



# MAKING CHANGE THAT STICKS

How to help your school leaders and teachers  
make lasting change that matters to learning

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Schools have always been hotbeds of change. Education leaders are continually on the hunt for that idea that could change their students' learning. In the 1800s, during Horace Mann's era, it was the "common-school" movement — the idea that a school's aim should be to educate people from all social classes and religions and that schools should be funded by local taxes. Today, the change might be raising the bar on educator credentials, redesigning learning spaces or any of a number of other compelling ideas.

**Y**ET, RARELY IS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT A WELCOME CHANGE — even when those on the inside know the existing system doesn't work. That's not surprising considering efforts are often accompanied by a session or two of professional development after which attendees are sent on their way to figure out how to implement the newest flavor of learning on their own. What's frequently lacking is the fidelity of implementation that leads to a truly deep transfer of knowledge and instructional practice that will make the desired impact on student learning.







What if school improvement planning efforts were directly tied to a change process and paired with customized professional learning that included continual coaching and mentoring as well as built-in evidence-gathering to prove the impact of the change?

In Visible Learning<sup>plus</sup>, teachers gain clarity about the effect they can make on student learning, and every child gains knowledge about what they need to be learning.

That's the thinking behind the development of Visible Learning<sup>plus</sup>. Based on Professor John Hattie's Visible Learning research, it is a practical approach that puts his findings into practice. The result is a sustainable change model that connects to district initiatives, addresses specific school needs and grows from the bottom up to ensure continuous buy-in from teachers and school leaders.

## “VISIBLE LEARNING” RECAP

As education researcher John Hattie explains in his book *Visible Learning*, most strategies that a teacher tries in the classroom are going to have some kind of impact — usually positive — on student learning; but if that's the case, why not work on those factors with the strongest effect? Currently, Hattie's research examines and synthesizes 1,500 meta-analyses covering 90,000-plus

studies involving 300 million students to rank more than 250 effects that influence learning outcomes. Those effect sizes greater than 0.4 accelerate student learning by a factor of one. In Visible Learning<sup>plus</sup>, teachers gain clarity about the effect they can make on student learning, and every child gains knowledge about what they need to be learning.



# STRANDS OF LEARNING

**F**IGURING OUT HOW TO JUGGLE THE NUMEROUS FACTORS in instruction that affect learning can easily overwhelm people. To simplify the complexity and help schools accelerate their understanding of the data developed by Hattie, Visible Learning<sup>plus</sup> consists of five key “strands” tied to the instructional practices that have the greatest impact.

The idea is to know, using evidence, that what you’re doing increases learning in a way that sticks and is sustainable. The evidence may show that the practice is effective or it may show the extent to which a practice is being implemented throughout a school. The first and primary strand is the Visible Learning System itself, which serves as an organizing principle — including the tools and processes — for fulfilling the four other strands. In turn, those consist of:

- **Visible learners.** When students are in tune with their own learning, they can express where they’re going, how they’ll get there and what comes next for them.
- **Know thy impact.** Teachers should evaluate the impact of their instructional practice on learning and use evidence to identify areas needing adjustment.
- **Inspired teaching.** These individuals know how to evaluate their students’ understanding and apply interventions to help their students.
- **Effective feedback.** Effective feedback closes the gap between where students are in their learning and where they need to be and touches on feedback among teachers, with students and within the community.

Evidence is an important part of Visible Learning. “It’s usually teach, teach, teach, test — oh, some learned, some didn’t; let’s move on,” says Julie Smith, senior director of Global Visible Learning for Corwin. Seeking student feedback during instruction helps teachers see the impact of their practices through the eyes of their learners. As she explains, “If kids are not learning, I’m probably not using the right practices at the right time to have that impact.”





Visible Learning<sup>plus</sup> has four commonly-used tools for gathering evidence. Each has a specific purpose, and once school leaders and teachers have been trained in their use, they can turn to them regularly to inform their next steps.

**1** **School Capability Assessment** is used to assess the school's current practices against the Visible Learning strands.

**2** **Mindframes Survey** measures how teachers and leaders think about learning and their own roles against the mindframes articulated by Hattie in high-impact areas such as "know thy impact," "dialogue not monologue," and "student voice."

**3** **Classroom Observation Tool**, provides a technique for teachers to learn about the practices and student learning in their own classrooms and others.

**4** **School Matrix** is a self-evaluation questionnaire that helps schools understand the processes, beliefs and practices that permeate their own schools in relation to the Visible Learning strands.

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## OUTCOMES MATTER

**CORWIN'S PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND COACHING** are customized to address the needs of individual school districts, as two accompanying school profiles, both in Klein Independent School District in Texas, demonstrate. Visible Learning<sup>plus</sup> is currently in use at four schools but will expand to 11 this year.

KISD school leaders are outfitted with a systemwide change model that is tied directly to their own school improvement planning efforts. While Visible Learning<sup>plus</sup> provides a proven framework, its application looks different everywhere it's implemented because each school focuses specifically on the greatest areas of need for its own students.





## LEMM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROFILE

**695** Total Students

**23%** Free/Reduced Lunch

**11%** English Language Learners

## EVIDENCE DRIVES TEACHER BUY-IN

**L**EMM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL KATHY BROWN had a lightbulb moment when she first heard about Visible Learning at a conference in Florida in 2014.

"We all work really, really hard, so we should be working on the right stuff," she thought. When Brown returned home, she began reading up on Hattie's research on effect size and gave a couple of presentations to district people about what she learned. But other initiatives within the district demanded her attention too, so Visible Learning was put on the back burner.

The following year, the conference was held in San Antonio, a three-hour drive from the school. Brown took a team from every grade and special education, and the excitement was palpable. By the following Monday morning, the participants had agreed that Visible Learning was worth investing in for the school. Later that afternoon, she persuaded the district's Teaching & Learning division to allow Lemm Elementary to take the work of school improvement into its own hands — with the help of Corwin consultants. She even wrote a rationale to district leaders explaining why the school should be able to opt out of its annual parent conference day and use that time for professional learning instead. Permission was granted.

By the beginning of October, all instructional staff at Lemm was sitting down for its first real dose of Visible Learning<sup>plus</sup>, a "foundation day" that focused on the five strands of Visible Learning. "Everybody was there — PE, music, ESL," Brown recalls, "and our brains were on fire." That was followed three months later with leadership training. By the end of that first year, Lemm educators participated in three schoolwide trainings and two leadership trainings.





The first goal is for teachers to step into their first “impact cycle.” In Visible Learning vernacular, the impact cycle is a continuous process of self-evaluation. It follows five stages:

- 1 Gathering evidence to determine areas of focus
- 2 Planning professional learning based on that evidence
- 3 Implementing a plan
- 4 Tracking progress and outcomes
- 5 Assessing the impact and figuring out next steps.

“Every teacher had to come up with what they wanted to try, and they [captured] data before and after to see if they were making an impact on student learning,” explains Brown. Several teachers chose to work on teacher clarity, and specifically on “learning intentions and success criteria,” approaches for helping students get the same idea as their teacher about what’s going on in the classroom and what they should be learning as a result. Many — but not all — of the teachers were already using “I CAN” statements in their instructional practices, which also encourages students to become more responsible for their learning and more reflective about their work.

However, because teacher clarity is in Visible Learning’s top 25 of influences affecting student achievement — it wasn’t so easy for naysayers to pass on, which meant that teacher buy-in was strong.

The buy-in showed up in the evaluation, also. The Visible Learning strand “Know thy impact” includes this specific assessment: “Lesson plans make the learning intentions and success criteria clear.” An April 2016 self-assessment by the Lemm team gauged their efforts on that aspect as good, but not great. Eleven months later, though, in a March 2017 assessment, the team called the practice “common-place and systematically embedded.”

At the end of the year, Brown’s school had its final day of professional learning, in which, facilitated by a Corwin consultant, people shared their impact cycles. The school traditionally held parades at the end of every grading cycle, in which students who met all of their goals would march through the building being applauded by teachers, parents and other students (the ones who had failed to meet their goals). One teacher decided to focus on goal-setting for her impact cycle. At the end of that grading period, the kids were coming up and asking, “Did I make my goals?” because it meant they could be in the parade. Her response: “I don’t know. You need to find out by looking at your goals yourself.”

That simple act “caused a lot of dialog in the classroom and across the board in our school,” says Brown. The realization: “A goal for children was a wish. Although we talked to them about how ‘100’ is not a goal because you could be the smartest person in the world and still make mistakes and not always get that 100, we weren’t talking to them enough about what a goal was.” As a result, she adds, “That totally changed what was happening at Lemm.”

The following fall, several teachers picked goal setting as their next impact cycle. Grade parades went by the wayside, replaced by independent grade-level celebrations. “We found out students don’t have to be recognized by the entire school to be successful,” Brown observes. “Everybody learns at their own rate and can be celebrated by their peers because they would know that people were moving forward on their learning.”

Then, between years one and two, the state replaced its longstanding teacher evaluation system with one that put more emphasis on showing evidence of student growth. Because Lemm’s educators had already been doing that, the switch was simple for them, requiring little more than embedding their impact cycles showing student growth into the new system. Corwin provided a quick “cross-walk” to show how Visible Learning fit into the new Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System. “That was awesome,” says Brown, “because we were already right there.”



Now, Visible Learning is “just life,” she adds. “It’s literally how we operate.”

That enthusiasm was put to the test in 2017, when Hurricane Harvey slammed Houston just a few days into the school year and did so much damage to Lemm Elementary that the school had to be shuttered for extensive repairs. Within two weeks, the students and teachers were back in action, taking up temporary residence at a new high school. (Lemm has only recently reopened at its former location, in time for the start of the 2018-2019 school year.)

The best part, says Brown, “The learning never stopped. We did our impact cycles. You could walk into a classroom, and they had their learning intentions and success criteria up on the wall. They were teaching without resources. Every child had a chair to sit on, even if it was a high school chair. But we weren’t playing school; we were actually doing school. The background knowledge that we had built for the last two years from Visible Learning<sup>plus</sup> helped support all of that.”



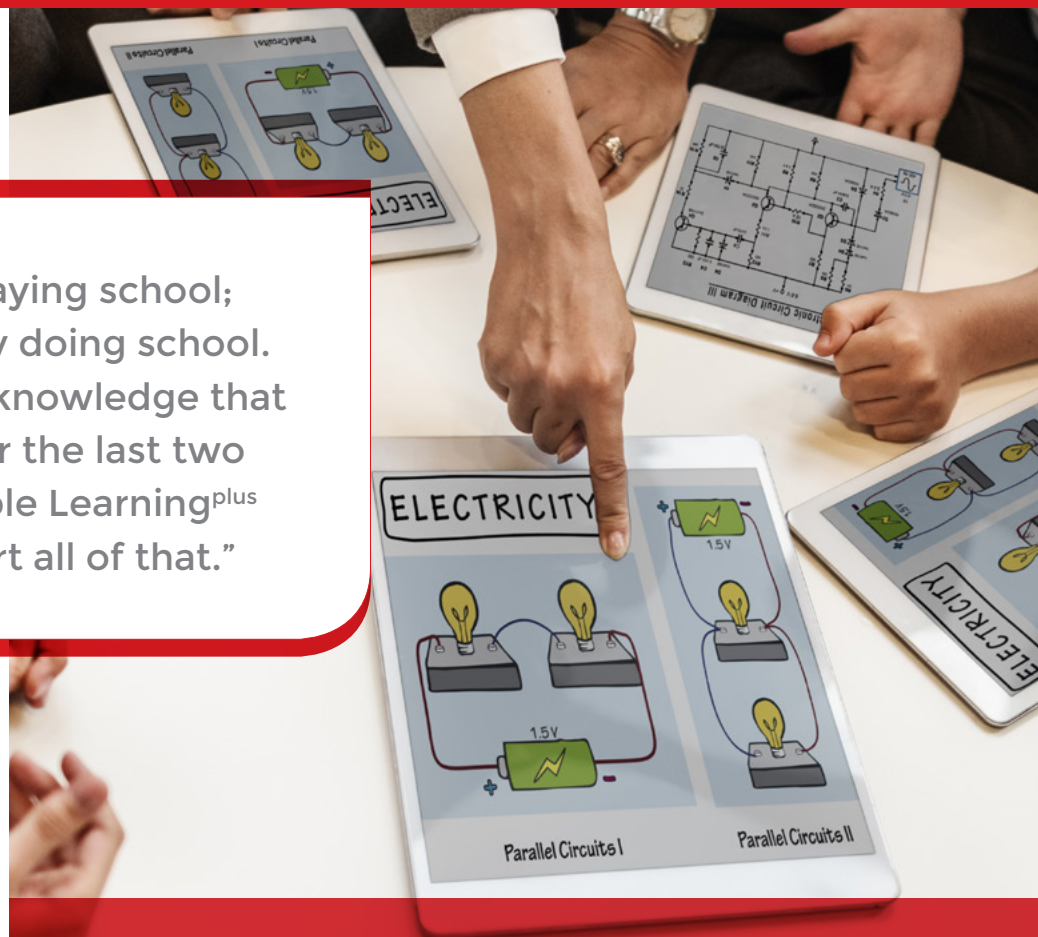
## CHANGING MINDFRAMES

**M**ETZLER ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL **LAKITA COMBS** was at an education conference in 2013 when she first heard about Visible Learning in a session about a completely different topic. Immediately, she stopped listening to the speaker and began looking up information about John Hattie and his learning influences ranking process. She was hooked. She returned home, began reading Visible Learning literature and got permission to take her leadership team to the Visible Learning conference in San Antonio.

Why the rush? The year before the school's state testing scores had taken a "huge dip," and Combs was in her first year as the principal. "I needed a direction for my teachers to go — something for them to get excited about," she recalls. "We needed that clarity and to develop that common language so that we were all on the same page, going in the same direction."

Combs set up a foundation day with Corwin to lay out the basics of the Visible Learning strands for all of her teachers and staff. The school decided to start by immersing itself in the "mindframes" of Visible Learning. School leaders spoke with student focus groups to understand what they thought about learning and what it means to be a good learner. The results were startling. Students said things like, "Raise your hand, listen to the teacher, pay attention," — things that were "task-oriented," says Combs. "We were hoping that they would say, 'Good learners are curious, they ask questions, they collaborate, they set goals, they self-reflect, they embrace challenge, they know learning is hard but they don't give up.'"

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## METZLER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROFILE

**864** Total Students

**27%** Free/Reduced Lunch

**6%** English Language Learners



Even the teachers weren't in agreement. "We didn't have a common definition," she admits. "We didn't know that we had to teach kids that. We thought they came knowing these things."

And so that's where the Metzler journey really began — by defining the qualities of a good learner. As an example, "We said good learners are curious," Combs explains. "Then we described what curious looked like, and we agreed upon that." The educators came up with five different

qualities and the traits for each one. They also made a timeline and set what they considered a reasonable period by which they would review their data to see whether they'd made progress. And then they started teaching the kids. The approach: to have everyone focus on one quality of learning and build on it schoolwide until they'd gotten through the whole list.

The evidence of the change is readily apparent, says Combs. For example, conversations with students have shifted. Now when she puts them into their cars after school, she asks, "Were you curious today? Give me an example. Did you work hard? What does that look like?"

**"I can't give up. Learning is hard work,  
and I have to keep on trying because I'm  
a learner and this is what learners do. I love that."**



# METZLER STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

The scores in the first four rows reflect scores from the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) program and reflect the percentage of students who showed good understanding of the subject material and are well-prepared for success in the next grade.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Reading</b>	77%	86%	89%	88%	89%	89%
<b>Mathematics</b>	77%	89%	NA	94%	93%	94%
<b>Science</b>	86%	89%	83%	87%	91%	92%
<b>Writing</b>	69%	77%	81%	92%	90%	88%
<b>Distinctions Earned (6 are possible)</b>	NA	2	2	3	6	5
<b>Student Achievement in Mathematics</b>	NA	Yes	NA		Yes	
<b>Student Achievement in Reading/ELA</b>	NA				Yes	
<b>Top 25% in Student Progress</b>	NA	Yes		Yes	Yes	
<b>Top 25% in Closing Performance Gaps</b>			Yes	Yes	Yes	
<b>Greater than Expected Progress in Math</b>	NA		Yes		Yes	
<b>Post-Secondary Readiness</b>				Yes	Yes	

Note: Metzler staff was introduced to Visible Learning<sup>plus</sup> at a conference in 2013, and began implementing it in 2014.



The impact is being felt even outside of school. One parent told Combs she and her child were at the skating rink, struggling with a particular technique. The response from that student: "I can't give up. Learning is hard work, and I have to keep on trying because I'm a learner and this is what learners do." I love that," says Combs.

That internal mindframe shift has happened with teachers, too. Combs cites feedback as one example, "It's hard when you're sitting in a PLC meeting, looking at your data and getting down about it if it's not what you expect it to be. So we're constantly telling each other, 'You know what? Assessments are just feedback to us. It's pointing us to where we need to go. It's just data. We need to keep collecting that.' It's just a different way of looking at things."

Do the kids get it? Do they understand it? Are they taking ownership of their learning with this? If the answer is yes, then you're doing it right.

The work hasn't been without its challenges. In particular, "There's no one right or wrong way to do it, there's no one right answer," says Combs. "When we write success criteria, it's going to look different depending on the content and grade level. But teachers want to know, 'Am I doing it right?' There's not a set way that you're going to do it. Do the kids get it? Do they understand it? Are they taking ownership of their learning with this? If the answer is yes, then you're doing it right. It doesn't necessarily have to look like it does for the person across the hall."

And now teachers have bought in. When Combs was a teacher at Metzler, the principal was constantly trying to get them to do pre- and post-tests as assessments, "but nobody was moving on it." Fast forward to today: Every semester, as a teacher starts a new impact cycle, integrating assessment into the work is a normal part of the process.





The same is true for the students, too. Each student from kindergarten on up have “success trackers” to let them know where they are, what they’re learning and what goals come next for them. Says Combs, “When I walk into a classroom, I’ve got these kids running up to me with these yellow folders saying, ‘Hey, look at where I am with my learning.’ Or ‘Can you test me on this because I’m ready to move forward.’”

Even the students who need that extra bit of encouragement to stay on track are part of the measuring. “We’ll meet with them and keep them pumped up and check to see what they’re learning to focus on that growth: How much growth can you make from where you are? Because we firmly believe that all kids can make at least one year’s growth. It doesn’t matter where they start from.” ■

How much growth can you  
make from where you are?



## 3 TIPS FOR GETTING BUY-IN

School improvement projects commonly hit barriers of reluctance from stakeholders. If you lack buy-in by everyone, insists Kathy Brown at Lemm Elementary, “you’re not going to be successful. People will nod their heads then walk into their rooms and do whatever they want.” Here are three ways to make sure everybody on the team eventually begins rowing in the same direction:

### 1 PROVIDE EXPOSURE TO THE IDEAS.

Brown acknowledges that it’s hard to send everybody to the same conference. But even if you can’t do that, she says, you can provide links to relevant YouTube videos or arrange to visit a “sister school” in the vicinity to see the change in action.

### 2 START SMALL AND BUILD ON SUCCESS.

Once Lakita Combs decided that Visible Learning offered an approach that made sense for her school, she took advantage of a nearby conference hosted by Corwin to introduce a group of teachers and specialists from her school to the concepts. From there they were off. Her advice: “Don’t bite off more than you can chew. Take it slow. Think and chart your path.”

### 3 HAVE THE COURAGE TO MOVE FORWARD WITHOUT 100% SUPPORT.

As Corwin’s Craig Hampton has seen, when a school or district embarks on a new direction that requires a lot of effort and change, buy-in eventually happens because teachers see success within the classrooms around them or at other schools.



# BOOKS TO SUPPORT YOUR VISIBLE LEARNING® JOURNEY

Find practical resources that distill the insights found in the Visible Learning research so that all teachers and school leaders can apply the strategies that have the greatest impact on student learning.

The Visible Learning® Official Collection includes books that are authored or co-authored by Professor John Hattie and explain and interpret the ever-growing body of Visible Learning research.

The Visible Learning® Supporting Resources focus on practices that have high effect sizes and will help you translate the Visible Learning research.



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