Message from the President

By Hannah Gbenro

Public education in the United States is continually reformed and reshaped through the process of implementing innovations in an effort to change the existing culture and find hope for the future (Gbenro, 2016; Hall & Hord, 2011; Schein, 2010; Tyack & Cuban, 1997). An innovation is something that’s new to an existing system, which means something considered “innovative” by one school or district might not seem like anything special from the lens of leaders within a different school or district (Hall & Hord, 2011).

Disruption that comes through facilitating innovative change for equity requires leadership at every level – from the Class Room to the Board Room to the Living Room (Klein & Knight, 2005). With this in mind, it is essential that schools and districts establish systems to engage, equip, and empower leadership within stakeholder groups; this proactive approach to communication and continuous improvement will position us to better implement and sustain innovations for a true impact on students (Gbenro, 2016).

Disrupting the status quo through innovation for the purpose of increasing equity and access for all learners to daily high quality, Whole Child supports and learning experiences is not easy. In fact, it’s really hard and there are so many places where we can potentially go sideways. Each step of the journey is important. As you engage with this issue of Curriculum in Context, my hope is (1) you’ll think about where you’re at with an innovation that intends to impact equity and access for students and (2) you’ll be equipped with some tools and ideas for next steps.

A myriad of equity-driven innovative reforms related to our 5 Tenets of the Whole Child have been implemented in educational systems over the last century with the hope of shifting classroom and leadership practices to better support student success (Burbridge, 2008; Everhart & Doyl, 1980; Gbenro, 2016; Hall & Hord, 2011; McLain & Thompson, 2001; Polikoff, 2012). Too many of these reforms have failed our students, educators, and families. We must do better by clarifying the need for innovations, communicating this need with stakeholders, and cultivating a continued understanding of why a given innovation is being implemented (Anderson, 2012; Casserly et al., 2011; Gbenro, 2016; Hall & Hord, 2011; Harris, 2012). To support you, and your team, with these pieces, I’m sharing some considerations for each stage of implementing an innovation. These guiding questions can be used alongside articles in this issue, which are relevant to the stage you’re at with implementing innovation(s) for equity (Gbenro, 2016).

“...families are counting on us to lead the way for equity... we are the leaders charged with seeing the possibilities of the future...”

Plan

What is the desired state of implementation? How will we know we’ve reached this desired state? What practices and processes can we systematize? How does implementing this innovation further the mission of our district? What is the evidence this innovation can be effective elsewhere? What evidence-based implementation framework are we using to ensure the innovation is effective? How are we laying the foundation to ensure this innovation is effective within our schools and district? What are the potential benefits and risks of implementing this innovation? How will we mitigate risks? How are we assessing, and communicating, the need for the innovation? How will we communicate progress about this project with others? How are we ensuring valid and reliable processes are used throughout the implementation?
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Do
How will we communicate as a team? How are we leveraging the strengths of a cross-functional team? How are we valuing functional diversity and promoting effective communication practices? How are we laying the foundation for this change to be adopted and truly shift practice? How are we engaging, equipping, and empowering team members? How are we tapping into the knowledge, talents, and diverse perspectives of team members? How are we intentionally creating, and supporting, second-order change? How are we framing the message for different sets of stakeholders? How are we laying the foundation for the cultural shift at each level (artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, basic underlying assumptions)?

Learn
To what extent is this innovation being implemented? What implementation data supports our understanding of the extent to which the innovation is implemented? What results data do we have so far? How can we use our implementation data as a lens through which to review our results data?

Act
Based on what we know about the extent to which the innovation is currently being implemented, what do we need to adjust moving forward? How will we document that we made these adjustments? What additional supports and/or resources are needed to make this a successful implementation? What policies, practices, and systems need to be adjusted moving forward? (Additional Guiding Questions from the “Do” implementation stage are applicable here.)

Our students and families are counting on us to lead the way for equity. There isn’t a back-up plan or a superhero waiting behind the scenes to come and save our educational system in Washington State. Instead, we are the leaders charged with seeing the possibilities of the future, while laying a foundation in the present. This is not about having the right job title or role to lead for equity; instead, it is about leading through influence not authority within your current role as parent, student, teacher, principal, assistant principal, district administrator, or superintendent. If you need permission to lead for equity - to think outside the box for solutions, to monitor the implementation of innovative solutions using continuous improvement processes, to put student needs above the preferences of adults - you have permission and you have a tribe of fellow Washington State ASCD leaders who are excited about learning from you and alongside you. Please tag us in your journey (Twitter: @WSASCD) so we can highlight, and support, your work.

Clock Hour Update
As of August 24, 2019, Washington State ASCD is unable to process clock hours for ASCD online courses and ASCD Conference/Institutes due to recent clock hour policy updates. WSASCD is unable to process clock hour requests retroactively. If you are currently enrolled or recently completed an ASCD Online PD course(s) you may apply for academic credit in lieu of clock hours. For more information visit: Academic Credit and Academic Credit Listings. The additional cost and requirements are between the educator and the academic institution. WSASCD or ASCD is not involved in the process.

References


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