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How Do Teachers Really Spend Their Summers? In California, Many Will Participate in Teacher-Led Professional Development on New Standards and Assessments

Report looks at the impact of a California initiative in which teachers provide high-quality, professional development for their peers

[The Instructional Leadership Corps: Entrusting Professional Learning in the Hands of the Profession](#)

There's a popular misconception that when school is out and summer break begins, teachers have several glorious months to sit poolside, globetrot, garden, or otherwise relax and enjoy themselves. The reality is that many teachers work a summer job to help make ends meet and whether they have another job or not, many spend a good amount of their summer break developing lesson plans and engaged in professional development.

This summer nearly 200 teacher leaders will engage in that professional development through California's Instructional Leadership Corps (ILC) where they will work together to adapt and create and fine tune the professional development they will offer other teachers around the state's standards and assessments. Teacher leaders participate in ILC professional development year-round and cap it off with an intensive summer program that kicks off this year on June 21 in Santa Clara, CA.

A report by the Learning Policy Institute looks at how the ILC is changing the paradigm for teacher learning. Rather than using outside consultants, who often conduct one-time workshops that are less likely to provide meaningful, sustained learning, ILC taps the expertise and

experience of local teachers, principals, and superintendents who are trained and supported to provide ongoing professional development to peers in their own districts—and, in many cases, to other schools and districts in their regions.

The report, [*The Instructional Leadership Corps: Entrusting Professional Learning in the Hands of the Profession*](#) finds that this “educators educating educators” approach has many benefits. Teachers value receiving education from their colleagues, and in addition the ILC: increased teacher leaders’ sense of professionalism and self-efficacy; facilitated teachers experimenting with new teaching strategies and making constructive changes to the ways they were teaching; and supported deeper and more widespread professional learning for educators.

The ILC was formed after California shifted to the Common Core State Standards and accompanying new assessments in 2014. The project also addresses the Next Generation Science Standards. It is a collaborative project of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), the California Teachers Association (CTA), and the National Board Resource Center (NBRC) at Stanford. Since it was established in 2014, the ILC has connected with more than 109,000 educators from more than 2,000 California public schools in at least 504 districts.

“When it comes to making sure teachers have the supports we need to be leaders in the classroom with our students, we know the most qualified experts are, indeed, our fellow teachers,” said CTA President Eric C. Heins. “Thanks to the Instructional Leadership Corps, California teachers have an environment where teachers are supported as leaders, through teachers training and teaching teachers. We have found the ILC gives teachers a renewed sense of collegiality, purpose, and a common mission that reaffirms their professional identity to make a lasting impact on students and extend it beyond the classroom. Furthermore, we’re thrilled the Governor’s 2019-2020 budget affirms these findings by investing directly in teacher and administrator professional development, providing educators the support we need to be effective in our classrooms, for our students.”

The report is authored by Professor Emerita of Education at Stanford University Rachel Lotan, LPI Senior Researcher Dion Burns, and LPI President Linda Darling-Hammond. It discusses program design, impacts on teaching and learning, and lessons learned. The authors sought to discover how ILC teams in different settings gained traction and began to transform professional learning opportunities in their communities and regions, often addressing long-standing problems of practice and inequities in children’s access to high-quality instruction. LPI researchers studied the work of ILC teams at four sites, observed workshops and statewide conferences, and interviewed ILC leaders, participating teachers, and school, district, and county administrators. The sites are:

- **Madera Unified School District** in rural San Joaquin Valley, serving largely Latino/a students from low-income families who are at varying levels of English proficiency. The ILC team focused on language development across the curriculum.
- **Conejo Valley Unified School District**, a high-achieving and well-resourced district in Ventura County, where the ILC focused on building science competencies and aligning instruction from elementary to high school.
- **The East Side Alliance**, a formal partnership between East Side Union High School District and its seven k-8 feeder districts in East San Jose, which range from moderate to extremely low-income. There the teams supported new approaches to standards-based mathematics instruction.
- A partnership between the ILC leaders' network in **North Orange County and California State University at Fullerton's College of Education**, which worked across a wide range of districts through a series of "Teachers Teaching Teachers" conferences focused on the instructional shifts in the standards. These efforts led to new mentoring programs for both beginning teachers and high school students interested in teaching.

"Access to high-quality professional development has been a longstanding need in California—a large state serving a diverse and high-need student population, and one that has experienced significant teacher shortages," said Jon Snyder, Executive Director of SCOPE. "The demand increased with California's shift to the Common Core State Standards in 2010 and the Next Generation Science Standards in 2013, which required major transformations in how teachers learn and teach, and necessitates coherent, high-quality professional development."

"The ILC's success suggests a promising model. Offering resources and supporting their colleagues as they teach and learn together for the benefit of their students, deepens teachers' sense of professionalism and feelings of self-efficacy," said Lotan.

Lessons Learned

Teachers value professional learning led by their colleagues.

Teachers expressed a strong preference for learning from and with their colleagues, reporting that teacher leaders were attentive to local needs; attuned to the specific implementation challenges facing teachers in their districts; and more accessible for follow-up questions, advice, and support.

ILC membership enhances teacher leaders' professionalism and sense of efficacy.

Beyond the effect on teachers' work in their home districts, creating and leading professional learning for colleagues was highly beneficial for the ILC teacher leaders. In these roles, they strengthened their leadership skills as they initiated innovative activities and solidified professional relationships. ILC members were proud of their work and accomplishments, and empowering the profession was a frequent theme in the teacher interviews.

Supportive structural arrangements foster instructional change.

Adopting the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards required curricular and pedagogical shifts that were ambitious, profound, and demanding. To align with more student-focused learning, administrators had to change the way they conducted classroom observations and provided more meaningful feedback to teachers. Given their role in allocating resources and acting as instructional leaders, school and district administrators need to be aware of and involved in sustained changes in instruction necessary to teach these deeper learning approaches. ILC teachers and their colleagues needed collaboration time and material resources to plan lessons, observe each other's classrooms, analyze their students' work, and discuss and reflect together on their experiences. Teachers had more opportunities to do so when school and district administrators provided resources and built structures to support that work.

Systematic follow-up contributes to implementation of instructional shifts.

To achieve lasting change, teachers should be allowed to and supported in trying new strategies, receiving feedback, addressing challenges in implementation, and iteratively improving over the course of multiple workshops, with advisors and coaches at hand. Frequency and quality of the follow-up opportunities are indispensable.

Strategic relationships support deeper, more widespread professional learning.

ILC teacher leaders were most successful when they were able to build relationships with district administrators, teachers associations, county offices of education, universities, and philanthropic organizations. Partnerships with these institutions supported content alignment and leveraged financial and logistical resources at the local level. As mutual trust developed, districts and teachers associations were increasingly willing to contribute financial resources, support, and logistical assistance.

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About the California Teachers Association

Founded in 1863, the California Teachers Association (CTA) has become one of the strongest advocates for educators in the country. CTA includes teachers, counselors, school librarians, social workers, psychologists, and nurses. These educators in the K-12 school system are joined by community college faculty, California State University faculty, and education support professionals to make CTA the most inclusive and most powerful voice of educators in the state.

<https://www.cta.org>

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[About the Learning Policy Institute](#)

The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the Institute connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.

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[About the Stanford National Board Resource Center](#)

The National Board Resource Center is located at Stanford University and operates under the direction of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education and with the support of Linda Darling-Hammond who founded the center in 1998. Its primary mission is to offer support to educational systems and teachers around National Board certification, promote teacher leadership, and improve the quality of teaching in California schools. Its successful support program is staffed by Board-certified teachers and is open to all teachers interested in high-quality collaboration and professional development, as well as candidates working towards certification.

<https://nbrc.stanford.edu/>

[About the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education](#)

The Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) fosters research, policy, and practice to advance high-quality, equitable education systems in the United States and internationally. SCOPE engages in research and develops authentic relationships with educators, organizations, and policymakers to address pressing problems of equity, opportunity and quality in education.

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