



## Intensive Model: A Case Study

Our Intensive partnership with King Elementary in West Contra Costa Unified, near Oakland, California, shows what can be achieved when one of our staff members is embedded in a school for 3.5 days per week for three years.

Amanda Faulkner, our senior improvement partner who worked with King, became part of the school's systems and supported the team to adopt a continuous-improvement approach to all of its work. The benefits to adult and student learning were substantial. In its second year of support from Partners, King showed some of the highest growth in reading and math [SBAC](#) scores in West Contra Costa Unified.

These gains arose from improvement efforts focused on the three domains that most directly affect student outcomes — results-oriented leadership, systems for professional learning, and core instruction.

### Results-oriented Leadership

The particular way in which Amanda implemented the Intensive model at King was tailored to the school's specific circumstances. It began with developing a relationship with the school's principal, Ms. Joey Sundberg, and understanding the school's needs and goals from her perspective. "Partners didn't come in and say 'this is what you need to do'; it's not a one-size-fits-all approach," says the school leader. "Partners has always let us work on what we needed to work on. Partners also helped me to define my priorities."

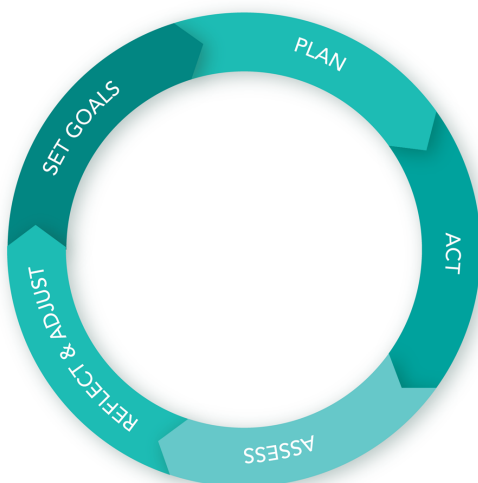


Joey Sundberg, principal of King Elementary

One way that Amanda helped school leaders set goals was by collaborating with them on a theory of action (TOA), which includes hypotheses about root causes of underperformance as well as proposed solutions. A TOA is not a "compliance plan." It is a living document that gets revisited and refined based on data gathered throughout the year. Creating a TOA encourages school leaders to

slow down and become more analytical, intentional, and willing to try new strategies. It is one tool in a continuous-improvement process that Partners calls the Results-oriented Cycle of Inquiry or simply *ROCI* (pronounced “roh-see”).

From the outset of our partnership with King, Amanda worked with school leaders to adopt a “ROCI mindset.” This means thoughtfully setting goals, making a plan, implementing the plan, setting aside time to assess how implementation is going, and reflecting on that assessment and adjusting accordingly. At Partners, we encourage our partner educators to take calculated risks and quickly learn from actions that work well and those that don’t. That’s how schools get good results for students.



### **Results-Oriented Cycle of Inquiry (ROCI)**

Through weekly one-on-one coaching and regular leadership team meetings, Amanda supported the principal and assistant principal to create a theory of action that focused on improving reading proficiency for all students.

#### **Systems for Professional Learning**

With that focus established, Amanda and the school leadership team worked on aligning King’s various professional learning spaces to help teachers improve their reading instruction. Amanda worked with teacher leaders to determine what professional development their grade level teams needed, and then they figured out ways that teams would get a half-day for collaboration each quarter. This required thinking creatively about overcoming the obstacles to holding productive collaboration-sessions (e.g., substitutes not showing up to cover classrooms, no time to plan an agenda or create instructional materials, unclear goals, etc).

Once the quarterly half-days were scheduled, Amanda took the lead on designing a ROCI-based approach to collaborative sessions. Teams reviewed reading-performance data to understand which teaching practices were most effective in achieving their goals for their students, plan upcoming instructional units, and set goals for the next round of student assessments. Information from these

grade level teams' ROCI cycles was then fed into the principal's review of schoolwide data so that she could monitor trends across grades and recommend adjustments to professional learning systems.

King's teachers found Amanda's support for their grade level teams highly valuable. "Partners helped us figure out how to work well together, how to look at data, and what to look for," says Lysett Perez, a kindergarten teacher. "We became much better at organizing our meetings, taking next steps, and working toward our goals."



Lysett Perez, kindergarten teacher at King Elementary

Amanda had the opportunity to build relationships with every grade level team and tailor her support to them. In the lower grades, we helped teachers align around phonics instruction; in middle grades we determined ways to prepare students to read chapter books; and in the upper grades we developed project-based reading units.

### **Core Instruction**

Given the substantial time that Amanda spent on site at King, she was able to work not just with teams but also with individual teachers. As a longtime teacher herself, Amanda found it very rewarding to connect one-on-one with King's educators. She was able to observe teachers' strengths and needs and provide ideas and resources to help teachers grow their practice. Throughout our three-year engagement, Amanda's support took many different forms, including for example:

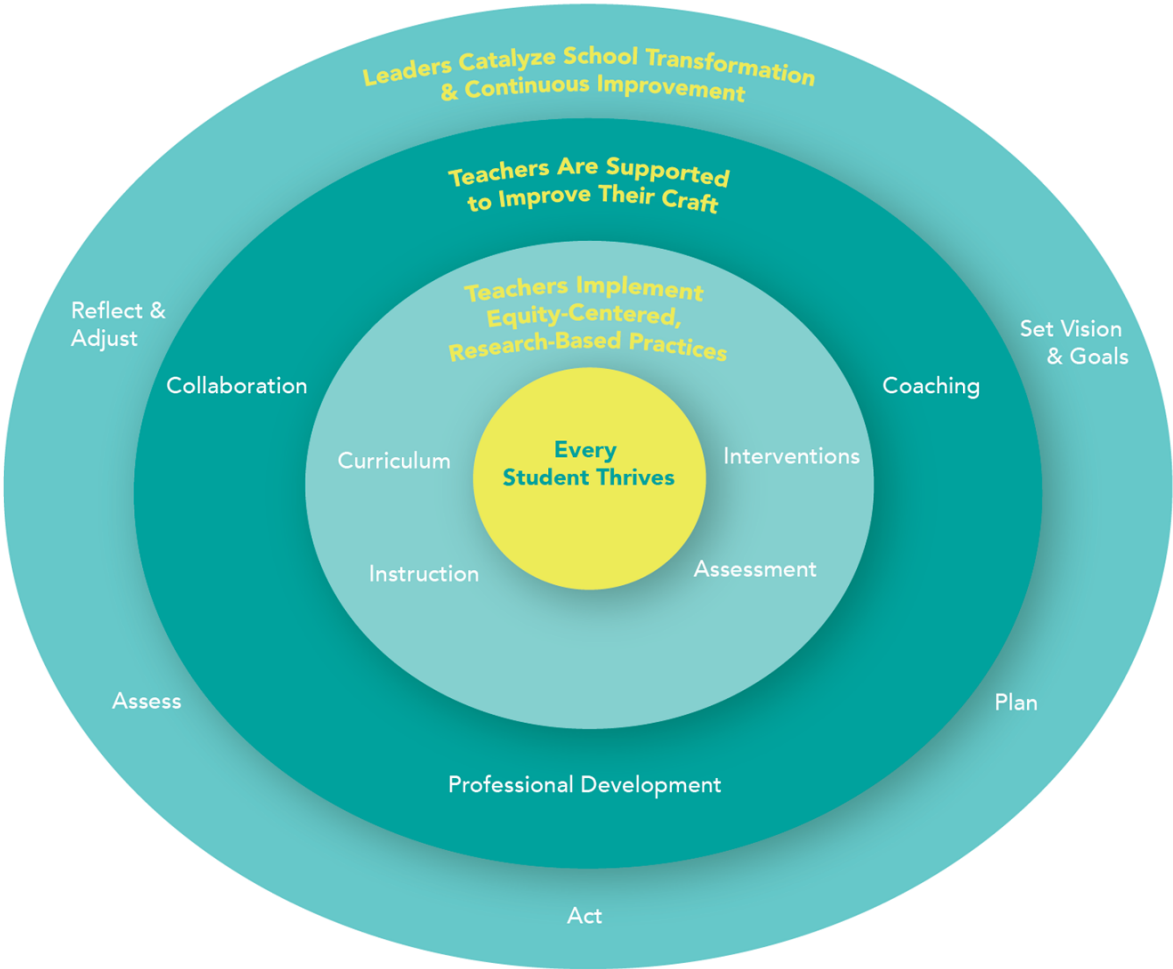
- Instructional coaching
- Supporting teachers in developing a small-group intervention system for students
- Leading a book study on trauma-informed practices
- Leading practice sessions on how to use Zoom

Ms. Perez found Amanda's support for novice teachers transformative: "Amanda helped them look at lessons and analyze the objectives and then push them to answer the really tough questions about how to get students to understand those concepts. I've seen those teachers grow into teachers who are now being consulted by other teachers and asked how they teach a certain lesson." Skillful teaching takes a great deal of time and practice, and Amanda appreciated being able to support teachers of all levels to become more confident, effective, and able to share their best practices across the building.

The support that Partners offered aligned to district-wide goals, but occurred in a non-evaluative coaching relationship. This allowed teachers to be completely authentic when working through instructional challenges with Amanda. The contact that she had with individual classrooms also produced real-time data about the impact of schoolwide reforms, which informed the implementation of King’s professional learning systems.

**Creating Sustainable Improvement**

King Elementary was developing a vision of academic success for all students when we began our Intensive partnership, but having an outside thought partner helped accelerate King’s growth. At the end of our three-year engagement, King’s principal reflected, “I don’t feel like that growth would’ve happened as quickly on my own as it did with Partners. It helped me clarify my vision for the school and think purposefully about what I’m doing. The vision for the school might not have changed that much because Partners was here, but how I was trying to make that vision live definitely changed way faster because somebody else was here to help me think deeper about what was happening.” This is our greatest hope as school improvement partners — that we can help a team set up systems to ensure that all students and teachers thrive.



Partners in School Innovation’s School Transformation Framework