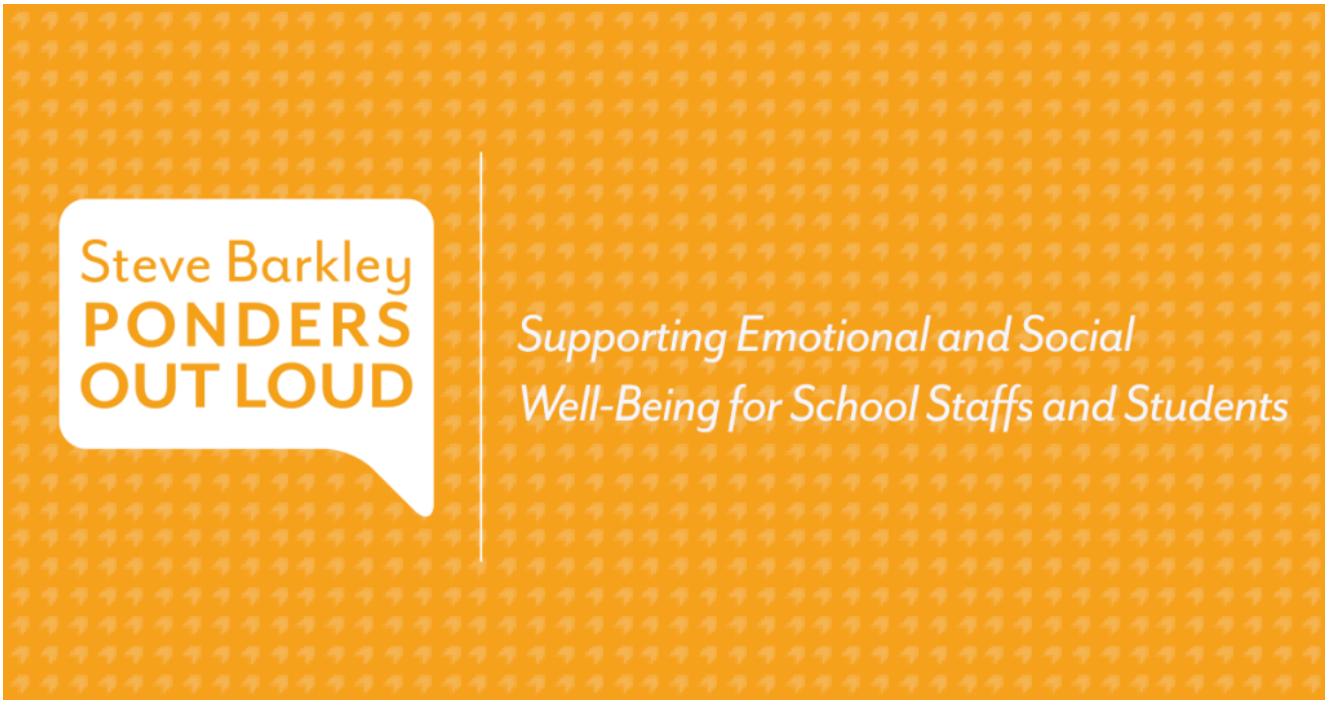
Podcast: Supporting Emotional and Social Well-Being for School Staff and Students



The Executive Director of Counselling in Schools, Kevin Dahill-Fuchel, explores the environments needed for students to thrive in school and survive in life. A key to that environment is a staff that can manage their emotions personally and be resilient so that they support students authentically. What role do instructional coaches and school leaders play in supporting teachers' emotional safety and relationships? How is SEL foundational to schools and classrooms and not an add-on? What should we be celebrating and where should we have an urgent focus?

Connect with Kevin and find his resources here.

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.000] – Steve [Intro]
Welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. As instructional coaches and school leaders, you are tasked with guiding continuous teacher growth to create student success. This podcast looks to support you with strategies from experienced guests, as well as my own insights that I've gathered over the years. I'm thrilled to have you with us. Thanks for tuning in.

[00:00:29.540] – Steve
Support emotional and Social Wellbeing for School Staffs and Students. I'm pleased to welcome Kevin Dahill-Fuchel, the Executive Director of Counseling in Schools, to our podcast. Kevin has more than 30 years of experience working with children, families, and school staff. In his current role, Kevin is committed to developing leadership models within organizations that are needed to effectively take on the complex challenges routinely faced in schools by children, families, teachers, and administrators. With a mission to promote the emotional and social growth of children so that they can thrive in school and succeed in life. Counseling in Schools provides a range of on-site services to help New York City school leaders and their staff find a better way forward. Welcome, Kevin.

[00:01:33.480] – Kevin
Thanks, Steve. It's great to be here.

[00:01:36.100] – Steve
I'm wondering if you'd start with just a little bit of background and current perspective on CIS and its role.

[00:01:46.620] – Kevin
Absolutely. Well, Counseling in Schools was started in 1986 to be a companion to a mental health clinic that was offering services in public schools as a third-party billing clinic. And families would sign their children up for therapy in the school. Sometimes, though, the insurance that was being billed

for that child would get interrupted for reasons that have nothing to do with the child. So counseling in schools was started to accept grants to create a buffer for that issue that might come up. So in a way, our mission has always been around breaking down barriers to access for children to services. As time went on and various events occurred throughout New York City and the country, frankly, the grants available to support breaking down those barriers for mental health expanded, and counseling in schools no longer needed to simply be an ancillary to the mental health clinic. In fact, the mental health clinics were fading out in favor of more of these grant-based services, which would have no other exchange other than consent from the parents to have their children enrolled in our services. So that's really the kernel of where we started. And really where we are now is finding ourselves really as entry points to social emotional well-being, as well as more clearly identified mental health concerns, but finding that the entire school community is a great place and a great opportunity for the development of just really healthy habits, socially and really strong and resilient emotional people.

[00:03:31.740] – Kevin
I say people because I don't just want to focus on the children. We do focus on the children first, but there's a lot more than children in a school community, as you know, Steve. Everybody matters.

[00:03:41.860] – Steve
I really appreciate the term of "opportunity to thrive." I think that's where our focus needs to be. What do you see as some of the most important elements that students need to find in classrooms that build that opportunity to thrive?

[00:04:00.720] – Kevin
There's a couple of things. I mean, and they're easy to say, they're harder to bring about. But I think one of the things that jumps to mind is a really well balanced and healthy teacher. And for children to thrive, I think they need an

adult who's leading them, who themselves is in a thrive mode. They're feeling good about themselves. They're expanding. They have a sense of agency over themselves and what they're doing and really able to connect with the children. And then I would say the children really need opportunities to connect with each other. The cooperative games, if you would, or collaborative experiences that a classroom can create really allows children that opportunity to find who they are, because we do do a lot of finding out who we are in relation to other people. But if it's a competitive win-lose dynamic, you might find out that you're the top of the heap, or you might find out that you're falling off the cliff all the time, and all those things create emotional challenges. If we do it together, and I don't just mean everybody gets a trophy idea here, but just the idea that if we can collaborate and cooperate towards things, what can everybody learn?

[00:05:15.020] – Kevin
And then those who are good at something will naturally be in a lead, but they'll be bringing those with them that have other skills that can complement what they do. So that's, to me, what a thriving classroom looks like. It's a collaborative cooperative space with a leader in class of an adult or several adults at times who themselves are feeling really motivated and in a space of thriving in their own lives.

[00:05:40.260] – Steve
In many ways, the statement learning as a social activity fits. If you don't have the social environment, the learning is not going to happen.

[00:05:53.420] – Kevin
Absolutely. The social environment and that emotional residue that comes from that. There's that saying there, I think it was the Maya Angelou piece – "You're not going to remember what they say, but you're going to remember how they made you feel." I think that really hangs with you throughout that. The socialization part, we'll get to another one of the concepts

that I know you'll align with, but that feeling and sense of belonging. When you're connected socially, you feel you belong. When you feel you belong, possibilities start to really awaken for you.

[00:06:31.120] – Steve
A lot of the listeners to this podcast are instructional coaches and school leaders. I wonder if you talk a little bit about how do you see those leadership people setting the tone for SEL environments in a school?

[00:06:49.480] – Kevin
So one of the things that I think might be overlooked at times is how the relationships that the coaches or the leaders have with each other in the school. And we're back to this collective idea, right? It's going to be a theme in my responses, Steve, as we go forward here. But I think that what they model within how they're interacting within the environment is a piece of what it is that they're offering to the teachers and how you set those relationships up amongst your cohort of teachers, if that's what you have, and how you position yourself within that is a big part of that experience of moving towards understanding what needs to happen to create those same conditions for the children in your classroom. They're not going to be exactly the same. It shifts and changes for the age of the child that you're working with. Clearly, a high school classroom is going to look different than a middle school or an elementary school. But the basics of the opportunities that are there to connect back again to this idea of being, how can we be collaborative and create a supportive environment within that space?

[00:07:57.060] – Kevin
And those are some of the things that I think when you're you look at where is that opportunity? When there's an answer that's incorrect, what is the response that a teacher has to a child for an answer that didn't quite meet the mark of what they were looking for? Is it, no, you're wrong, or is it, I

see part of what you're thinking was there, can someone else help Steve understand maybe the direction this needs to go in? Those things may seem like I'm just parsing language, but those words will live with a child who hears something like, oh, my thinking was acknowledged, but I didn't have the thought that brought me to where I needed to go, versus, oh, I was wrong.

[00:08:42.080] – Steve
Many teachers are under pressure to deliver both academic and SEL outcomes. How do you see coaches and leaders helping teachers to, I guess, first of all, manage their own emotions and have resilience themselves so that their support for students is authentic?

[00:09:07.400] – Kevin
Yeah, that's a really important question. I think, again, something that's probably easier said than done. But I do think, again, the time that you can invest in your cohort of teachers and collaboratively working together and identifying what resilience is. Resilience is a muscle that I think needs to be trained. It's not something… We're often saying, oh, that group is a resilient group, or maybe this group isn't so resilient, or we talk about it at times like some inequality that some have and some don't. But really, I think it comes into how we train ourselves towards awareness of who we are, an outlook on life. And I think positive I take lessons from positive psychology. What is it that I want to see more of? Where is it that I'm heading collectively within a classroom, what is it that we want to see more of? Where is it that we're heading that we want to get to? And how do you stay focused on that? There are little exercises that have come into my life through other trainings that I've been to. Just at the end of the day, what are three things that I saw happen in the world that someone helped out somebody else that was positive?

[00:10:27.810] – Kevin
Did someone hold a door on the subway? Was there someone

helping someone pick up something off the street? I mean, I see those things here in the city all the time, right? And you blow right past them. But if you can connect to those things that are life-giving, it helps you be in a position to also then notice those things, perhaps in your classroom. What child held the door for you when you came in? Just little things that you do on a daily basis, some journaling. Those are individual things that you can do, but you bring it out into a collective conversation when you create a cohort and have those conversations together.

[00:11:01.640] – Steve
It just really triggered something in me for that reflection because I think I knew this, but I had forgotten it. I just reread a research piece of the… You use the example of holding a door, so let's stick kindness in there. But the impact of kindness on the person who was the receiver. But then the research showing the provider is getting the same benefit from it. But then the one that blew me away was an observer of it was impacted by it. So your use of that term of stopping and reflecting on where the kindness is and that I see the kindness. To me, that sounds like an opening for the faculty meeting. Every sitting a small group of three and each teacher talk about one that you saw today.

[00:12:06.840] – Kevin
Yeah, that's great. I love that, Steve. I think it speaks to this idea or this reality, I think that when you're the teacher in a class or a teacher in a school or an adult in a school building, people are watching what's happening. They're seeing. So the kindness is seen. The opposite is also seen, which is where I think that investment in a collective wellness amongst the adults is so important so that people are… Not everybody's going to be your best friend, but that's not the point is, how is it socialized? How are people responding to each other? Does one teacher hold a door for another? Just in that, a child will see that. If you don't, a

child will see that, too. Those things, I think, are really often overlooked just because they seem like, oh, that's maybe someone being chivalrous or someone having good manners. But it's good practice for how you act in the school building the way you want to see everyone else act because they're watching and they're going to take it in and it's going to have an impact.

[00:13:23.480] – Steve
I worked in a school years back where it was a middle school, and they'd done one of those surveys where where they collected input from the kids on an adult in the school that they would trust to go to with anything. They ended up identifying a group of kids who didn't have anyone. But they also ended up identifying a group of teachers who weren't selected by anyone. So the next year, they rolled out a plan where they took those kids who said they didn't I don't have anyone. Each teacher was given one or two of those students as a focus. And the task they had was to use the kid's name once a day to make eye contact with the student once a day. But this is the one that really blew me away. Once a week, ask the student to do something for you. Create the opportunity that the student carried something for you or went and got something for you. Powerful enough, at the end of the year, there wasn't a single teacher who wasn't selected by a student. Just the teacher focusing on that one student I don't know that that was the student that picked that teacher, but that consciousness on the teacher's part brought about a change.

[00:14:52.980] – Kevin
Yeah, and I love that, Steve. I hadn't heard that, but I think that's great. Part of what I think of listening to you say that is the fact that things can change. You can be someone who's so into something. Maybe you're not making eye contact, maybe you're not holding doors. You're not consciously trying to be an isolationist or something. You're just in your thing

intensely, perhaps, and whatever else is going on in your life, maybe bringing it with you. But when you get in the classroom, I'm here to teach, and so you do your job. But It's one little turn of the screw making eye contact with someone. Hey, could you help me with this? And that piece just really warms my heart. The fact that they're wise enough to understand that when you give the child a responsibility, it lifts them up as opposed to, oh, I need to do this for somebody in order for them to get somewhere. No, you need to give them the opportunity to be who they're going to be. Then when they are, everybody goes higher.

[00:15:59.320] – Steve
With Without consciousness, that's not the kid who's going to come into your mind when you need something. It takes the consciousness on your part.

[00:16:08.260] – Kevin
That's right. The child themselves may be just not noticing. They're noticing things, but they're just shy or they just have a lot of maybe a self-esteem that tells them that, oh, well, I'm not as good as them, or whatever our negative self-talk might be for the child. That's just a brilliant lesson to take.

[00:16:28.760] – Steve
I'd like to talk a little bit more about SEL and it being embedded in the school. Are there some shifts that you'd like to see schools making so that SEL isn't an add-on? It's not a time where we stop what else we're doing and teach SEL, but it's a foundation for building how adults and students interact?

[00:16:58.520] – Kevin
Yeah. This can be a real soapbox for me, so I'll try to keep it within range here. But I think the idea from my perspective is that I love to see schools measure emotional well-being, social skill development on the same type of scaling that we

measure our development of intellectual skills or knowledge attainment through the academic portion of schooling. If that were the case, and actually, when I think about it, if you think about it, at least here where I went to school in a kindergarten, your report card as a kindergarten is, how well did you get along with the other kids? Are you happy when you get to school? Can you make the letter A look like the letter A with the crayon. It's like those three lanes are really understood when you're five and six years old. You get to be seven, and now it's like, okay, we're done with that. Let's now get down to this win/lose scenario of you either pass or fail and all of that. I'd like to see that back reintegrated. Why wouldn't we want to have a teacher say, ow well is this child socializing?

[00:18:12.080] – Kevin
And what do we need to do if there's an issue there? And how is this child feeling throughout the day? What do we notice about that? Or how can a child express themselves? What opportunities are they taking to express their emotions? And what emotions are they expressing? And then do they understand the Pythagorean theorem? All of those things can exist on the same plane, and I think we can work that out so that teachers have that as part of what they're doing. You may have some specialty classes, just like you do for any of the academics. There are AP this, and there's other advanced classes in that. You might have some children or things that excel in those areas or you want to dive deeper. But overall, I think it's a significant mistake for us to leave that stuff behind when a child hit six or seven because there are so many more experiences that we're going to have from 7-21 that are going to change how we socialize or how we feel about ourselves or feel about the world, that we really ought to be continuing to monitor that and supporting it all the way through.

[00:19:13.640] – Steve
I'm going to put you on the spot. Do you think you can rename

the three things that you said the kindergarten report card was made up of?

[00:19:21.280] – Kevin
Absolutely. Social skill development, emotional well-being, and academic progress.

[00:19:29.280] – Steve
When you did it the first time, you gave it in kindergarten terms.

[00:19:33.780] – Kevin
Well, I think it's how well you're getting along with others. How do you feel? How are you feeling today? What did you just learn? What do you now know how to do that you didn't know how to do yesterday?

[00:19:47.180] – Steve
I love it because as you said it, you were saying it ought to continue. It struck me, it should be on the teacher evaluation form for the school. We ought to be clear that the adults in the school are looking at those same three things, which is really progressing through their career.

[00:20:10.920] – Kevin
Exactly.

[00:20:11.760] – Steve
After 20 years of teaching, what have you gained in those areas that sharpen your ability to create that place for kids to thrive?

[00:20:23.820] – Kevin
I think that would have a significant impact.

[00:20:27.980] – Steve
What do you think are some things that What are happening in schools that we ought to be celebrating as you get to go out and be in schools around the city?

[00:20:38.200] – Kevin
I think there are things that children do, that students do regularly that illuminate the possibilities of their lives that we don't celebrate enough. I think certainly here in New York City as a public school entity, it tends to only get spoken of for those things that are the deficits or those things that are lagging behind – what we want to see or those incidents that are dramatic in a building. But I think there are teachers who are doing incredible things in classrooms. We have schools that have hydroponic labs with children who are growing food in communities that have slight food deserts, and they're serving their community this food. These are 10 and 11-year-olds who are growing food and carrying it out into their community, their own community. They're from there. They're growing the food. They're bringing it out. I think that's just like, shouldn't everybody want to know about this? Let's talk about this. There are other ones. There's another school by the Harbor here in New York. They're building boats. They're actually building boats in the classroom. You see the woodshop and they're building the boats, and then they go out and they sail them.

[00:21:59.420] – Kevin
Those hands-on practical things that you see children do. There are the highlight schools in New York City, the ones that everybody hears about the Bronx Science or the Stuyvesons or the Brooklyn Tech, and those are great. Those kids do great, wonderful things that also need celebrating. I could walk into almost any school, and we serve about 70 schools in the city. I could walk into almost anyone and find something that I'm just like, why doesn't everybody know that this is what's what's going on or that this teacher has created this environment? You see joy and creativity and kids working together. It happens. It doesn't happen every day and every moment for every kid, but it happens. If we lifted those things up. I think more people would want to strive towards them rather than, I think a lot of people in our system come

in with this heaviness of something I have to overcome where we are versus I'm coming into something that I'm to continue to help lift up because, wow, it's already so great. And I'm not saying I want to have rose-colored glasses, but I am saying I want to bring that positive mentality.

[00:23:10.480] – Kevin
Again, that essential question for me around assessing schools or working with children or working with families is what do you want to see more of? What do you want to see grow? And let's lean into that. We'll deal with the problems along the way for sure, and we'll have the skills available to do it. But let's start with where we're headed, not with where we've been that we don't feel necessarily so good about.

[00:23:33.520] – Steve
I'm hearing the opportunity to thrive, both for the kids in those settings and the adults.

[00:23:39.920] – Kevin
Completely.

[00:23:42.040] – Steve
Let me switch it. You got one or two things that you think are on the urgency list that we need to be paying more attention to faster?

[00:23:54.920] – Kevin
Yeah, I do think the well-being of teachers is a part of the growing social anxiety that we're seeing in children. I think post-COVID, the social anxiety that came from the isolation and the separation to a degree was a part of it. We're five years past, people are almost six, and you're saying, well, why is this still an issue? Well, I think part of that is that we didn't really fully recover the adult community around that many teachers left. There's new teachers coming in. There's still, COVID hasn't gone away. It's not in its pandemic proportions, but you still have this idea of people, well, do

I really want to go into a building every day? There's hybrid jobs out there. Do I really want to be around children? Aren't they sick a lot of the time? So there's something in that that I don't think we've paid enough attention to. And I think we're going to continue to have anxious children because they're looking to adults who themselves are not as settled as we once were. The things we took for granted are no longer taken for granted. So there's a hyper alertness, and I think that's trickling down and translating into our children.

[00:25:09.440] – Kevin
So I think we have to really work on that piece from the adult side before we can really expect because we're doing a lot of work with the children. We do a lot of work with teachers as well. But it does feel like when we're working with the children, that we're a little bit more downstream than we used to be from where the problem is continuing to get fomented. And I think it's… And again, I'm not assigning intention or blame anywhere. I just think it's a result of what we all went through.

[00:25:37.220] – Steve
It's our attention.

[00:25:38.780] – Kevin
Yeah. I think there was a reality pre-COVID where, for the most part, the communities that we serve, there are certainly a lot of adverse childhood experiences in those communities. There's certainly a lot of generational trauma that's been present. The adults who would come in, the teachers who would choose to work and support, generally did not have a lot of those same experiences. So there was this, I don't know, foundational pillar that someone could reach toward and hold on to. And there was a gap in that experience of trauma. And I think COVID just erased that gap because we all were in that same boat. And I don't think I know anybody of any status that didn't have someone that either was lost or came real close to it during that terrible time. So I think that needs to be

addressed urgently. And I think that we're still rushing to get back to this idea of, well, we got to get grades back on track. Everybody wonders why there's a chronic absenteeism problem. I think you got to look at what's the attendance rate of teachers, not just what's the absentee rate of students, because there's a correlation there.

[00:26:50.800] – Kevin
And so it's like that put the mask on yourself before the child idea. We've got to get the adults right. And then the children will get those children to come along because they're watching and they're going to do along the lines of what we do.

[00:27:06.840] – Steve
There's a parent piece there to then.

[00:27:10.080] – Kevin
Yeah, and all of the adults in the community, right? We've got to work with that.

[00:27:14.460] – Steve
The schools have got to build that in as part, which we keep dumping more and more on schools. But the reality is if I can't serve the family, it's difficult to serve the child.

[00:27:27.300] – Kevin
Yeah. I think here in New York, I think we need to do a much better job of creating welcoming environments for parents in schools, as well as important opportunities for parents to come in and be part of conversations that need to be had. An example is in New York City, we're about to start a school year where a law was passed in New York that would no longer allow a child to bring an internet-enabled device into the school. It's being otherwise referred to as a cell phone ban, which drives me a little crazy because it's highlighting the negative. It tended to be a policy that would allow children to be less distracted, engage more with each other, be

socially more adjusted, and all of that. But it's going to go out as this cell phone ban. Certainly, there's lots of questions about how that's going to be implemented, and parents who want to be able to touch it. But what's going out? Some notices, some emails. Why don't we bring everybody into the school who can make it multiple times? Not just one little, I don't mean little, but…

[00:28:30.660] – Steve
It's not an announcement.

[00:28:31.920] – Kevin
It's not just one afternoon. Let's have four days in a row from 3:00 to 5:00 or from 9:00 to 12:00. We're going to have these discussions. We'll bring in someone from the district. They'll talk about it. We'll come up with the pluses and the minuses. We'll show you some examples of how this could work. We'll show you where the child's internet-enabled device will be held while they're in school. We'll do all of these things really methodically. So when it happens, we all understand. I think without that, what we're going to get is parents not understanding. A child is going to report back something that may or may not be the case. Then the parents are going to get upset. We're going to have this tug of war going on that I think could be avoided with some effort and some thoughtfulness ahead of time. I don't think people are not being thoughtful, but I think the practical realities of a system with 900,000 kids is difficult. I don't think it's an easy question, but I do think it's an answerable question.

[00:29:27.660] – Steve
The focus too often is on telling the parents. What we need to be doing is asking, listening, and sharing the information. It's not that the telling part isn't important, but we tend to overlook the other piece.

[00:29:43.720] – Kevin
Very much so.

[00:29:44.840] – Steve
Well, Kevin, I was looking forward to this podcast with you, and I loved it. Thank you so much for what you shared. Before you sign off, what's What's the best way that listeners might learn more about counseling in schools or touch base with you?

[00:30:08.120] – Kevin
Yeah. Our website, I think, really gives a lot of opportunities to people interact with us – counselinginschools.org. There's a lot of information about what we do, but there's also a section called Partners in Healing, which has a number of exercises and activities that are downloadable that help create these collaborative social interactions that I was speaking about or some of these other ideas around social networking that you referred to, Steve, as well. Just little things that both either parents or teachers can do and use their PDFs you can download and have. And then there's a little section on there for ask us a question or send us something. And if we can support in any way, we will. We're moving into – we do a fair amount of training, but we're about to move into a Webex space where we could work with people anywhere by doing things remotely in a platform that we're getting ready to launch. We'll do that. So all that stuff will be on the website, and we're there. We're here for all of it.

[00:31:20.520] – Steve
Well, thank you. Thank you so much. We'll put your website in the lead-in notes to the podcast so folks can go back and find it. Thank you again.

[00:31:30.610] – Kevin
Thank you, Steve. I really appreciate the opportunity, and I love what you're doing out there. I think it's great.

[00:31:38.600] – Steve
Thanks for listening, folks. I'd love to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn at Steve

Barkley. Send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.

Building, Implementing, and Learning From Improvement Plans

Many school administrators, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders at this time are engaged in designing improvement plans or beginning the implementation of plans that were created earlier to achieve school and/or district goals. This process should be built to guarantee that educator learning is an outcome along with increased student learning. Educator learning is more likely to occur if the improvement plans follows this sequence:

- Identify the desired outcome in terms of student success.

Nearly all students in freshman algebra will achieve a passing grade.

Fifth grade students will increase executive functioning skills to increase readiness for middle school

- Identify student learning production behaviors that are most likely to lead to successful learning outcomes.

Algebra students approach math challenges with a growth mindset. "With effort I can master this"

Fifth grade students consciously practice executive functioning skills.

- Identify the teacher actions that are most likely to generate the identified student actions.

Algebra teachers will provide experiences with "real life" math problems that illustrate students' mental math problem-solving abilities.

Fifth grade teachers will identify, model, and provide feedback as students practice executive functioning skills.

- Hypotheses should be formed around the desired outcomes and student and teacher actions. These hypotheses drive actions, observations, reflections, and educator learning as the plan is implemented.

If building a growth mindset around learning math is a continuous, conscious focus of freshman Algebra teachers, more students will engage greater focus and effort and increase learning results creating a positive spiral. (The words that teachers use when conferring with students are important.)

If fifth grade teachers plan for the instruction and practice of executive functioning skills, students will develop skills that will increase their success as they enter Middle

school.

"A hypothesis emerges from a set of underlying assumptions. It is an articulation of how those assumptions are expected to play out in a given context. In short, a hypothesis is an intelligent, articulated guess that is the basis for taking action and assessing outcomes. Building a culture of effective hypothesizing can lead to more thoughtful actions and a better understanding of outcomes. Not only will failures be more likely to lead to future successes, but successes will foster future successes."

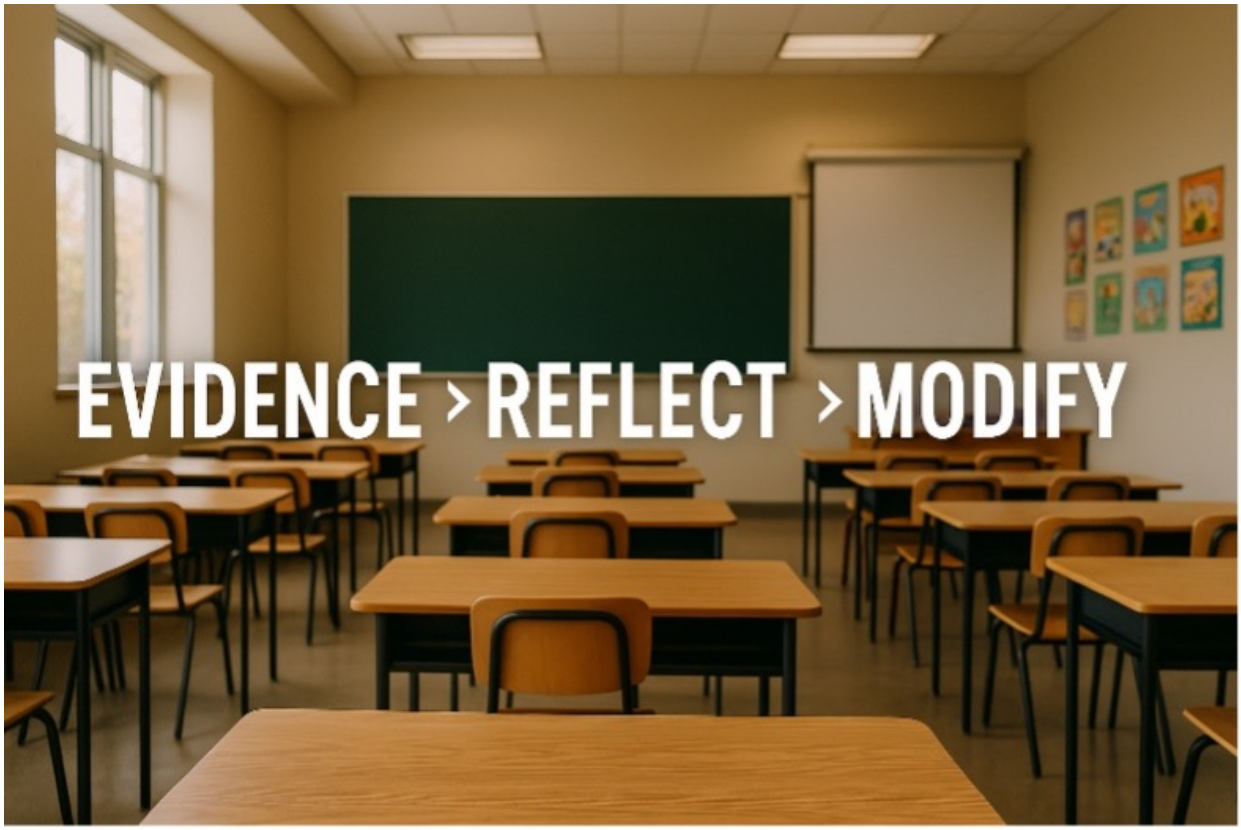
Jeanne Ross, "Why Hypotheses Beat Goals"

Leadership Actions

With a hypothesis in place, leadership should examine what leadership actions are needed to begin and support the implementation of the plan. While planning backwards the leadership role is the last piece planned and generally the first to be implemented. Here are some questions to guide leadership's planning:

- How confident are we that the identified student success outcome (e.g., passing Algebra, increased executive function) is meaningful and measurable? A connected question: Will we be able to spark teacher passions around the desired student outcome.
- What do we know and not know about the teacher and student actions that are key to the plan?
- How will we communicate the purpose and expected outcomes of the plan clearly to teachers and students?
- What leadership actions (e.g., scheduling, PD, co-planning time) are necessary to launch and sustain the plan?
- How will we monitor the implementation of teacher practices and student behaviors without being evaluative?

- How will we gather evidence of student behaviors (e.g., use of EF strategies, persistence in Algebra) to assess impact?
- What opportunities exist for teachers to reflect together on what's working and what's not?



Evidence, Reflection, Modify

The learning for educators that will impact student learning occurs through the ongoing collection of evidence, reflecting on that evidence and then taking action based on what is being discovered. Coaching observations by instructional coaches, administrators, and peers can gather the evidence for reflection.

- Are the suggested teacher actions observable in planning conversations and classroom observations? If not, what might be necessary for teachers to implement the actions? How are teachers describing their experiences with implementing the teacher actions?
- If the teachers are implementing the hypothesis actions,

how are the students responding? Are the desired student learning production behaviors present? If not what modification of teacher actions might be helpful?

- Are there initial indicators of student increases in success as students engage in the identified learning behaviors?
- What have we learned so far? What don’t we know yet?

Ultimately, the success of any improvement plan rests on how the design generates learning among educators. When teachers and leaders engage in testing hypotheses, observing impact, and adjusting practice—especially through the collaborative structures of PLCs and the personalized support of coaching—they model the very learning behaviors we seek to develop in students. Professional Learning Communities can provide the space for shared inquiry, dialogue, and collective reflection, while coaching offers targeted, just-in-time support to deepen practice. Each step—from identifying desired outcomes through reflecting on implementation and impacts—becomes an opportunity for professional growth. By centering educator learning as both a means and an end, schools increase the likelihood that improvement efforts will lead to lasting, meaningful gains in student learning.