



Fall 2026 Newsletter

Welcome to the Improvement Scholars Network's Fall 2026 Newsletter! We hope that the fall semester is off to a great start.

Like many of you, we have been following conversations and activities focused on **reimagining the national educational research and development infrastructure**. By this we mean strengthening systems for creating, testing, refining, and spreading knowledge in education. We've enjoyed following the [Alliance for Learning Innovation](#) under the leadership of Sara Schapiro to stay abreast of this lively conversation.

Within the ISN, we are collaborating with colleagues at [Align R&D](#) to co-host exactly such a conversation at the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness 2026 Conference. Titled *Building Trust in Using Research to Inform School Improvement: Integrating Impact Evaluation and Improvement Research*, the session will feature a panel discussion with field level leaders exploring the complementary roles of impact evaluation and improvement research in strengthening the education R&D Infrastructure. Join us on Saturday, September 26, 10:15-11:45 a.m. EDT, in the Galena Room at SREE!

The SREE panel discussion is one initiative among many others seeking to strengthen the field of improvement research in education. Indeed, please join us in recognizing other initiatives and institutional entrepreneurs leading the charge, including:

The ISN [Introduction to Improvement Syllabus Blueprint Project](#), under the leadership of Erin Anderson, Max Yurkofsky, and Samantha Viano.

The [Reimagining Educational Research and Development Initiative](#), under the leadership of Caitlin Farrell, Bill Penuel, Alison Resnick, Norma Ming, Kris Gutierrez, and Katherine Strunk.

The [Fall 2026 Improvement Summit](#), under the leadership of David Rock and Mary Bramlett at the National Center on School-University Partnerships.

The [National Coalition for Improvement in Education](#), under the leadership of Ben Daley, Stacy Caillier, and Sofia Tannenhaus.

You'll find more information about these initiatives and many others throughout the newsletter. We encourage you to take time to appreciate the hard work of the ISN community, to participate in convenings, to read and promote new publications, and, importantly, to celebrate our collective success as we launch what promises to be an exciting, productive academic year.

On behalf of all of our colleagues in the ISN Hub,

Jenn Russell & Don Peurach

Co-Directors, Improvement Scholars Network

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Announcements

Continuous Improvement Book Club

Max Yurkofsky of Radford University hosts a book club on continuous improvement in education, working through five to ten books over the year. Community members are welcome to join for any, all, or none of the sessions. Each book club session comes with a couple of chapters and discussion questions (reading encouraged but not required), and the group is often joined by an author or scholar who knows the material deeply. The 2026-27 lineup and sign-up link can be [found here](#).

Invitation from the District-Centered Research SIG

On behalf of the District-Centered Research SIG, I encourage ISN members who are active in AERA to join the SIG to help expand our footprint. We are a community committed to doing research about, with, and for school districts. By joining the SIG, you will also receive regular communications about upcoming events, including our upcoming webinar "From Governance to Impact: Advancing Educational Equity" and opportunities to receive recognition for your own research. Please email me directly for additional guidance and information about joining the SIG.

Jennifer Cowhy
Co-Chair
jcowhy@uark.edu

Introduction to Improvement Syllabus Project Community of Practice

The ISN is excited to announce a fall community of practice (CoP) based on the *Introduction to Improvement Syllabus Project*. Beginning in the Fall of 2025, Erin Anderson, Max Yurkofsky, and Sam Viano developed an [adaptable syllabus](#) intended to support higher education faculty and leaders of professional learning in developing and teaching introductory courses or workshops in improvement research and continuous improvement. Over the summer, we hosted a community of practice for those working to design (or re-design) courses or curriculum related to improvement research and continuous improvement.

Beginning in October, Erin and Max will facilitate a CoP that meets monthly from October to January to dig into ideas, artifacts, dilemmas, and challenges related to teaching continuous improvement. We have invited participants from the summer CoP to help host these conversations. More information on all four sessions is coming soon.

CoP Session 1: Monday, October 26 at 1pm ET on Zoom.

David Trautman, Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at the College of Education at University of California Fullerton, will host a conversation around teaching and guiding students and other learners to select problems of practice.

If you are not already registered for the CoP, we encourage you to [register here](#). After you register, we will send calendar invites for each CoP session. Join us when you can!

Join the Moveable Feast: Reimagining Education R&D Together

The Moveable Feast is a field-wide series of conversations inviting educators, researchers, policymakers, funders, community members, and other partners to reimagine the ecosystem across research, development, policy, practice, and communities in education. Supported by the Spencer Foundation, the initiative aims to network communities so that each group can contribute its distinctive experiences and expertise, and so that ideas can travel, evolve, and connect across gatherings.

The Improvement Scholars Network is especially well positioned to contribute! Improvement scholars bring important perspectives about learning across contexts, engaging those closest to problems, testing ideas in practice, and building systems that can adapt over time.

We invite you to join an upcoming Moveable Feast conversation and add your perspective to this growing field-wide dialogue!

Learn more on the Moveable Feast website and register for an upcoming conversation:

<https://www.colorado.edu/research/crer/reimagining>

The Rural Professional Learning Network: Seeking a Research Partner

The Rural Professional Learning Network is looking for a research partner.

RPLN is a networked improvement community of four county offices and eight rural districts across Northern California, serving more than 10,000 students. The network is in its eleventh year and has been renewed by the Cowell Foundation for 2026–28. Its current work targets chronic absenteeism, using relational and restorative practices to strengthen belonging and deepen engagement. Network leaders can describe how those practices work on the ground. What they lack is a trustworthy way to measure them and the empirical evidence to demonstrate impact.

RPLN is one of six practitioner projects selected for Innovation Day at SREE 2026, September 23 in Baltimore. Beyond that day, **the network is seeking a long-term research-practice partnership to evaluate belonging practices using methods realistic for improvement work** — interrupted time series, matched comparisons, multilevel models. Two more immediate needs: recent research on belonging and attendance in rural schools, and a lightweight, teacher-friendly belonging measure.

Findings will go to county and school leaders to identify practices worth scaling, guide resource decisions, and build the case for future funding.

Contact: Nicodemus Ford, Nicodemus Ford LLC / Design with Joy, nford@designwithjoy.org

New Virtual Series: Notified, Not Terrified

Notified, Not Terrified is a free three-part virtual series for school and district teams carrying a CSI, ATSI, TSI, or California Differentiated Assistance designation, and for the people supporting them. New California data drops October 15.

Session 1, October 22 — what the designations mean, what they don't, and how to read a dashboard as a story about students.

Session 2, November 19 — empathy interviews with students and families to get at the reasons behind the patterns.

Session 3, December 10 — building and testing a prototype, with participants sharing change projects in progress.

All sessions run 12:00–1:00 PT. Each one includes a guest who has led this work in their own school or district. Replays go to everyone registered.

Led by Nicodemus Ford, a school redesign consultant with 22 years in schools under improvement status and a California Department of Justice subject matter expert on educational discrimination.

[Register here.](#)

Job Postings

Assistant Professor, Tenure-Track Department of Educational Leadership and Policy

[Job Posting & Application Link](#)

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy in the Graduate School of Education, The State University of New York, invites applications for a full-time, tenure-track Assistant Professor. The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy is committed to improving evidence-based educational policy and creating educational environments for all students. UB's Educational Administration program is committed to creating a collegial academic environment that is fundamentally concerned with culturally competent educational leaders throughout our three degree programs: 1) a two-year fully synchronous online school leadership certification program through our Leadership Initiative for Tomorrow's Schools (LIFTS), 2) a three-year fully online Ed.D. in Educational Leadership program with both synchronous and asynchronous components, and 3) a department-wide in-person Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy.

Member News

New Positions

- Samantha Viano has a new faculty position as Associate Professor and EdD Program Director at Johns Hopkins University School of Education
- Erin Anderson has been appointed the new William and Sheila Konar Director of the Center for Urban Education Success (CUES) and associate professor in educational leadership in the Warner School of Education & Human Development at the University of Rochester.

Updates from SERP

We're excited to share a new publication from SERP Institute researchers Emily Hayden, Ph.D. and Margaret Troyer, Ph.D.: *Centering Equity and Asset-Based Reading Intervention for Adolescents*

For too long, conversations about reading intervention have focused primarily on early literacy, leaving millions of adolescents with unmet needs. This new concept paper argues for a different path, one that combines evidence-based foundational skills instruction with culturally responsive, asset-based approaches that recognize the strengths, experiences, and identities students bring to reading.

Drawing on research from SERP's Strategic Adolescent Reading Intervention (STARI), the paper demonstrates how reading interventions can do more than build decoding skills. They can foster critical comprehension, increase engagement, and accelerate reading growth by centering students' cultural, linguistic, and place-based assets.

As schools continue to address literacy challenges, this work offers a timely framework for reimagining adolescent reading intervention through both equity and evidence.

Congratulations to Emily and Margaret on this important contribution to the field!

Read the publication [here](#).

New Resources from the Education Leadership Data Analytics Research Group

The Education Leadership Data Analytics (ELDA) Research group at Teachers College, Columbia University has recently published three open access resources for school, district, and state level administrators to help them move away from an exclusive focus on test scores to include a wide range of opportunity and resource variables that are public and open access at the systems-level across their states. Our recent Wallace Foundation funded work has identified thousands of open public access datasets across the states aligned to the National Academies' 16 equity indicators for schools, in which we've mapped and aligned the vast systems-level data resources available for education leaders to the global FAIR data principles of Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable.

In the three below recent publications, first in "Beyond Test Scores" provide an interactive report aimed at each of the 98,000 principals in the US in which the reader can click on their school and visualize system-level opportunity and resource data in comparison to their district and state, such as harassment and bullying, teacher qualifications, and disproportionate suspension rates. Throughout we direct readers to many of the school improvement resources from across the ISN community.

In the second, "From Files to Systems" we discuss the issues with data accessibility and the FAIR data issues across the states for equity-aligned open public data.

And in the third "Equity Opportunity Reader" we've created an interactive viewer for users to identify datasets that they may be interested in across the 7 states and DC that align to the 16 equity indicators and then provide direct links for accessing and downloading the data, helping to address the accessibility and interoperability issues.

Each report and resource is published open access Creative Commons (CC:BY) under an open MIT code license to encourage code and data reuse, modification, and adaptation for any purpose.

- Phan, L.H., Kandemir, E.N., Bowers, A.J., Saldaña, C., Halverson, R. (2026). Beyond Test Scores: Tracking School Improvement Initiatives Using Systems-Level Tools. Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY.
<https://doi.org/10.7916/cxks-t530>
 - Kandemir, E.N., Phan, L.H., Bowers, A.J., Saldaña, C., Halverson, R. (2026). From Files to Systems: How States Organize Their Public Education Data and Why It Matters. Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY.
<https://doi.org/10.7916/71s4-4925>
 - Bowers, A.J. (2026) Equity Opportunity Reader: Connecting Principals to Evidence. Teachers College, Columbia University.
<https://doi.org/10.7916/zhhe-v886>
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Updates from the National P-3 Center

The National P-3 Center at the University of Colorado Denver was founded "to improve the education continuum that children experience from birth through 3rd grade, regardless of race, class, culture, and zip code". More about the National P-3 Center can be found on their [website here](#).

In 2024, the Center released an improvement-focused policy report, [P-3 in Principal Preparation: Leveraging School Leadership to Improve Early Learning and the Early Grades](#) (Kauerz, Tozer, & Tarrant, 2024).

This October 1-2, collaborating with ISN member Steve Tozer from University of Illinois Chicago, the Center and selected IHE/District partners will convene in Chicago, in most cases with representatives from their state agencies, to share strategies for improving school leader preparation and development for creating the school culture, teacher teamwork, and pedagogical approaches that best support schools' youngest learners. The theory of change behind this work is that if more elementary schools are led in ways that better reflect the science of early learning and development, then young children will develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that will be reflected in improved 3rd grade achievement and that will push up into the rest of the K-12 system. Eight IHE/district partnerships from throughout the country will collaborate to inform one another's improvement work, and they will explore the formation of a lasting Networked Improvement Community to support improvement of P-3 leadership development nationwide.

(For a look at earlier improvement work by the National P-3 Center, led by founder Dr. Kristie Kauerz: the Center partnered with NAESP in 2021 to introduce continuous improvement as central to leading P-3 learning in schools in [Leading Learning Communities: A Principal's Guide to Early Learning and the Early Grades](#).)

Upcoming Conferences

SREE 2026 Conference, September 23-26

Poster Session: Voices as Infrastructure

Friday, 1:00-2:00pm

- Nicodemus Ford will present **Voices as Infrastructure** drawn from Guidebook for the People, co-authored with Dr. Monica Ng and published with JOY LLC. *Location: Harborside Foyer*

Panel Discussion: Building Trust in Using Research to Inform School Improvement: Integrating Impact Evaluation and Improvement Research

Saturday, 10:15-11:45am

- The ISN and Align R&D are collaborating to host **Building Trust in Using Research to Inform School Improvement: Integrating Impact Evaluation and Improvement Research**. This session will feature a panel discussion with field level leaders exploring the complementary roles of impact evaluation and improvement research in strengthening the education R&D Infrastructure. *Location: Galena Room*

Improvement in Education Summit, November 3-4

ISN Introduction to Improvement Syllabus Workshop

Wednesday, 1:15-2:15pm

- As a next step in the ISN's Introduction to Improvement Syllabus Project, Samantha Viano, Erin Anderson, and Don Peurach will be facilitating a workshop at the Improvement in Education Summit in Chicago, IL, November 3-4, 2026. Join this workshop to explore the use of the Improvement Science Syllabus Blueprint in campus-based courses and professional development opportunities. The workshop titled, "**Introduction to Improvement Syllabus Project**", will be held on Wednesday, November 4th from 1:15-2:15 PM CST in Superior AB.

New Books

A Chance to Solve Their Own Problems

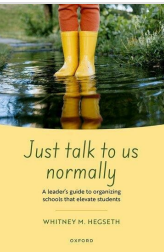
INSIDE THE NEW METHODS SEEKING TO REMAKE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

JAL MEHTA, MAX YURKOVSKY, KIM FRUMIN, AMELIA PETERSON, REBECCA HORWITZ-WILLIS, & JAMES JACK

A Chance to Solve Their Own Problems: Inside the New Methods Seeking to Remake Public Schools

A Chance to Solve Their Own Problems: Inside the New Methods Seeking to Remake Public Schools was recently published with Harvard University Press.

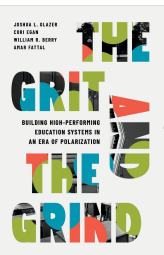
Co-authored by Jal Mehta, Max Yurkovsky, Kim Frumin, Amelia Peterson, Rebecca Horwitz-Willis, and James Jack, it shares findings from a four-year comparative study of four continuous improvement and design methods, and draws lessons for leaders pursuing ambitious, equitable change in their systems. If you want to discuss or debate parts of the book, please register for a "Authors meet critical friends" series Max and Jal are organizing (we will meet to discuss 2-3 chapters ever 3 weeks). Link to join [is here](#).



Just talk to us normally: A leader's guide to organizing schools that elevate students

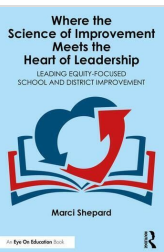
New book out for current or aspiring educational leaders (and all those who support them)!

Whitney Hegseth (assistant professor of educational leadership at the University of La Verne) has a new book out with Oxford University Press, titled *Just talk to us normally: A leader's guide to organizing schools that elevate students*. The topics covered in this book apply readily to courses in: educational leadership, educational change/reform, comparative education, systems thinking, anthropology of education, and research methods. Order the book [here](#). Feel free to reach out to Whitney Hegseth with further questions: whegseth@laverne.edu



The Grit and the Grind: Building High-Performing Education Systems in an Era of Polarization

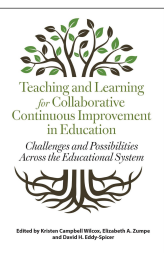
Joshua L. Glazer, along with Cori Egan, William R. Berry, and Amar Fattal, has published *The Grit and the Grind: Building High-Performing Education Systems in an Era of Polarization* with the University of Chicago Press (release date Oct. 26). Drawing on the experiences of the Tennessee Achievement School District and the Shelby County Innovation Zone, the book examines how system design and implementation are shaped by political context, local history, and community trust. It shows that efforts to build and sustain improvement systems cannot be understood apart from the environments in which they take root.



Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership: Leading Equity-Focused School and District Improvement

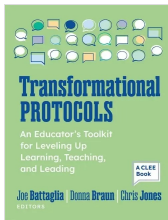
Where the Science of Improvement Meets the Heart of Leadership by Marci Shepard is a hands-on roadmap for leading meaningful school and district change. Grounded in the proven framework of improvement science, it offers a step-by-step process to transform systems and build a positive, collaborative culture. More than an informational book, this is a facilitation guide—complete with learning targets, icebreakers, leadership strategies, reflection prompts, and practical tools throughout. Real leaders coach you through every step, sharing insights, challenges, and successes to show what's truly possible. At the heart of it, this book helps close the vision-implementation gap—the disconnect between leaders' aspirations to create equitable, improvement-focused environments and the day-to-day staff experience, which too often lacks ownership and psychological safety to engage in authentic, vulnerable inquiry. Whether you're a current or aspiring superintendent, principal, or district leader that's leading teams, transforming departments, or improving systems at scale, this exciting book gives you the strategies and support to turn vision into action—and lead lasting, equity-centered change with those closest to the work.

*The ISN encourages members to contact Marci directly for opportunities to review this book



Teaching and Learning for Collaborative Continuous Improvement in Education: Challenges and Possibilities Across the Educational System

Kristen Wilcox, Liz Zumpe, and David Eddy-Spicer are excited to announce the recent publication of their edited volume, *Teaching and Learning for Collaborative Continuous Improvement in Education: Challenges and Possibilities Across the Educational System*. The book is part of Myers Education Press's Improvement Science in Education Series and features an introduction by Brandi Hinnant-Crawford along with 15 chapters from a wide variety of contributors in three sections covering learning design, critical challenges, and learning modalities. The volume grew out of a series of workshops sponsored by the Improvement Scholars Network over the past few years on teaching and learning for continuous improvement. Many of the contributors presented in those workshops. You can find out more about the book at [this link](#), including a table of contents. You can also order the book using the link below and get a 25% discount by entering the code "MEP25" at checkout.



Transformation Protocols: An Educator's Toolkit for Leveling Up, Learning, Teaching, and Leading

This book features over 75 ready-to-use protocols for how schools can level up their use of collaborative time to drive deeper continuous improvement. Organized around 4 interconnected phases—fostering learning communities, strengthening collaboration, improving instruction, and systematizing improvement—this book helps leaders at every level navigate the complexities of building capacity for continuous improvement in schools.

Whether you are a teacher, instructional coach, principal, or district leader, you will find clear routines for building the psychological safety and trust necessary for honest reflection and shared problem solving. By centering real evidence of student learning and professional dilemmas, teams can shift from "initiative fatigue" to sustained, disciplined improvement that transforms both educator practices and student learning. The book can be found [here](#).

Journal Publications

- Bowers, A.J. (2026) Equity Opportunity Reader: Connecting Principals to Evidence. Teachers College, Columbia University. <https://doi.org/10.7916/zhhe-v886>
- Gurr, D., & Liu, P. (Eds.). (2025). Educational leadership preparation and development: International and future focused perspectives. Springer.
- Hayden, H. E., & Troyer, M. (2026). Centering equity and asset-based reading intervention for adolescents. *Equity in Education & Society*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27526461261459627>
- Kandemir, E.N., Phan, L.H., Bowers, A.J., Saldaña, C., Halverson, R. (2026). From Files to Systems: How States Organize Their Public Education Data and Why It Matters. Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY. <https://doi.org/10.7916/71s4-4925>
- Kauerz, K., Tozer, S., & Tarrant, K. (2024). *P-3 in principal preparation: Leveraging school leadership to improve early learning and the early grades* (Executive summary). National P-3 Center, University of Colorado. https://nationalp-3center.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/P-3-in-Principal-Prep_Exec-Summary_FINAL.pdf
- Liu, P., & Thien, L. M. (Eds.). (2025). Understanding teacher leadership in education change: An international perspective. Routledge.
- Liu, P., & Thien, L. M. (Eds.). (2025). Turnaround leadership in Southeast Asian countries: Leading school transformation. Springer.
- Liu, P. (in press). Teacher well-being matters in Canadian schools: The roles of distributed leadership, perceived disciplinary climate, teacher-student relations, and teacher innovativeness. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*.
- Meyer, A., Liu, P., Kempert, S., & Richter, D. (2026). Leadership for innovation: Teacher participation in decision-making, readiness for change, and collective teacher efficacy. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*. Advance online publication.
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- Russell, J. L., Peurach, D. J., & Sherer, J. Z. (2026). How state leaders can support local innovation and improvement. *The State Education Standard*, 26(3). <https://www.nasbe.org/how-state-leaders-can-support-local-innovation-and-improvement/>