing teaching and learning firsthand provides valuable evidence that informs our decisions. You know, the, the decisions we make about an evaluation rating, about retention, about issuing permanent contracts, about improvement plans all of those high stakes decisions that we do need to make which typically are based on just one or two formal observations, those become much better decisions if we're in classrooms much more often, seeing teaching and learning firsthand.

Fourth, I believe that teachers change their practice not so much in response to suggestions that they get in the formal observation process or even in more frequent informal classroom walk-throughs but more as a result of conversation with someone who knows their practice well, who knows best practice and who's willing to talk with them on a regular basis about their practice. And it's true for just about any type of belief that we might change as humans that we're going to change those beliefs because of conversations we have with people we trust.

Fifth, I believe that we need a common vocabulary for those conversations and the more specific and detailed and customized that vocabulary can be, the more we're on the same page by having shared meaning and shared understanding and not just using buzzwords but the more we're using

truly a shared instructional framework, as we talked about in the last couple of modules, the better off we will be and the more effective we'll be in changing teacher practice.

And then sixth, I believe that there's a sense of urgency around improvement. This is not something where we can say, you know what? When everything's back to normal, when we don't have any virtual learning going on, when there are no disruptions, there are no concerns about the pandemic then we'll focus on improvement. I believe that there is an urgency to this work right now. We can be getting better at serving our students.

So everything in this program is designed to help you do that right away without delay. And one of the things that we shared early on to help you make that progress quickly is the High-Performance Instructional Leadership Model for getting into classrooms.

And the seven characteristics you might recall from Module One are making classroom visits that are frequent, brief, substantive, open-ended, evidence-based, criterion-referenced that's your instructional framework and a conversation-oriented. You will also find those in chapter two of Now We're Talking! 21 Days to High-Performance Instructional Leadership as well as in our Module One audio review.

So just to review the review options, if you ever want to go back through this program, you can look at the transcripts and you can listen to the audio reviews. We've created a single MP3 file for each module of this program. So that rather than have to go through multiple files, you can just go right to the module review and play the whole thing to quickly review. Very helpful for refreshing your memory on anything you may have gone through a while ago. Now this is the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge.

So the High-Performance Instructional Leadership model may be impossible to implement if you are in a virtual learning model right now. So if you cannot physically get into classrooms what do you do? My suggestion is that rather than try to replace face-to-face observations with virtual observations that you instead look at other forms of evidence and focus those three a day interactions on phone calls rather than classroom walkthroughs. call students, excuse me, call teachers outside of class time and talk with them about their practice and develop an agenda for your calls and you know, figure out what you need to connect about what information you need to convey and so on.

We talked about an agenda in Module One if you want some tips on what you might talk about on those calls but the consistency there is really critical because it maintains the flow of information and it maintains the relationship that otherwise you'd be maintaining by getting into classrooms. So when you can't get into the classrooms, talk on the phone, not another zoom call, not a Google Meet not a video call, but just a regular old phone call and people will give you the information you need. They will ask you for what they need. They will stay connected if you reach out and continue to make those daily contacts with teachers.

Next, I wanted to review the evidence driven philosophy that we talked about in Module Two. The idea that it's not enough to simply give ratings, it's not enough to simply score what we see and say that this is good, this is bad, this is proficient, this is distinguished and so on that we actually need to make evidence the centerpiece of our leadership for a couple of reasons.

First of all, evidence is at the heart of making good decisions, right? We need evidence to make decisions as leaders, teachers need evidence to make the decisions that they have to make as teachers and the better the quality of our evidence, the richness of our evidence, the better those decisions will be. And one of the most powerful things we can do as colleagues and as professionals working together is talk about the evidence and make sense of it. So rather than say that data or strategic planning or anything else is the most powerful improvement activity, I argue in this program that conversation is one of the single most powerful practices you can engage in for school improvement. And I stand by that because this is complicated work, right?

When we get into classrooms and see teachers teaching, what we're looking at is just the tip of the iceberg of practice. This is a metaphor that we introduced earlier in this program. The idea that when you get into a classroom and you see a teacher at work, you're not seeing all of the decisions they made in advance, you're not seeing their professional knowledge, you're not seeing their relationships with students and their awareness of many things that are not visible to you as an observer. And we said that we have to be very careful about a tendency to engage in observability bias and to reduce practice to just the parts that are easy for us to see.

So I want to challenge you to keep that in mind, when you get into a classroom or you see virtual learning for that matter, we're only seeing visible aspects and we're missing a lot of the real intellectual work that teachers are doing behind the scenes.

And when it comes to working virtually, really there need to be some fundamental shifts in the way we understand what teaching is, right? It's not just explaining things from the front of the room. It never was but sometimes because of observability bias, we focus heavily on the explanations and the directions that teachers give from the front of the room and their classroom management and other virtual or visible things like that.

But especially in a virtual or hybrid context, we may find that teachers are actually playing a different role, a role like curator of resources created by other people, a role like docent, guiding students through materials rather than, you know, personally explaining everything, coaching students to do challenging work or being a teammate as they work with colleagues and possibly divide up the workload in different ways. You know, we've seen more specialization, more dividing up the workload just to save effort and to save time that I think may stick with us long beyond virtual learning.

So we have to understand that what we're asking teachers to do is different and the way that we lead and supervise that work has to be different as well. And I want to refer you again to our 15 Questions For Feedback On Virtual Teaching If you're struggling with what to say, what to focus on those questions can guide you in the right direction. We also talked in Module Three about who actually is participating in those feedback conversations. It's not just two people, right? It's not just you and the teacher.

The third participant in a feedback conversation we said is the framework, the expectations that you have in place that sit around the table with you saying, what's good? What's excellent? What's not so good? You want that third participant to be there as an external standard or arbiter so that when you're talking about the evidence it's not just a back and forth, you know, kind of argument about whether this was good or whether this was bad. There's a third party there seated at the table with you in the form of your instructional framework. And that allows conversations to be

much more focused on the evidence and much more focused on growth.

A tool that I shared with you that I want to encourage you to start using if you are not already using it is the Notecards. And you can download those at PrincipalCenter.com/notecards-pdf. And you can print that out on Cardstock, make a notecard for each teacher that you supervise and you use those note cards to keep track of either your visits to teachers or if you're not able to visit in person, your phone calls, your interactions with each teacher and simply note the date and the subject or the period or the time of day that you observed and keep those in a stack.

And keeping those notecards in a stack will allow you to establish a consistent rotation so that you're not over visiting some people, you know, the people who are easy to talk to or convenient to reach and missing other people who may have more difficult schedules or more difficult personalities.

We want to be consistent with this and we want to visit everyone once or chat with everyone once before we follow up with anyone twice. So the note cards are just a tremendous simple tool for allowing you to do that.

In Module Four, we talked about developing and using instructional frameworks. You know, that third participant in your feedback conversations and we talked in depth about the characteristics of a good framework. And we said, ideally, they have four levels of performance. And those levels of performance cover specific areas for you know, whatever it is that we're focusing on, we break that into two key components and we don't just describe the different levels of performance in terms of frequency, you know, like sometimes are always or never does a particular practice.

There's actually a qualitative difference between the levels of performance. And that allows us to figure out where a person's practice is without having to see it all the time, without having to say, well you do this every day therefore you're distinguished. No, it's not about that. It's about the nature of the practice that we are seeing even if we're only seeing it once.

So I want to refer you to one of the bonuses that's included with this program, the Instructional Framework Development Program which will help you guide teachers through the process of developing your own frameworks. Now, you probably have frameworks in place like your Teacher Evaluation Rubric. You probably use you know, a broadly shared framework perhaps like the Danielson framework or something that your district has developed to evaluate teachers overall.

The Instructional Framework Development Program is for developing smaller rubrics to zoom in on specific practices where you want to help people improve. So check that out. It's under your bonuses section in the challenge and you have teacher facing materials. You can share those videos with teachers to guide them through this process.

In Module Five, we talked about the time and the mental energy components of being an instructional leader during a pandemic and some strategies for creating that bandwidth that you need to truly have an impact as an instructional leader. And we talked about budgeting your mental energy. We talked about the planner and the daily scorecard. We talked about Parkinson's Law and how insights from that idea that work expands to fill the available time can actually give us some good ideas on how to organize our days so that we get the right work done and prioritize those classroom visits and conversations with staff.

So as we put things all together in this final unit of the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge we're turning our attention to the question of how we turn our work with individual teachers into collective learning at the organizational level and to the question of how we can help teachers learn from one another even if they're not teaching in the same classroom, they're not working together directly, they're not able to observe each other directly, how do we help people learn from one another? That will be our focus throughout the remainder of this module.

For now go ahead and get your journal out and some reflection questions I have for you as we consider this recap of the program so far. First, what is one insight from an individual conversation that you've had with a staff member that could benefit teachers in other departments or grade levels. In other words this is kind of the cross-pollination question. What have you learned from talking with one teacher that you could share with a different teacher or team?

And second thinking about your instructional frameworks, what existing shared vocabulary, expectations, or formal frameworks are in place? Because those can be a tremendous drivers of improvement. When you have filled out your journal for this section, you're ready to move on to the next section.

Aligning Practice: Tight But Loose

Let's talk now about aligning teacher practice. Now, the promise of an instructional framework is that we can use it to get on the same page about what professional practice looks like but we have to be careful to do that in a way that respects teacher autonomy and that gets us aligned on the things that matter.

And I was recently investigating this issue and came across a research report from 2008 by some authors that I have a great deal of respect for. And the report is called "Tight But Loose, Scaling Up Teacher Professional Development In Diverse Contexts." And they directly tackle this issue of what alignment should really look like because on the one hand, we know alignment matters and we want people to be rowing in the same direction, right? We want people to be working together, working toward common goals, using common approaches so they can learn from one another.

But on the other hand, we don't want to micromanage. We don't want to have to police specific strategies and take away teacher's autonomy and say that everything has to be done exactly my way down to the finest detail.

There is a sweet spot for alignment and if we're going to obtain the benefits of alignment without the drawbacks of micromanagement we have to make sure we're aiming for that sweet spot.

So this report that I came across, I'm going to share some insights from, is very helpful in framing some of these issues and helping us avoid micromanagement. And this was a report based on the "Assessment for Learning" a project from a number of years ago. And they articulated a very detailed theory of action. And I want to share with you two specific parts of that. We're not going to get into the details of what their study was about or what their professional development program was about. But their theory of action said that first "teachers learn extensively and deeply about minute-to-minute and day-by-day assessment for learning via an initial workshop and sustained engagement in teacher learning communities."

So there was a professional development and learning community component that was designed to teach teachers in this project, some specific strategies for using Assessment for Learning. The second component of their theory of action was that "teachers would make minute-to-minute and day-by-day Assessment for Learning a central part of their everyday teaching practice by implementing the big idea and the five strategies of Assessment for Learning through judiciously chosen practical techniques." And I love that phrasing, "judiciously chosen," because it highlights the reality that in order to implement a practice, teachers have to make decisions on their own, right? They cannot simply do what they were told in the training. They have to own their practice. They have to make those decisions for their students on an ongoing basis. And what really struck me as I reviewed this report was their organization and distinction between those three elements of practice. They said, you know, this Assessment for Learning project is really all about a big idea. And they've got that big idea in the diagram here.

And then there are five key strategies that all teachers need to master and implement but they implement them by choosing judiciously from a large repertoire of practical classroom techniques. So what they did not do in this project was give teachers the entire list of techniques and then go around with clipboards and count how many of the techniques teachers were using or check off

each technique and make sure that teachers were using all of them. That was not their approach because they knew that teachers needed the flexibility and the autonomy to choose which strategies to use at any given time.

Now, in order to still be implementing Assessment for Learning, the big idea had to be there, the five key strategies had to be evident but they purposefully avoided the pitfall of micromanaging what teachers were doing. And we might find that we're in that trap of micromanaging, if we find ourselves focusing too heavily on the visible aspects of teacher practice, you know, if it's on a clipboard, if it's on a checklist, if we're just looking to check it off and move along then we might've fallen into what we call observability bias and we might be missing the deeper aspects of teacher thinking and decision-making that really matter.

So, you know, if we do want to align on some surface level things, that's probably okay but we have to recognize that they're surface level things. For example, if we all have the same hall pass policy in the school that will be helpful to students, right? Creating consistency for students is good and creating consistency about the strategies that we're using to help students learn like Cornell Notes, right? If every teacher in your school is having you, students use Cornell Notes, that's going to be helpful to students but we have to recognize that it is a surface-level alignment. And it's probably not at the heart of our improvement work because the real work of teaching and the real work of improving teaching, lies deeper beneath the surface.

So what do we do if we want to avoid surface-only alignment? Well, first we have to remember that teachers need autonomy in order to work as professionals, in order to do their jobs and meet students needs, they need to be able to act with a certain degree of autonomy. And the main way that we oppose that autonomy or tamp down that autonomy as instructional leaders is when we tell people, you know what? You used technique X instead of technique Y and you should have gone with Y. We micromanage and police the specific strategies that teachers are using and take away the autonomy they need to be flexible and to make decisions in the best interests of their students. And we really have to be careful about that. We really need to remember that it is not our responsibility to make those decisions moment by moment. You know, if we walk away and leave the teacher to teach on their own, we need things to not fall apart without us. We need it to be not necessary moment by moment. And that means we need to trust and empower teachers to make those decisions.

One more thing that I think we have to be careful about when it comes to surface-only alignment is aligning simply at the level of a buzzword. And this is where having an instructional framework can be incredibly powerful because it creates a shared understanding that goes much deeper than the terminology, right? If all we said was, "we're going to do Assessment for Learning. I want to see lots of Assessment for Learning in your classroom," well, we would have virtually no guarantee that everyone meant the same thing by that term, Assessment for Learning. So we've got to go deeper. We've got to be more specific because simply using the same term does not ensure that we have a common understanding.

In order to align around practice, we have to be much more specific. And in the Instructional Framework Development Program which is available as a bonus training accompanying this program, you will see that to develop an instructional framework, we need to specify basically four things. We need to identify the practice itself, we need to break that practice into specific key areas. We need to identify the key characteristics of that practice, we need to identify how visible

those practices are or those elements are and how long a period of time they play out the visibility and zoom grid. And then we need to define four levels of performance for each of those characteristics.

So again, we walk you through that whole process in the Instructional Framework Development Program there's a workbook and some templates that you can use with your teachers to start identifying some of those shared expectations in depth and clearly so that you're talking about the same thing and not just using the same buzzword or the same title.

Now, one caution that I want to give you when it comes to alignment. Is to not align around the steps for doing something, right? As observers, we like to see the steps as novices, we like to see the steps when we're training people, we like to say, first do this, then do that, and then do the other part. Well, that only gets us so far because there is inevitably going to be decision-making that needs to occur. And in order to truly train teachers on a practice we need to familiarize them with the key dimensions that they're going to need to consider to make those decisions. So if you look at, you know, and any good rubric for practice, it's not going to say the steps. It's not just going to say first, do this, then do that. It's really want to break it into the key areas and that is going to help us avoid observability bias.

And again, you might remember from the earlier modules of this program, observability bias is that tendency that we have to focus on what's easiest for us to observe and ignore the key decisions that teachers are making behind the scenes, just because they're not visible us. So we've got to get the insider's view of practice and that means we have to talk about practice. We have to talk with teachers to truly understand what they are doing and to help them improve.

So that brings us to the end of this section. Go ahead and grab your journal, and think about alignment for a moment. Think about what you want to become tight but loose about when it comes to shared expectations. What are some big ideas within those shared expectations that really matter, that serve as the foundation of that alignment effort and decide who it applies to, right? Is this for the entire staff? Is this for a particular department or a particular grade level? It is especially powerful to focus on things that don't apply to everyone because you can be much more specific in meeting the needs of say the English department or the first-grade team.

There is huge power in focusing and zooming in. So don't feel like you have to include everybody in everything. What are the core ideas? What are the core practices, right? With Assessment for Learning we saw that they had identified five core strategies. So what would those be for your alignment effort?

And then what is the, you know, the kind of furthest tier out of alignment where you want people to have a shared repertoire of strategies, you want them to be trained and familiar and able to use those strategies flexibly but you're not going to micromanage those and tell teachers that they use the wrong one or they should've made a different decision. You're going to protect that autonomy for teachers.

What goes in that kind of tier of shared expectations? When you've done some thinking about that, you may again want to go directly to the Instructional Framework Development Program and start sketching out some ideas, or reach out to one of your teams and say, "hey, could we start talking about aligning in this particular area of practice?" And you will find that teachers welcome those

conversations, they want to be understood, they want to share that insider's view with you, and you will learn a ton from it that you can then use to help other teachers learn across the organization.

That's it for this section, I will see you in the next section, as we move through module six of the "Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge."

Teacher Autonomy and Alignment

In this section, we're going to explore some of the research around autonomy, and apply that to the situation of teachers who are working together and working to align their practice. Because there are some very important insights that we need to keep in mind whenever we attempt to align teacher practice. And I'm going to be drawing, in this section, on self-determination theory from Deci and Ryan starting in the 1970s, identified three factors that they now call self-determination theory that factor into intrinsic motivation.

So self-determination theory says that intrinsic motivation comes from three innate needs. The need for autonomy, the need for competence, and the need for relatedness. So if we're going to have teachers work together and identify areas to align their practice and get very good at something, get better at something, this is incredibly relevant to that work because if we align people and get them on the same page but we undermine their intrinsic motivation, we're not going to be happy with the results.

So alignment can be a powerful force for improvement but only if it doesn't eliminate that appropriate degree of professional autonomy that teachers need to do professional work and to be responsible for their students and to make decisions to improve student learning. We have to build that autonomy in because it's central to doing the job of teaching and it's central to intrinsic motivation.

Now, when we are choosing a focus for our alignment, we can build in autonomy right from the very beginning, and we can ask teachers, what do you think would be helpful to align around? And you can share these criteria with your teachers. You can say, we need to choose things that impact your practice a lot. Practices that you use on a frequent basis, not something you do once a month but maybe something you do every single day. Let's get aligned and let's improve on those high frequency practices that have a major impact on student learning, and also that sometimes people tend to struggle with. So you can look at your teams and notice if you have a large degree of difference in performance from one team member to the next.

So if you have that high degree of variability where some people are very proficient with a particular strategy or in a particular area of practice and other people are really struggling, well then you probably have a good candidate for alignment.

And developing an instructional framework in that area, is going to lead to a large amount of growth. Now your best teacher may not grow all that much compared to how much other people grow, but imagine the improvement that would result if you brought everyone on a team up to the level of the top person on the team. And we can actually do that if we create an instructional framework that serves as a roadmap for growth. But as I mentioned, we wanna give teachers a say in what we focus on. We wanna give teachers a voice in deciding what topics, what practices to develop instructional frameworks around. Because if it doesn't seem worthwhile to teachers, then they're not going to have the investment, they're not going to put the effort in to really make something that pushes their practice forward.

So this is a conversation to have with your teachers, and really make sure that they have an interest in, that they care about the topic that you were wanting to align around. Now, when we do align, when we create shared expectations in the form of an instructional framework using a program

like the Instructional Framework Development program... You're welcome to follow that process and share those materials with your staff.

When we do that, that creates a growth pathway that every teacher on the team can follow to bring their practice up to a certain level. And certainly we want everyone on the team to be proficient. If you have a four-point scale and level three is proficient, we want everyone on the team to quickly reach that level of proficiency. And we define that level of proficiency very clearly so that if people are not yet proficient, they look at the rubric, they look at the framework, and it tells them what should be different about their practice to improve it to rise to that level of proficiency.

So again, competence like autonomy, is one of the the three elements of self-determination theory that lead to intrinsic motivation. And competence shows up in a very specific way when it comes to instructional frameworks because we actually specify levels of performance. And we say, if you are at a level three or a level four, you can safely assume that you are competent or better. And if you're a level one or a level two, there definitely is a need for some growth. And to avoid inflating our descriptions of practice, to avoid what we might think of as kind of grade inflation, we want to avoid saying that just the best person on the team is a level four and everybody else is a level three.

And I have some more specific recommendations for you on this in the Instructional Framework Development program. I hope I've convinced you by now to check that program out. But the way you can explain this to your teams is to say that level one is probably what you had as a kid, right? If you think about some of the not-so-great teachers that you had as a kid, many of those practices are still around and we need to work diligently to do better than that, right? We need to push beyond those apprenticeship of observation kind of practices that any high school graduate would have experienced without any teacher training, right?

If we're just repeating the poor pedagogy of a generation or two ago, we can do better. We can do better. And level two is better, but it's still not good enough. And we really wanna get everyone up to the standard of our best teachers. And this is the promise of alignment, right? That if we get everyone on same page, hopefully the best teacher on the team is not going to drop their performance in order to meet others, the average is going to rise, right? People are going to up their game when they have the opportunity to do so because they're clear on what to do differently because of those shared expectations. But level four should not come from your team. Level four in your rubrics that you develop should come from best practice research.

We need to look outside of our own teams, look outside the walls of our own school and say, what does the best evidence from our profession tell us is best practice in this particular area. And that's typically where you have to look at books, you have to go to conferences, you have to bring in experts in specific areas so that we're not capped by just the best here, we're capped by the best state-of-the-art practice anywhere. That should be the level four in your rubrics.

Now, when you make these rubrics and get clear about what good practice looks like, there is the potential for an awkward issue to emerge on your team. There's the potential for people to realize that they are not competent in a practice according to the rubric that you've developed. You know, people will look at their own practice and say, you know what? This is actually kind of level one on our rubric. I thought I was doing just fine but really this is level one apprenticeship of observation kind of practice that I got from my teachers when I was a kid, and it hasn't really im-

proved since then, and I needed to up my game. So that can be awkward.

And you want people to come to those realizations perhaps privately. You know, you wanna have individual conversations with people about where they are and not cause them to lose face with their teams. But the good news is that they have a roadmap for growth. When you've done that alignment work, when you have created that shared framework describing professional practice in great detail, people know what to do to improve. And they can learn that from their peers, and they can learn that from best practices brought in from across the profession. One other element that we have to talk about when it comes to alignment is the idea of shortcuts.

And of course, in any given year, we have to take shortcuts because there's more to teach, there are so many standards, there's so much curriculum, there's so much we want to get to that we just don't have time for that we all have to take shortcuts, right? Every teacher takes shortcuts and doesn't do every single thing in the curriculum, in the lesson plan, in the textbook, you know, we simply can't, right? There's far more in the plans than we can get to.

And in order to stay on pace, in order to finish the curriculum by the end of the year and get to what we need to get to, every teacher is making decisions about what to cut, what to skim through, what to emphasize, where to slow down, where to speed up. And this is something that especially in times of virtual learning, we can align on.

There are certain things that are simply not going to work very well in a virtual context. And I'm a former science teacher so I think about labs. There are labs that you can have students do at home with things that they probably have around the house, but there are a lot of experiences that we're just not going to be able to give our students in a virtual context. And what we wanna encourage teachers to do, is make those decisions together.

Make those decisions transparently, and be honest with ourselves about what's going to work and what's not so that when we've all taken shortcuts at the end of the year, we've taken the same shortcuts and we've agreed upon them so that we don't have some classes that did this and some classes that did that, and we don't have these huge inequities from student to student about what was possible for their remote learning. Just a final thought there for you on alignment. It is okay to align around the shortcuts that we take.

Now it's time to get out your journal as we come almost to the end of the program. I wanna encourage you to identify some specific areas in which you want to create greater alignment. And again, these could apply it to just one team or they could apply to your whole staff. They're probably going to be more powerful if they apply specifically to one team or department. What practices that are high-frequency, high-impact, and high-variability could you get teachers to align around by developing a shared instructional framework? Do some thinking, make some notes in your journal.

And again, if you're ready to get going on this, check out the Instructional Framework Development program. It is included with this program and you can share it with your teachers. It is ready to go.

That's it for this section. I'm Justin Baeder, and I will see you in the next section of the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge where we'll wrap things up.

Your “Stop Doing” List: Pareto Satisficing

Congratulations, you made it to the end of the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge. I thought in this last section, what we would do is talk about a type of improvement that doesn't get enough credit for the impact that it has on student learning. And that is what you might think of as addition by subtraction. And we'll call this your Stop Doing list.

This has been a year when educators are so overwhelmed that there's been a lot of pressure to stop doing anything that doesn't fit, anything that doesn't matter, anything that doesn't seem like it's worth the time and effort.

And what I want to do in this section is encourage you to review what we've talked about, to review the models that you've learned for understanding practice and how teacher practice has changed in the pandemic, and identify things that at least for now need to go. Because one of the most direct paths to improvement is to stop doing things that aren't contributing to the results we want.

In the last section, we talked about aligning the shortcuts that we take, about realizing that we never have time to do everything. We always have to cut here and there and skim through this section or that section and stay on pace.

And we're going to make the best decisions together if we align the shortcuts that we are going to take. And a particular way that you can do that, especially in a pandemic, especially in a virtual learning context, is to implement something that is known as the Pareto Principle, which we talk about in our bonus module Preventing Teacher Burnout.

So there's a more in-depth section on this concept there. But just briefly, the Pareto Principle is the age-old idea that 80% of our results come from only 20% of our efforts. And the other 80% of our efforts produce only 20% of our results. So this is a way of saying that a lot of what we do, a lot of what we spend our time on doesn't produce results. And right now, this is a season when we need to be honest with ourselves and ruthless in eliminating work that does not produce results for our students. You know, things that have been piled on over the years that maybe made sense once, that might make sense again next year, but right now, they just don't fit.

We really need to prioritize getting rid of anything that is not a top priority, that doesn't produce those results. There's an idea from the organizational decision making literature from the pioneering researcher Herbert Simon, called Satisficing. I love this idea of satisficing. Think of it as the opposite of perfectionism. Nobody is holding themselves to perfectionist standards this year. We don't have time. It's not going to get us the results we want.

And satisficing is a direct way of valuing that impulse, to avoid perfectionism. So satisfice is a portmanteau. It means satisfy the criteria, do what needs to be done, accomplish the goal, but don't overshoot. Don't over do it. Don't be a perfectionist. Just do what will suffice to satisfy the goal. That's what satisficing is. And we need to tell teachers directly, good enough is good enough.

Do not be a perfectionist about this. Do not stay up all night formatting your document or just getting every little thing right. We need to focus on the big rocks in order to focus on student learning. And when we do that, when we focus on the big rocks, everything else that's not a big rock, to

use Stephen Covey's term, can be dropped. We can let go of a lot of the things that are taking up people's time and bandwidth.

And we've got to give people permission to stop doing those things. Because teachers, by temperament, are often just so conscientious, they want to do everything, they want to check off every box and satisfy every requirement and make sure that nothing gets left undone, we really have to give people permission to stop doing things that no longer matter.

So I want to encourage you to adopt this as your kind of mindset throughout the rest of the school year, to be vigilant in looking for things that can be eliminated. You know, if people are stressing out over something, ask yourself, does that really need to happen? Or can we let it go? Can we say that what we're doing is good enough? We do not need to put a bow on it, to put the icing on the cake.

Satisficing says good enough is good enough. And we need to actually invite teachers to tell us, hey, if I've asked you to do something and you find that it's taking up a lot of time and it's not contributing to student learning, tell me. I want to know. I want that feedback. And I will give you permission, you know, if it's all possible, I will give you permission to stop doing it. We wanna give people permission to speak up and make their own workload more manageable. We also need to search for efficiencies that we can achieve.

If we have duplicated effort, if we have the same planning work being done by every team, every first grade team in every elementary school, or every science department in every middle school, if they're all working in parallel and not sharing the workload that it has created this year to be teaching in the pandemic, well, that's an opportunity to create some efficiencies. If we're requiring paperwork for the sake of paperwork, if we're asking people to turn in lesson plans and other plans, you know, all this paperwork that we typically require, this is a good time to suspend that.

Maybe we bring it back, maybe we don't. But we've got to free up people's time. Because the reality is that the less people have to do, the better they will be able to do what's left. That's that Pareto Principle in operation. If we pare down what we ask people to do to just the bare essentials, they're going to have more time to do it well. And I would much rather have people do fewer things better than try to cram in all the stuff that we normally do in a typical school year, because this is not a typical school year.

So again, you have reached the end. And I wanna share our final journal questions with you for your reflection. First of all, what are teachers currently spending too much time on? What are the complaints? What are the, maybe you're not getting complaints.

Maybe people are cheerfully doing what they're supposed to do, but it's hard for them. Get that feedback. And then ask yourself, how can I bring that up with each team or department? How can I get that feedback on what needs to go, what needs to be cut, or what needs to be put on the back burner?

So this is it. You've made it to the end of the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge. If I could leave you with one particular action item, it would be this. Talk with your teachers. Get in the classrooms if you can. And if you can't, pick up the phone and call them and keep track of those visits. You have the note card template for keeping track of your visits and phone calls. And you

can alternate purposes, right?

If you're able to get into classrooms some of the time, but perhaps you have a teacher who's quarantined and you're not able to visit their classroom right now 'cause they're home for 14 days, pick up the phone and call them and keep that same rotation. Because there's nothing more important than the relationship that you have and the communication that you have with teachers as an instructional leader.

Thanks so much for being part of the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge. I'm Justin Baeder. And please reach out any time if I can be of assistance. And please let me know what you do with this program. What impacts are you seeing? What insights are you gaining from this work with your teachers? I would love to hear from you. You can email me anytime at justin@principalcenter.com.