



Research Partnership
for Professional Learning

A New Model for Supporting Research–Aligned Teacher Development:

Emerging Insights from the Research Partnership for Professional Learning

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Executive Summary

The Research Partnership for Professional Learning (RPPL) launched in 2021 with the goal of building a practical evidence base focused on teacher learning. Three years into the effort, we are reviewing our ongoing work with a critical eye, aiming to capture how RPPL’s work and theory of action has evolved and what this means for our ability – both as an organization and as a broader field – to accelerate knowledge about equitable teaching and learning.

Authored by the leaders of RPPL, this paper identifies our key takeaways from this review.



First, what are we learning about effective PL strategies – and what key questions are emerging across our network? We highlight and describe three primary points:

1. Recent evidence expands and complicates consensus views of effective PL practices and highlights the importance of learning opportunities that couple robust support for teachers' day-to-day practice with genuine teacher-level accountability for change and improvement.
2. We must deepen our understanding of how best to personalize professional learning to meet individual needs.
3. Districts have few templates or models to follow as they make decisions about how to allocate resources toward PL.



Second, how can we build stronger infrastructure for better, faster research on high-quality learning opportunities? Here, we identify a series of challenges and needs across our network:

1. Partnerships around large-scale PL research are necessarily complex because there are so many players in the PL space.
2. Across our network, we continue to work to include teacher and student voice, diversify our RPPs, and operationalize equitable PL research.
3. Our investments in research infrastructure are building standardized measurement models and more consistent data collection processes to improve our ability to generate reliable, research-ready data.
4. Infrastructure and best practices to coordinate approvals from multiple partners can alleviate challenges from the ambiguous and fragmented ownership of PL data.



Third, what is the path forward for RPPL in this space? How can we continue to shape our work in ways that respond to our emerging understanding of our network needs? In the near term, we are focused on building:

1. A developing learning agenda with an increased focus on teacher personalization and choice.
2. A growing portfolio of place-based research grounded in a coordinated effort to center district research questions alongside those of PL providers.
3. A math- and curriculum-focused studies portfolio supported by a community of practice and a common measurement structure.
4. A toolkit of standardized data collection items driven by an emphasis on common, shared measures.
5. An emerging framework for promoting equitable research practices in our work and in the field.

Looking ahead, RPPL is committed to advancing equitable and impactful professional learning by deepening collaborative efforts, refining our strategies, and evolving our approach based on emerging insights to better support educators and students.

Introduction

The Research Partnership for Professional Learning (RPPL) was founded on the premise that, despite important learning over the past several decades, academic research on teacher professional learning (PL) was not sufficiently responsive to key PL design questions emerging from the field.

When RPPL formed in 2021, most existing research fell into two categories – broader descriptive studies that sought to understand teachers' experiences in PL and experimental studies that provided causal evidence about program impact on teacher and student outcomes. Program impact research focused on evaluating the overall effect of entire PL packages, often targeted smaller programs, and relied on context-specific evaluations. Such studies led to important shifts in PL practice, but reading across them to distill lessons for PL program design was challenging. Meta-analyses designed to draw these lessons offered valuable guidance but were limited by the different ways that PL features were operationalized and that outcomes were measured across studies.

RPPL grew out of these limitations. The organization developed as a research partnership between a series of PL providers (Instruction Partners, Leading Educators, Teaching Lab, TNTP, and UnboundEd) and researchers at the Annenberg Institute at Brown University. Together, this partnership asked the question: What if the providers delivering PL in districts across the country could turn themselves into learning laboratories through sustained research-practice partnerships (RPPs) to better study what PL design features work, for whom, and under what conditions, to improve educational outcomes for historically marginalized students?

While many factors – inside schools and out – contribute to substantial inequities across our system, **RPPL focuses on creating better and more equitable learning opportunities by improving the knowledge, skills, and capacities of teachers, particularly those who work with students living in poverty, BIPOC students, and students from other historically marginalized backgrounds.** Improving outcomes at scale requires improved instruction. RPPL research aims to provide

causal evidence to promote improved professional learning opportunities for teachers in these settings, coupling systemic shifts in school conditions with efforts to develop the talent that already exists in our schools.

To ensure we do this work well and with intention, we have anchored our work to a [learning agenda](#) and a set of core organizational values: advance educational equity, build a collaborative community, learn with humility, and share practical evidence-based solutions. Both were collectively generated by our network and guide not only what we study but how we study it. In order to achieve our vision that every student enters into equitable, rigorous, and joyful learning environments, we must clearly articulate what that looks like and how our research supports this effort.

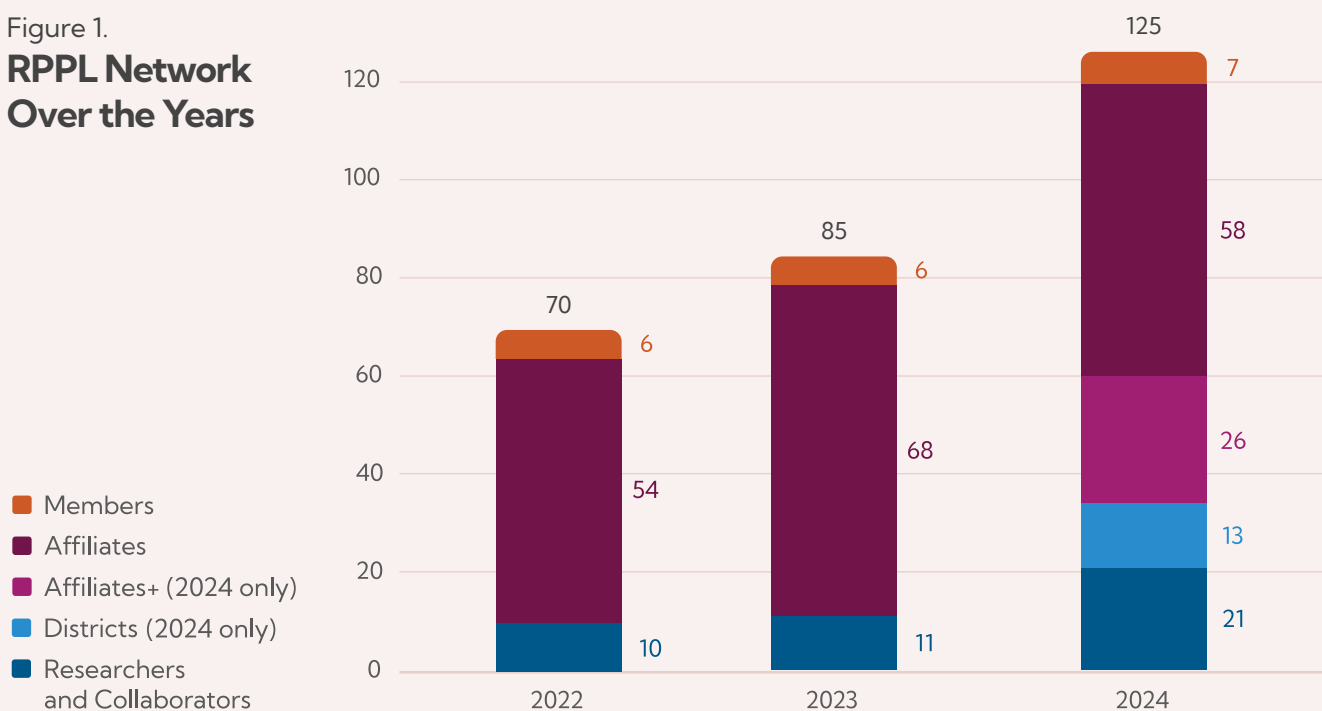
What do we mean by educational equity?

For students, educational equity means that each child receives the unique supports they need to develop their full academic and social-emotional potential.

For educators, equitable professional learning means that each educator and teacher receives the training and support necessary to develop their practices to effectively meet the individual learning and development needs of all students in their classroom.

For RPPL researchers, practitioners, and school leaders, this means that we intentionally integrate the lived experiences and expertise of our diverse collective and the lessons we learn in our work into our organizational strategy and learning agenda, and advance research and infrastructure grounded in equity-centered practices and principles.

Figure 1.
**RPPL Network
Over the Years**



We are still in the early years of this effort, but we have seen growing excitement and engagement across our network. Today, RPPL's collective unites teacher professional learning organizations, researchers, funders, and school leaders through research-practice partnerships across the country to advance a [learning agenda](#) focused on scalable, impactful professional learning. In 2024, we launched 23 new studies that continue to build and expand on the existing evidence base about

effective practice. In addition to our founding 6 member organizations, we have 84 affiliate organizations who are doing this work on the ground, 21 researchers engaged in robust inquiry about PL and its design features, 13 district affiliates who are partnering in research and learning efforts, and 5 mission-driven funders who are committed to advancing teacher professional learning to improve student outcomes. This fall, we also added our first new member, Teach For America.

As an organization that continues to grow, shift, and evolve, we regularly reflect on our efforts. Here, we look across our emerging research portfolio to capture some initial learnings from the past two years, not only about how to improve PL at scale but also, and equally importantly, about what it might take to improve our ability to conduct the research that can accelerate knowledge in the years ahead.

The report is divided into three sections:



A Knowledge Base around Professional Learning: The first section draws on our reviews of existing research, ongoing discussions with organizational leaders, and the results from initial studies to highlight some initial takeaways about effective PL practices.



Building a Robust Infrastructure for Scaling Collaborative Research: The second section focuses on our research process and infrastructure, identifying our learnings to date about what this work takes as well as key barriers and challenges that we are working to overcome as a network as we build our capacity to accelerate the pace and impact of this research.



Where We Go from Here: The final section identifies how we aim to put this learning into action and where we expect to go from here.

I. A Knowledge Base Around Professional Learning

Over the past few years, RPPL has invested heavily in building the enabling conditions for research and is seeing results that can provide actionable insights to PL developers and providers. This work is grounded in the deep and robust PL literature that has emerged in the past several decades, our synthesis of this literature, and the lived experiences of our members and affiliates. Here, we summarize some of our key takeaways from this literature.



1 Recent evidence expands and complicates consensus views of effective PL practices and highlights the importance of learning opportunities that couple robust support for teachers' day-to-day practice with genuine teacher-level accountability for change and improvement.

One of our first RPPL reports, [Dispelling the Myths](#), highlighted the prevalence of established “myths” that often drive PL policy and design even though these claims are either unsupported or sometimes even directly contradicted by emerging evidence (Hill et al., 2022). These myths suggest that PL is often a waste of time and money, that it is primarily effective for new teachers, that only certain models of PL (e.g., job-embedded and time-intensive) work, and that effective PL efforts must be adopted with no modifications. Several of these are deeply rooted and affect who gets served by PL, the structure and content of the learning opportunities, and the ways that these opportunities are integrated and built into district policy.

Instead, many studies offer definitive proof that teacher PL can significantly improve teacher practice and a range of student outcomes. Research shows that a broader variety of PL programs can be effective in improving student outcomes – including some that target teachers later in their careers and others that move away from a simple focus on delivering content knowledge to instead build toward purposeful shifts in instructional practice (e.g., Kennedy, 2016; Lynch et al., 2019). And, evidence suggests that while fidelity of program models is an important feature of effective scaling, adaptation to local context is critical (e.g., Kim et al., 2017; McMaster et al., 2014).

Taken as a whole, this evidence demonstrates the need for an increasingly complex view of the types of adult learning that can shift instructional practice.

RPPL's [Building Better PL](#) report looked across recent research and high-quality meta-analyses on PL to highlight the strategies and design features that show up repeatedly as effective across programs and contexts and offer perspective on why these strategies appear more effective than others (Hill & Papay, 2022).

Some of these PL strategies involve elements of program design and structure (i.e., “the how of PL”). For example, a meta-analysis of research found repeated and replicable effects of instructional coaching programs on student achievement (Kraft et al., 2018). A series of other studies demonstrate the importance of PL that protects time for teachers to collaborate around broader learning goals rather than only around day-to-day planning or lesson materials – and of specific types of built-in checkpoints and individualized follow-up around learning goals that offer teachers the opportunity to work through implementation challenges (Johnson et al., 2018; Patrick, 2022).

“Teaching Lab employs the *Dispelling the Myths* and the *Building Better PL* reports in professional learning with teachers, principals, and system-level leaders. For instance, in our partnership with Chicago Public Schools, we asked leaders to read and discuss the reports in order to ground system-wide planning and implementation of evidence-based professional learning. Teaching Lab's leader support combines the study of the reports with the creation and implementation of year-long plans as well as the collection of data to ensure that professional learning and coaching are effective. In this way, the reports do not just disseminate information but change mindsets around what's true about effective teacher professional learning and how to effectively implement professional learning.”

**DR. SHAYE WORTHMAN, SENIOR DIRECTOR,
LEARNING & RESEARCH AT TEACHING LAB**

“Leading Educators is proud to be a founding member of RPPL, and we have learned so much as part of the RPPL community. In particular, RPPL’s *Building Better PL* brief has helped shape a foundational understanding of impactful learning design for both our internal staff and external partners. We have used the features from the brief to more clearly define our core services as a program and their grounding in research. Growing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of what works, for whom, and under what conditions continues to be a priority for our organization and, due to what we’ve learned from RPPL, is now a key priority of our 2025–2027 organizational strategic plan. We are working with RPPL on a number of studies, especially our work to study a number of professional learning “recipes” that lead to student impact. Our initial research into recipes has helped us identify dosages of professional learning that lead to larger student impact, and we’re using what we’ve learned to refine how we scope future work to ensure we are creating the most impactful programs possible.”

LAURA MEILI, CHIEF IMPACT OFFICER AT
LEADING EDUCATORS

Others involve the specific content (i.e., “the *what*”) of PL opportunities. The most effective programs tend to center themselves around practical application, providing teachers with the chance to engage with practice-supportive materials such as curricula, lessons, and assessment items and to engage in detailed modeling, analysis, and rehearsal using these tools that they can then import directly into their classrooms (Heller et al., 2012). These findings help to both explain and justify the increasing focus on PL that is grounded in and focused on an emerging set of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). We also found that programs that explicitly attend to and aim to improve teacher-student relationships – rather than only academic content – often have outsized effects (Gehlbach et al., 2023; Gregory et al., 2017; Okonofua et al., 2022; Poling et al., 2022).

Generalizing from the list of strategies, we noted two prevailing themes that helped to explain the positive effects across studies. **PL programs that work best tend to build learning opportunities around materials and ideas that ground this learning in instructional moves rather than staying at the theoretical level. Additionally, they add urgency to transforming learning into practice by incorporating clear mechanisms and structures for creating social accountability for the necessary shifts.**

While the broad themes are clear, RPPL members face many questions about what it looks like to actualize these ideas in practice. How can PL providers better design and sequence opportunities for teachers that incorporate the themes of practice, collaboration, and empathy?

These ideas are helping RPPL narrow in on particular areas of our learning agenda and they played a major part in our most recent [Request for Proposals](#) to our network, where applicants were required to describe the ways that their research could deepen or complicate RPPL’s understanding of these core principles. As a result, funded studies span three interrelated areas: individualizing PL to teacher and student needs; building stronger, more empathetic teacher-student relationships; and expanding the use of technology to support HQIM in mathematics education.

We must deepen our understanding of how best to personalize professional learning to meet individual needs.

PL providers and districts across our network encounter similar challenges regarding when and how to tailor PL around individual teacher needs versus building more standardized offerings. Leaders see benefits and drawbacks to each approach.

RPPL has launched a series of studies that aim to provide greater insight into these dilemmas. One ongoing study by Leading Educators, a founding RPPL member, suggests that teachers and leaders each have separate ideas about the types of data that should be used to identify PL needs and that this divergence can lead to markedly different views about whether specific PL strategies are most useful and appropriately adapted to school and classroom contexts.

We are also investigating the ways that coaching can and cannot solve dilemmas around PL personalization. Robust evidence shows that instructional coaching can be highly effective in shifting teacher practice, and many of RPPL's district partners and PL providers have built teacher PL systems that rely at least in part on one-to-one instructional coaching. However, coaching has tended to be difficult to scale in ways that retain the demonstrated effectiveness of smaller programs because of cost and capacity and because we know relatively little about which elements of a coaching system are most effective or important (Kraft et al., 2018). Many districts collect coaching logs as part of their coaching process but often report that they don't know how to analyze these logs or how to use them to ensure stronger and more effective coaching over time. When providers rely on individualized coaching, they often struggle to institute quality control procedures across coach-teacher pairs and to build broader cohort models of learning that research also suggests can lead to sustained shifts in practice.

As we better understand the needs of organizations in this space, RPPL is working to develop a better

vocabulary that can help PL providers tighten the training and ongoing support they provide to their instructional coaches. One example of this type of field-building infrastructure that creates a common language and supports a shared research agenda is a recently released study that offers a framework for capturing the different types of "[coaching moves](#)" that take place during coach-teacher interactions (Boguslav, 2024). This framework suggests how coaches can respond to particular types of teacher needs with different purposeful actions. We are beginning work to understand how certain moves lead to instructional shifts by mapping coach moves to teacher responses and to the classroom and student outcomes that follow. Another RPPL study, of a curriculum implementation effort in Chicago, aimed to understand the ways that individualized coaching can help teachers work through their concerns about new instructional materials and can help them adapt materials for particular student needs without watering down expectations.

Given new emerging technology, RPPL and its members are exploring new ways to personalize and individualize PL. For instance, some RPPL organizations are moving quickly into the world of generative artificial intelligence (AI), proposing that AI systems can provide scalable, customizable in-the-moment feedback to teachers. For example, Teaching Lab has developed an AI-enabled coaching tool that allows coaches to better personalize one-on-one coaching with teachers through analyzing observation notes and providing feedback directly to teachers through AI-generated podcasts and websites. Others are building stronger data collection systems, betting on their ability to identify and train around particular types of student and teacher misconceptions. Yet much of this work is still in development. To better identify the ways that AI is and could be used in teacher PL, RPPL conducted a series of interviews with stakeholders in this space, including district leaders, AI researchers, and PL developers. [Our report](#), released in spring 2024, highlighted the differences in what districts and PL providers are currently looking for from PL focused on AI – but also key similarities in concerns about equity, access, privacy, and data stewardship, and the ways that research and policy could better support this work going forward (Krall et al., 2024).

3 Districts have few templates or models to follow as they make decisions about how to allocate resources toward PL.

Decisions about PL strategy are not only about effectiveness; they also depend on resource constraints. Instructional coaching, despite its robust evidence base, for example, tends to be expensive compared to other types of professional learning and is often the first thing that our members trim in response to funding constraints (Freitag, 2024). As we have gone deeper in this work, our network has seen a need to better understand the financial and non-financial constraints that shape these decisions.

RPPL's analysis of shifts in reported district costs across the past two decades suggests that annual spending on PL, largely on salaries and benefits for district-employed personnel, has increased steadily at a rate far exceeding inflation (publication forthcoming; initial webinar available [here](#)). Yet these averages hide tremendous variation across districts, even those within the same state. Indeed, state borders explain a relatively small and shrinking share of the variation in district spending on PL, suggesting that districts are making very different choices about investment in PL.

At the same time, we do see hints of systematic differences in the ways that districts allocate PL

resources. For example, larger districts appear to spend more on teacher development than smaller districts, even when taking into account higher salary costs in these districts, the greater numbers of teachers and students, and the greater concentration of high-needs students in these districts. Similarly, more rural districts rely less on in-house personnel for PL and do more contracting with outside providers.

Building on initial research, we are working to better understand how district-specific resource decisions influence the predominant PL models in different districts (ERS, 2024). What do districts gain and lose by developing systems in-house versus contracting for certain services? What types of in-house investments tend to be most impactful, and how do these factors vary across district contexts? How should considerations such as the availability of other staff types and specific student and teacher needs factor into these decisions? Ideally, resource choices should be closely linked to impact. The Outcomes-Based Contracting (OBC) movement showcases one example of how district-provider contracts can strengthen curriculum-based PL services by linking them to measurable outcomes for teachers and students (Southern Education Foundation, 2024). However, further research is essential. **We need a clearer understanding of what districts are purchasing, from whom, how these investments contribute to internal capacity building, and for what purposes. Without this insight into the resource allocation decisions shaping PL models, we are unlikely to make meaningful strides toward evidence-aligned practices in the field.**

II. Building a Robust Infrastructure for Scaling Collaborative Research

Since its start, RPPL has taken on the challenge of conducting rigorous and actionable research that is responsive to partner needs but also builds knowledge for the field as a whole. Doing this work at scale requires a substantial research infrastructure within individual organizations and across the RPPL network. This work has yielded learning about the opportunities and challenges of engaging in this type of partnership research. Here, we summarize several important lessons.

1 Partnerships around large-scale PL research are necessarily complex because there are so many players in the PL space.

Traditional experimental research efforts see external researchers identifying a testable intervention and then recruiting site participants for a specific project. Research-practice partnerships extend this model, bringing external research capacity to bear in a specific state or district to explore problems of practice surfaced in a shared agenda co-created by researchers and practitioners, but these still tend to be two-sided relationships.

RPPL's goals and [theory of action](#) extend beyond these models, aiming to create complex collaborations involving multiple stakeholders—teachers, district leaders, providers, and researchers—across the PL system. Including PL providers enhances expertise, adds leverage for system improvements, and provides diverse contexts for testing interventions and understanding what works, for whom, and under what conditions.

These dynamic partnerships have the potential to allow RPPL to rethink research impact and systemic improvement. Districts are as likely to contract out teacher PL as they are to build mechanisms for teacher learning in-house, yet the providers that conduct PL at scale tend to be left out of research discussions. **By increasingly co-designing studies across different districts and providers, RPPL focuses on understanding generalizable PL features rather than proprietary programs, aiming for stronger, more practical evidence-based solutions. We believe that these diverse, dynamic partnerships will generate stronger, more relevant, and practical evidence-based solutions for the PL field.**

Our ongoing efforts here show promise. For example, in one study, we sought to learn about whether an intervention designed to shift teachers' mindsets improved outcomes. We partnered with Dr. Jason Okonofua, a scholar who has studied teachers' empathetic mindsets, to develop a reflection exercise intended to give teachers the opportunity to reflect on their expectations of students. We fielded common survey items about teacher expectations and offered teachers similar reflection exercises across districts in

“ Since publishing *The Opportunity Myth* in 2018, TNTP has collaborated with Dr. Jason Okonofua to identify and test interventions that consistently enhance teachers' expectations for student success in meeting grade-level standards. Together as a part of the RPPL network, we co-designed and piloted a promising intervention focused on helping teachers set and maintain high academic expectations in their classrooms.

Our initial pilot with partner districts, conducted alongside other RPPL members, provided invaluable insights. Although the intervention showed promise, it did not yield the improvements in expectations or student outcomes that we had anticipated. Reflecting with Dr. Okonofua, we hypothesized that introducing the intervention midway through the school year might have limited its impact, as teachers' expectations had already solidified.

With additional funding, we modified our approach based on this feedback, taking a strategic pause to redesign the intervention itself, as well as the rollout timeline. Rather than delivering the first session of the intervention midway through the school year, we opted to delay implementation until the start of the next school year, allowing us to assess the intervention's effectiveness when introduced early, as initially intended. This adjustment highlights the strength of our partnerships within RPPL, as we collectively learn and adapt in pursuit of effective, scalable solutions for fostering high expectations in education.”

**BAILEY CATO CZUPRYK, SENIOR VICE
PRESIDENT OF TRANSFORMATION AT TNTP**

rural Arkansas, suburban Texas, Chicago, and New York City. We conducted this study not only across contexts but across several PL organizations, opening the possibility of better understanding the ways that similar PL approaches can play out very differently across the tremendously varied contexts of the U.S. landscape.

But, adding in additional partners requires more coordination to carry out studies, and we are still learning as a network about how to build the right buy-in across the right partners at the right times. In the study described above, which found no effects on teacher practice, and in others, we have struggled to create the level of research coordination necessary to build robust findings from the work, often conducting the work on a smaller scale or with weaker interventions than we originally imagined.

One pattern we have noted has been initial excitement about exploratory research into PL but hesitation toward the kinds of experimentation that RPPL has built into its guiding principles. Another pattern is that organizational leaders might be interested in a research study but have constrained ability to identify districts or program teams eager or able to engage in the study. A third learning that has emerged focuses on challenges with research infrastructure, which we return to later in this paper.

RPPL is seeking to navigate these challenges by using new models and approaches. Experimental roll-outs where not everyone receives a particular intervention can be controversial at times if it feels that some individuals are being excluded from important benefits. This has pushed us even further in the direction of studying practical design dilemmas, where there is not an obvious “better” choice. A recently launched study on teacher choice about the focus of PL in Montgomery County, MD, represents a good example, with PL facilitators genuinely unsure about when it makes more sense for teachers to pick their own focus area versus having instructional leaders identify apparent areas of need.

We have also expanded our portfolio of research work. RPPL launched with an almost exclusive focus on randomized trials with PL organizations that were poised

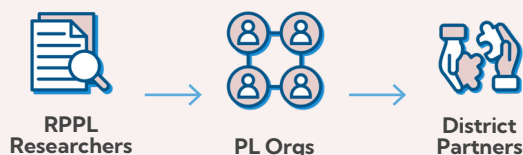
to experiment on specific practices. While our focus on conducting causal research remains our north star, such longer-term trials were challenging for PL organizations to launch. As such, **we have worked to build a more diverse set of studies, including more descriptive and qualitative work that builds our understanding of the PL landscape, how PL plays out in schools and districts, and the collective hypotheses about what to test across organizations and districts.** More and more, our affiliate organizations, both on the district and PL provider sides, have helped us build a broader portfolio of research around key topics that includes a wide variety of methods and approaches to provide multiple forms of insight into broader research questions, build a better understanding of what’s driving change, and learn more nimbly, ensuring we make the right investments in large, resource-intensive causal studies.

Finally, we have broadened our strategies to engage diverse research partners more effectively. We have begun collaborating directly with districts—who are themselves PL developers. These studies address their priority questions and have proven easier to launch given districts’ direct control over their PL, an interest in key design features, and data infrastructure. We’ve also funded field-driven studies where practitioners set the research agenda and bring in engaged partners. For PL organizations, we’ve taken a strategic approach to involve all relevant sub-teams in complex, multi-partner efforts. This includes empowering not just research and program teams, but also partnership and sales teams, to share the organization’s commitment during early discussions with districts. Throughout, we’ve created multiple touchpoints to ensure research communication is not just top-down but also resonates with program staff who see its value for their work. Our engagements are thus much more varied, as we illustrate in Figure 2.

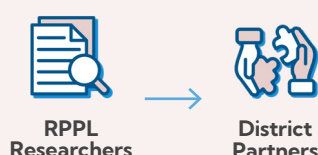
Figure 2.

RPPL Partnerships

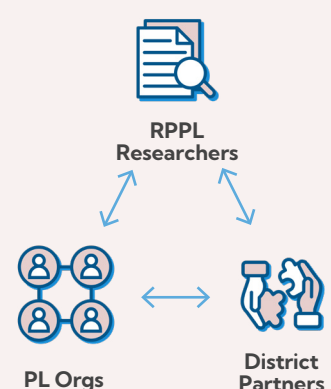
MODEL 1



MODEL 2



MODEL 3



2 Across our network, we continue to work to include teacher and student voice, diversify our RPPs, and operationalize equitable PL research.

RPPL exists to ensure that all students receive the unique supports they need to develop their full academic and social-emotional potential. For this to be possible, all educators must receive the training and support necessary to develop their practices to effectively meet the individual learning and development needs for all students in their classroom.

Each PL organization and the research partner in our network share this commitment but operationalize it differently. **We aim to support our partners in building collective capacity to drive impactful equitable change for our teachers and students in two key ways.**



First, we believe we must honor and share the unique gifts, lived experiences, and expertise within our diverse community. This looks like prioritizing the voices that are often left out of crucial conversations about teacher development.

To further amplify teacher and youth voices, RPPL hosted two equity-focused reviews of our learning agenda, involving 21 teachers nationwide to discuss their experiences with PL, particularly in AI-focused topics. Concurrently, RPPL collaborated with the BUILD Youth Advisory Council in a six-week co-design process, where 12 high school and college students from California, New York City, Maryland, and Texas provided insights into their educational experiences and offered feedback on RPPL's learning agenda.

Teachers and students both valued a PL approach that was flexible, impactful, and relationship-centered. They agreed that quality was more important than quantity, stressing that effective PL should be practical and adaptable. Both groups also appreciated

PL that fostered collaboration—teachers sought interactive feedback, and students valued the idea of “teachers as learners,” seeing it as a pathway for more partnership and dialogue in the classroom. This shared focus on quality and collaborative learning highlighted a common goal of creating supportive, equitable learning environments. Each group also brought unique perspectives. Teachers emphasized the need for structured follow-through and collaboration, expressing interest in having a say in PL selection to better align with their varied experiences and goals. They also raised questions about the long-term sustainability of PL and its success factors, including “efficacy,” “intensity,” and “dosage.” In contrast, students focused on the role of technology in enhancing PL, suggesting that digital tools and AI could personalize learning and improve relevance. They sought transparency on progress-tracking tools and recommended ways to contribute more directly to teacher development, such as providing feedback through anonymous surveys or participating in workshops. They also proposed using visuals, like charts or survey data, to represent student perspectives in PL research frameworks.

The alignment and divergence of teacher and student perspectives on RPPL's learning agenda offer new pathways for its evolution and will inform research priorities and equitable research practices going forward.



Second, we strive to confront and disrupt structural inequities, power imbalances, and biases in our research and the broader PL ecosystem by embedding equity-centered practices and principles in our daily work with PL organizations, researchers, school systems, and educators.

For example, our recent [Request for Proposals](#) aimed to grant funds that would form and support a more diverse set of RPPs grounding their work in equitable research frameworks, led by teams representing the lived experiences of students and teachers RPPL was designed to serve. Applicants were asked to explicitly link the equity frameworks they leveraged to the research questions and design choices in their proposed study.

The funded RPPs represent a wide range of lived experiences, research disciplines, and methodologies. A diverse RPP team does not, however, equate to use of equitable frameworks and research practices. Notably, while many of the proposals provided thoughtful frameworks, interpretations differed significantly. Some equated equity with diversity in representation, while others mentioned frameworks without clearly applying them to the study. There were also different focuses on equity, with contrasting approaches to similar challenges. This variation presents a clear opportunity to establish clearer guidelines and shared standards for integrating equity into research. This includes building a common language and set of practices around carrying out genuine equity-centered research in the PL space. One that attends to the types of decision points and trade-offs related in part to where research is happening (e.g., state policy and school system differences).

We have used the proposals that we received as a launching point for a broader discussion about the research processes that are most likely to help us achieve our aims as a network. We discuss our path forward in greater detail in the next section of this paper.

3 Our investments in research infrastructure are building standardized measurement models and more consistent data collection processes to improve our ability to generate reliable, research-ready data.

Reliable, common measurement constructs, tools, standard data collection processes, and shared data infrastructure are key enabling conditions that will allow us to learn and grow together as a network.

When we started RPPL, we recognized that our members and affiliates deeply valued data-based decision-making and dedicated significant effort to gathering data to assess their effectiveness. We hoped to leverage these data-gathering mechanisms for larger-scale research but soon discovered that our combined data collection efforts were not yet producing research-ready data. While organizations had invested in evidence-based and/or homegrown measures, there was significant variability in data collection methods and a wide range of measures used across organizations. For example,

“RPPL is unique in the education research space in that it is deeply grounded in the value of practical measurement and measurement tools. In true partnership, Instruction Partners, peer organizations in the professional learning space, and RPPL team members are co-creators of our collective learning agenda centered on the experience of instructional leaders and educators in many different contexts around the country. Our studies are not theoretical; our shared learning is not just academic – it is rigorous, collaborative, and above all else, it is relevant and responsive to the needs of our partners. In particular, we appreciate RPPL’s thought partnership on the design of Instruction Partners’ research studies, connection to possible principal investigators and lead researchers, and mutual accountability to center equity of perspectives and voice in everything that we do.”

MALIKA ANDERSON, CHIEF PROGRAM OFFICER AT INSTRUCTION PARTNERS

most organizations conducted classroom walkthroughs to assess instructional practices, however, these varied in frequency, personnel involved, and the types of practices measured, complicating the collection of valid data for research and hindering the development of shared insights across the network.

Additionally, PL providers often had to make difficult trade-offs to improve service efficiency, which sometimes compromised research rigor. Many organizations accepted lower response rates or skipped rater validity checks due to time and resource constraints, making the data unreliable for generating broader knowledge in the field. These challenges further exacerbated the ability of organizations and research partners to engage in the types of data collection that would support both continuous improvement efforts via ongoing, practical assessment and understanding PL impact related to their services. These observations are symptomatic of a dearth of investment in R&D infrastructure and research in education compared to other fields. RPPL is working to shift the paradigm here by investing in research infrastructure.

“Working with RRPL has expanded our view on current measurement practices and tools. This includes both collaborating with other organizations to surface challenges around effectively measuring professional learning and learning how other organizations are measuring impact. RPPL has connected us to leading researchers in the field to address persistent challenges in practical, reliable data collection; for instance, exploring how we can employ the Tool for Equitable Reading Instruction (TERI) in our work. Working with these researchers has also surfaced opportunities for UnboundEd to engage in more causal work to identify the impact of our programs.”

**DR. ALIZA HUSAIN, VICE PRESIDENT,
RESEARCH & EVALUATION AT UNBOUNDED**

Over the past three years, we have invested substantially in building the types of research and data collection infrastructure that can accelerate research and allow more timely learning across the network to address these challenges.

We began our work by [co-authoring a white paper](#) with 10 RPPL member and affiliate organizations about what it would take to strengthen measurement across the RPPL network. The paper highlighted a series of key challenges in the broader field that undermined members’ attempts to collect and use data for research-based improvement. For example, the tools that RPPL members and affiliates find in the research sphere often don’t focus on key equity metrics that represent central elements of practice across our network (Alicea et al., 2023). Moreover, these data collection instruments are often built to generate exhaustive data on an individual construct. While ideal for summative impact research, this approach makes measures too long and involved to serve as the kind of practical measures needed for rapid, organizational improvement. The report called for

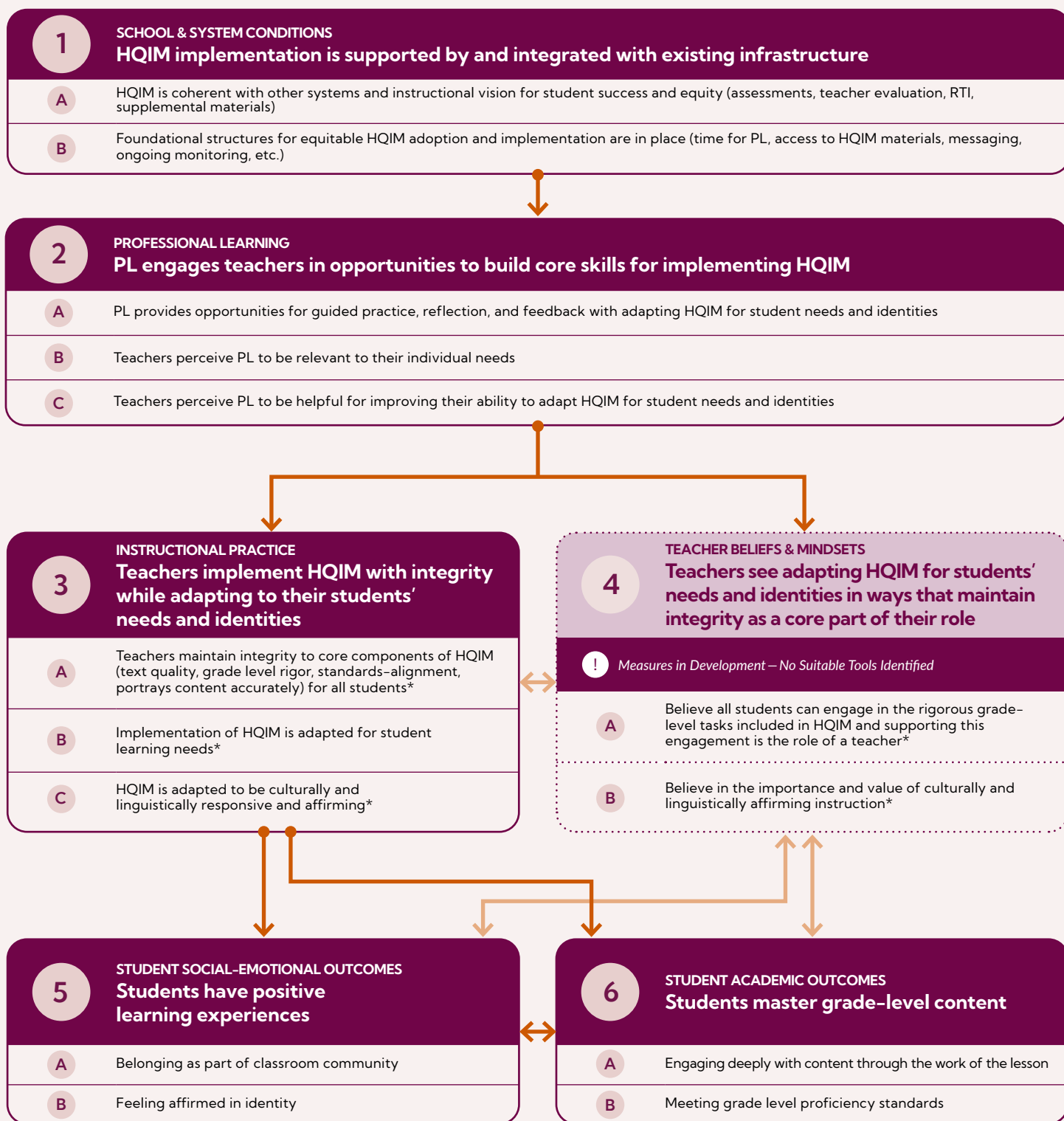
innovative measurement solutions grounded in strong research methodology to address these challenges.

We did not wait for others to respond to that call. Instead, we began the work in earnest and with our network. In partnership with six RPPL member and affiliated organizations, we launched a project to identify key gaps in measurement and build consensus around a limited set of shared measures and processes for early grades literacy PL that can be used across organizations to create a shared bank of data and common ground for cross-organizational analysis.

Already, this work has produced a growing clarity around the shared “sub-constructs” that RPPL organizations find either particularly important or particularly tricky to measure in their own work. **It has also allowed us to build a repository of measurement tools that can be used to capture data on these sub-constructs and to constructively debate the trade-offs between various tools in terms of the validity of the data they produce, their practicality and feasibility, and their alignment with the work.** Further, while not without its challenges, particularly in relation to scaling the model, it fuels a critical opportunity to understand PL features at scale across contexts, link those features with student and teacher outcomes, and engage districts in testing this model alongside practitioners and researchers.

To date, we have leveraged a common theory of action linking school and system conditions for school improvement to the delivery of quality PL and changes in instructional practices, teacher beliefs and mindsets, and student outcomes to: (1) identify the most important sub-constructs within each of these dimensions (e.g., coherence in context, foundational supports, guided adaptation, feedback, HQIM integrity, student engagement with content, belonging), (2) identify the most important causal links between sub-constructs within and across dimensions, and (3) build consensus around several sub-constructs within each dimension, the causal linkages between them, and how they should be operationalized. We are currently moving into the second phase of this work, where we will pilot this shared measurement model across our six participating PL organizations, and continue to test innovative solutions to implementation challenges of this work at scale (e.g., cadence and logistics of measurement, survey response rates, observer training and assignment, target sample, etc.). We are also building a “toolkit” to help district leaders and professional learning provider organizations use this measurement model across grades 3-12.

What to Measure When Assessing ELA Curriculum Shifts



*Signifies gaps in available measurement tools that RPPL is working to fill in the next year

Over the past year, we have built data infrastructure that will support this work by enabling us to de-identify, pool, and visualize shared data across participating partners. We will also be expanding the reach of this work into middle grades math in the year ahead. This will ensure that new studies can call upon common constructs, tools, and comparable data points that are already collected as part of the routine work of our network.

But, ownership of these data is often shared across multiple parties. Teacher attendance at PL sessions and surveys on teacher perceptions tend to be collected by PL providers. Even when these data are collected by districts, they are rarely integrated into district data systems. Classroom walk-throughs and observations are sometimes carried out by district personnel, sometimes by PL providers, and sometimes by research partners – with each scenario creating different ownership scenarios and sometimes different privacy protections and considerations. And, districts' student information systems house particularly sensitive student outcome and teacher performance data.

4 Infrastructure and best practices to coordinate approvals from multiple partners can alleviate challenges from the ambiguous and fragmented ownership of PL data.

Building a better infrastructure for PL research doesn't only require agreement on common measurement data; it also requires us to improve our ability to work across partners to collect, store, and use this data to accelerate knowledge production.

Our RPPL research projects have faced challenges in navigating the web of approvals that these studies require. These can include research approval and a data-sharing agreement from the district partner(s), individual consent forms from involved teachers, data-sharing agreements between the PL provider and the research partner, and an institutional review board approval from the research partner's academic institution. They also often require extensive discussion across partners to determine exactly who needs to approve which pieces of the work. These explicit agreements often need to be in place before studies are launched, lengthening timelines considerably and limiting the ability of research to provide actionable and timely evidence to inform policy and practice.

So what will it take to get better and faster at this work? To enhance our efficiency and effectiveness in this work, we have developed several promising solutions:

First, we have created a bank of agreement templates and resources at RPPL to streamline our processes and rescue the need for partners to generate new documents with new language for each subsequent research project.

For instance, we've established standardized consent language that clarifies exactly what teachers are approving, along with tri-party data-sharing agreements that encompass researchers, PL providers, and districts in one document. These templates are available to all network members and affiliates, and as we continue to refine our playbooks, we will make these available in the [Insights Hub](#) on RPPL's website.

Second, we are thinking carefully about what pieces of this work need individual consent, and what does not.

For example, as districts or PL organizations roll out different versions of PL, teachers cannot opt out of participating in the study because the study is inherent in the authentic PL practice on the ground. Instead, we have worked to clarify that informed consent procedures relate to data sharing, not participation.

Third, we are actively expanding our understanding of practice-oriented research and what it can enable.

For example, providers are able to test out their practices without prior approval. Leaning into the fact that all of our member organizations are learning organizations that use evidence to refine their programs, some members have begun to consider district contracts that give them the explicit right to use data to study their own practice.

Finally, we understand that achieving scale requires strong, long-term district partners who play a core part in shaping our research.

RPPL's initial approach involved engaging districts in research proposals only after collaborating with external PL providers, but this delayed their investment in research and program teams. Today, we prioritize engaging districts from the start to lead question development grounded in our learning agenda with integration of their contracted PL providers, ensuring smooth data transfer across multiple parties alongside PL service delivery. We are also working to generate more opportunities to have districts, external PL providers, and RPPL researchers all at the table from the outset of our partnerships, and expect this approach to take root in the coming years.

III. Where We Go from Here

RPPL today looks tremendously different from RPPL during its launch in 2021. We have grown into a robust network spanning more than 120 organizations, districts, and researchers, and have clarified our two-part mission focusing both on generating rigorous, practical research that helps teachers develop the skills to provide better and more equitable instruction to all students *and* on building an ecosystem across partners to share learnings, do better, faster research, and translate that research into improved practice.

Our emerging learning from the first several years of work is directly informing our next steps as an organization. So, what are the key strategic shifts that we have made as a result of this learning?

Here are a few of the bigger changes:

A developing learning agenda with an increased focus on teacher personalization and choice

RPPL is refining our learning agenda to focus on the areas of greatest need across our partnerships, with a strong emphasis on ensuring that PL is directly relevant and impactful for educators. This ongoing refinement involves exploring how teachers engage with content in meaningful ways, and understanding what this means for PL providers and districts striving to create common, scalable models. Many of our newest studies ask questions about the ways that teachers can engage around the content that feels right for them. By continuously seeking input from a growing group of partners and incorporating feedback from teachers and facilitators, RPPL is working to ensure the content and structure of PL programs align with the real needs of educators. This iterative process aims to improve teaching practices, enhance student outcomes, and ultimately contribute to a more effective and cohesive approach to professional development across the network.

A growing portfolio of place-based research grounded in a coordinated effort to center district research questions alongside those of PL providers

We started this work believing that the most useful studies would involve multiple organizations and multiple locations, but those larger studies turned out to require a level of coordination that our still-developing network and the larger PL ecosystem were not fully prepared to take on. While we remain excited about the potential for cross-context work, we have also found that focusing on individual districts allows us to engage more deeply while not necessarily precluding studies of the types of design features that continue to feel core to RPPL. With this in mind, we have brought on a limited set of key district partners and have worked with them to identify broader RPPL dilemmas that they can build and test in their own practice. In Baltimore City and Montgomery County, MD, we have launched experimental work to understand whether variations in levels of teacher choice and peer accountability lead to better experiences and outcomes for teachers and students. In Boston, MA, Guilford County, NC, and New York City, we are working to understand which teachers are selecting into which learning opportunities and what this means for the district's attempts to recruit the right participants. Our district affiliates are playing a key role in the network, both in making it easier to generate the kinds of research that can inform the whole network and also in shaping the next generation of questions we will ask. We are eager to continue to develop new models and approaches that bring researchers together with district partners and the PL organizations that serve them. This cross-partner synergy will allow for different types of inquiry.

A portfolio of math- and curriculum-focused studies supported by a community of practice and a common measurement structure

In the summer of 2024, all nine studies in our new contributing research portfolio launched, completing key steps such as obtaining IRB approvals, finalizing Data Transfers and Use Agreements (DTUAs) with RPPL, and participating in three RPPL-led community of practice meetings. During these meetings, research teams collaboratively generated a set of common measurement items to be implemented across all studies. We designed these items to capture features of PL that, to our knowledge, are not regularly measured but are highlighted as priorities in RPPL's learning agenda. With teacher and student measures already well-represented in each study, the focus of the new measurement items is on the relationships between features of PL, teacher experiences with PL, and shifts in teacher practices. Each study will integrate these items into their existing data collection plans, fueling both organizational and broader field-wide learning. Throughout 2025, the studies will continue with data collection, preliminary analysis, ongoing participation in RPPL's community of practice activities, and receive tailored technical assistance. Once the studies conclude, we will publish a white paper summarizing the findings from this portfolio of studies, aligned with RPPL's learning agenda.

A toolkit of standardized data collection items driven by an emphasis on common, shared measures

In the coming months, RPPL, in partnership with the Annenberg Institute's [EdInstruments](#), will release the first iteration of a measurement toolkit that we will pilot across our network to ensure that we are gathering comparable data on a series of metrics focused on ELA-focused curriculum-based professional learning. By sharing measures and data standards, we expect to launch new conversations within the network, opening new conversations around why we are seeing the same or different outcomes across programs and partners and what this means about the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches. Simultaneously, we hope to call on these common data points to enable better, faster research by making it easier to conduct quick turnaround experimentation in line with RPPL's original vision.

An emerging framework for promoting equitable research practices in our work and in the field

As we've matured and grown, equitable research and building together as a true collective has emerged as a core pillar central to our ability to deliver on RPPL's promise. Throughout 2024, we have focused on two key strands of work that will enable us to pilot a PL-focused equity framework within RPPL's research, shared learning, and ecosystem development. First, we conducted a literature scan, identifying frameworks related to research-practice partnerships, professional learning research, and equitable research principles. We also interviewed prominent scholars leading studies using equitable design principles and theories. We are now in the process of contextualizing these approaches to align with RPPL's commitment to centering equity in PL research processes and outcomes. Over the next year, we will pilot our framework by retrospectively evaluating RPPL's existing work to identify areas for alignment and improvement and by implementing it in an upcoming study. Additionally, we will integrate and test aspects in the 2024-2026 math-focused HQIM studies cohort's community of practice arc.

Looking ahead, we are energized by the new direction RPPL is taking and grateful to our founding members, affiliates, research partners, and funders. Our growth into a robust network of partners deeply committed to educational equity for all students presents an exciting opportunity to innovate and collaborate on research that truly impacts teacher professional learning. We invite feedback and ideas on what we have shared in this paper as we continue to shape the future of our work together.

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