



The Instructional Framework for 21st-Century Educators



Instructional Framework Case Study

Executive Summary

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Introduction

From its inception, the Bainum Family Foundation has sought to help children and families thrive, often by supporting education. A case study of one of the foundation's long-running initiatives provides a look at how its approach to investing in and supporting school change unfolded, what was accomplished, and what learnings emerged that could be useful for leadership and staff moving forward.

These insights may be particularly relevant as the foundation shifts its work to meet its mission: to work alongside communities experiencing racial and economic disparities to create lasting systems of change for the well-being of children and families. This executive summary provides a distillation of the findings.

The Instructional Framework for 21st-Century Educators

The Bainum Family Foundation has long sought to strengthen schools, particularly Seventh-day Adventist schools, which the foundation's founders attended and attributed much of their success to. After years of partnering with Seventh-day Adventist schools, the foundation hired veteran educators from the Adventist school system to deepen its work. Together, foundation staff and educators identified a critical gap: a lack of student readiness for high school. Specifically, students were coming to high school unprepared in English/Language Arts and math from their feeder kindergarten through eighth-grade schools.

After speaking with a number of teachers and administrators, foundation staff came up with the concept of creating an English/Language Arts framework for kindergarten through ninth grade that would provide teachers with guidance to help students think critically and be on grade level for reading, and for teachers to meet the Common Core standards,¹ which came out in 2010. While many public schools had guidance and curricula that helped them to meet the Common Core expectations in English/Language Arts and math, Seventh-day Adventist schools did not.

What Is the Instructional Framework?

Much of what the Instructional Framework does is demystify for teachers what it actually means to teach the Common Core standards, particularly teaching multiple standards at once. It also sets out clear expectations for student learning in the belief that such expectations will help students become college or career prepared. While it focuses on a scope and sequence for teaching English/Language Arts literacy standards, it is designed to enhance classroom instruction and student achievement in all subjects.

The framework also includes a rubric that describes eight research-based practices for effective teaching, planning and assessment.

¹ The Common Core standards is a set of academic standards and expectations for what every student should be able to do at every grade level from kindergarten through 12th grade in language arts and math.



■ Testing, Piloting and Implementing the Instructional Framework for 21st-Century Educators

From the start, foundation staff created the framework in close consultation with teachers and administrators. They spoke to about 25 teachers and administrators one-on-one to learn about their needs in the classroom and school and whether a framework like the Instructional Framework would be useful to them. Foundation staff then hired former teachers to create units for each grade level and formed a project review team of teachers and administrators who provided regular input and feedback on the draft units over the course of three years, which the writers incorporated.

As foundation staff looked for a promising partner to pilot this project, G.E. Peters Adventist School, an Adventist kindergarten through eighth-grade school in nearby Hyattsville, Maryland, emerged as a good candidate. The Bainum Family Foundation had worked with the school previously, and the principal at G.E. Peters quickly expressed interest in piloting the framework at the school. The principal also promised to provide the support that teachers needed to participate in the pilot.

The purpose of the pilot was to test the framework, particularly to understand whether the framework and guidance were useful. A foundation staff member regularly traveled to the school to help teachers implement the framework and adjust it based on their feedback. Teachers provided feedback about what worked and what did not. Teachers said they were enthusiastic about the framework and appreciated the ability to provide feedback on it. At the same time, foundation staff struggled to maintain the involvement of the principal and achieve buy-in from the local Adventist conference, both of which they felt were important to the lasting success of the framework. Despite those early warning signs about the difficulty of embedding the Instructional Framework in Seventh-day Adventist schools, foundation staff felt strongly that they

had seen enough promising feedback that, when they happened to learn about another school that might be interested in using the framework, they began exploring a partnership with it.

That school — Creation Village World School (formerly Creation Kids Village) — was just getting established and had a number of conditions that made it seem more promising. It had started as an early childhood center and was just beginning to expand, with plans to add one grade a year through 12th grade. The school's leadership was eager for Creation Village World School to serve as a demonstration site that would attract educators from around the country, providing a potentially ideal opportunity to further spread the Instructional Framework to other schools. Another appeal of Creation Village World School for the Bainum Family Foundation was that it was backed by recognized members of the Seventh-day Adventist church, which could give the Instructional Framework needed credibility.

In 2017, the foundation reached an agreement with Creation Village World School (based in Celebration, Florida) to serve as a demonstration for the Instructional Framework. There, the engagement was focused on implementing the framework into ongoing practices — with the foundation staff focusing more on instructional best practices. They developed an accompanying rubric that foundation staff hoped would be the starting point for replicating the Instructional Framework in other Seventh-day Adventist schools across the country.

After five years of collaboration and with both organizations' strategies and priorities shifting, the foundation and Creation Village World School mutually decided to end their partnership in June 2022.

The completion of this partnership was timely because it occurred as the foundation was updating its programmatic strategy to increase its investments toward early childhood outcomes (i.e., early learning, mental health and well-being, health, family economic security and housing stability).

Additionally, with the foundation's revamped strategy came the priority of following the lead of its partner communities and organizations. Because partnering with the foundation around curriculum and instruction was not a priority across the Seventh-day Adventist education system, the foundation chose to end the Instructional Framework project. The foundation continues to support systems-level change in Seventh-day Adventist education by focusing on building the capacity of school and educational leaders.

Most important, the foundation had achieved a central goal for the project. The Instructional Framework for kindergarten through eighth grade was completely written, with more than 600 documents and a companion rubric. The framework is freely available online for teachers and administrators around the country who want to enhance their teaching and advance student achievement.

In all, the Bainum Family Foundation invested some 10 years in an ambitious initiative that leaders hoped would help Seventh-day Adventist schools across the country prepare their students for high school and beyond. The following findings and learnings are based on interviews with 23 individuals involved with the Instructional Framework, including foundation staff, teachers, principals, and Seventh-day Adventist educational leaders and consultants, as well as a review of documents.



■ What Has Continued at G.E. Peters and Creation Village World School?

Many teachers and administrators said they found the Instructional Framework useful and that it helped them do their job better. The teachers who piloted it and worked at the demonstration site said their involvement with the Instructional Framework has made them better teachers and administrators and that they continue to use it. Among the benefits they cited were:

- **Learning from a framework written, reviewed and tested by classroom teachers.** Too often, they said, other such frameworks seem to be created by publishing companies that have limited insight into the realities of a classroom.
- **Helping teachers become skilled at meeting Common Core standards.** Teachers may be expected to meet the Common Core standards without having the resources to actually do that. The Instructional Framework provides that guidance sequentially, with manageable learning targets and in an organized and user-friendly fashion, participating teachers noted.
- **Serving as a road map to help teachers reach their goals in implementing best practices.** The Instructional Framework helped participants understand how to apply critical teacher practices like reflection and backward planning. While both are expectations of teachers, many participating teachers said they did not fully understand how to do these practices until they'd participated in the Instructional Framework.
- **Helping teachers see how they can break free from textbook-driven instruction and have flexibility and resources to teach standards in ways that are better suited to their classroom.** The one-size-fits-all approach of textbooks can be limiting and may

not meet the needs of particular students. Teachers noted the Instructional Framework provides guidance on how teachers can meet standards while customizing their lessons for their students.

- **Making learning relevant and fun for students.** Teachers said the Instructional Framework, with its emphasis on real-world connections and providing resources for students with different interests and learning styles, consistently engaged their students in learning.
- **Creating routines for students, which increased their engagement in the classroom.** Teachers said that the Instructional Framework created needed routines for students. Many teachers said that consistency led to an increased engagement with the students, particularly those who struggled with paying attention in class.

■ Where Should the Instructional Framework Go From Here?

Across the board, teachers and administrators said that the Instructional Framework and/or the IF Rubric are great products that can help student teachers, new teachers and experienced teachers. The Instructional Framework and IF Rubric are backed by research and informed by teacher feedback every step of the way. Teachers suggested a variety of ways they could be used going forward. They include:

How to package the Instructional Framework

- **Make the entire Instructional Framework available online with some support.** Teachers had varying opinions about the amount of support the framework would need to be useful. Some said it could almost serve as a turnkey product for schools without the need for a coach. Other participants said it would be difficult for teachers to fully implement the Instructional Framework without guidance from a help desk or someone actively coaching them.
- **Promote the IF Rubric as a stand-alone resource.** The IF Rubric provides a helpful breakdown on what teachers should be doing, teachers noted, particularly in guiding their reflection on their teaching. Specific IF Rubric indicators can be learned and applied regardless of a school's curriculum. Teachers can use the IF Rubric as a benchmark for planning and implementing research- and standards-based instruction that promotes the 4Cs of 21st-Century Learning (Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration and Communication) and supports students with diverse abilities, interests and learning preferences. The IF Rubric can also serve as a tool to provide specific, targeted feedback through leader or peer observation or video-facilitated self-reflection.

Who to target with the Instructional Framework

- **Develop the Instructional Framework as a course for college students planning to go into teaching or as a resource for first-year teachers who would benefit from a step-by-step plan.**



- **Target new or experienced teachers who love finding new ways to teach and develop their craft.**
- **Focus on professional learning communities (PLCs) as a locus for sharing the Instructional Framework, and help teachers get continuing education units (CEU) for implementing it.** Teachers listen to other teachers. In the Seventh-day Adventist system, PLCs could meet either at individual schools or across schools at the conference level.

How to promote the Instructional Framework

- **Hire the teachers who helped develop and implement the framework to promote it to other teachers.** They are contagiously enthusiastic about the framework and can speak to other teachers and administrators about how it has helped them in their classroom and how it benefits children.
- **Tell school administrators about the benefits of the Instructional Framework.** The Instructional Framework could help administrators clearly communicate to staff that the school takes teaching seriously and teachers need to be accountable for what they are presenting in the classroom. The foundation can explain how this can be useful for schools by providing a strong platform for teachers across grades.
- **Position the Instructional Framework as a way for teachers across grade levels to collaborate on students' progress in areas such as reading and meeting standards.** The framework could facilitate more cohesiveness and better communication among teachers across grades to ensure they are reaching their educational goals for students.
- **Pitch the framework as a complement to or even replacement of existing curricula.** Teachers are often unhappy with the curriculum they are using because they see it is

limited and takes too much of a lockstep approach that does not meet the needs of their varied students. Teachers know they want something like the Instructional Framework but are unaware that it exists.

■ Learnings From Participants

- **Foundation leaders said they did not listen enough to the needs of the teachers and administrators at the schools they were working with and supporting.** On reflection, foundation staff could have taken more time to understand what motivated all the different parties involved — teachers, administrators, the conferences and unions, and the North American Division — and what they needed.
- **The foundation should have been more persistent in getting buy-in from leadership at the different levels of the Seventh-day Adventist education system prior to launching the Instructional Framework pilot and demonstration.** It can be frustrating to work with any large system because of the slow pace of adoption or change. But working with educational leaders across the Seventh-day Adventist education system is the best opportunity to get universal buy-in for the Instructional Framework across the North American Division. If the foundation had slowed down and been more persistent in co-creation, the efforts may have been more successful.
- **Historically, the foundation has tended to take a community-informed approach to problem solving based on identified needs.** While well-intentioned and grounded in research, this approach did not support co-creating and creating solutions with administrators and teachers who were most impacted.
- **An understanding of what the Bainum Family Foundation is, its values and what it is trying to accomplish could have given teachers in particular a helpful context for the Instructional Framework before they were thrown into the details of implementing it.** Ensuring teachers understood that the foundation was there to help them grow and coach them would have relieved the feeling of being observed that they experienced during lesson-planning sessions and recorded lessons.
- **Given the continued obstacles, foundation staff wondered whether there were times they should have paused to reflect on the initiative and to consider ending it rather than pushing through.** Throughout the Instructional Framework initiative, there were a few times when the foundation might have paused and considered ending the work. One was after the pilot at G.E. Peters, and others were during downturns at the Creation Village World Village demonstration, particularly when the Instructional Framework Coordinator was no longer working full time on the framework although the foundation understood that she would be.

A core value of the foundation is to discern when to stay the course and when not to. The experience with the Instructional Framework revealed the need for the foundation to take time along the way of an initiative to stop and reflect. How to ensure that happens is an important focus going forward.



■ How the Foundation's Work With the Instructional Framework Connected (or Did Not) to Its Mission

- **The Instructional Framework helped advance equity in the schools it supported.** The author and coach of the framework intentionally developed a framework with equity and cultural responsiveness in mind. Teachers said that the framework gave them practical resources and materials, which they had not had before, to make sure their teaching included culturally relevant pedagogy and real-world connections. Teachers added that their students of color saw themselves and their lives reflected in the materials presented to them.
- **Creating community engagement.** Teachers at G.E. Peters, the pilot school, said they felt engaged because they were co-creating the Instructional Framework and felt as though they were part of something that would help not only them but other teachers as well. Teachers at Creation Village World School felt less engaged, at least initially, because they often felt as though they had to participate and that their voices and opinions were not always valued.
- **Building relationships that are trusted, authentic and collaborative with the people and organizations the foundation collaborates with.** Teachers at G.E. Peters felt positive about their relationships with the foundation largely because they felt that they had a role in creating the framework and that the foundation contact who came to the school was there to help them. What did not go as well were the relationships at Creation Village World School. The foundation was impatient with the competing priorities that the Creation Village World School administrators and teachers had to juggle, and the foundation's expectations for the principals who were in charge of all aspects of the school were unrealistic.

- **Providing equitable compensation for partners.** Whether the teachers and schools involved in the pilot and demonstration were appropriately compensated for the contributions they were providing is a question the foundation must examine. Teachers did not receive financial compensation for the time and brainpower they invested in the Instructional Framework project. Teachers at G.E. Peters received hours that could be applied to their CEU requirements for teacher recertification, and Creation Village World School teachers received three college course units. An important question is whether the foundation should have valued the teachers' contributions in another way for the additional work they were expected to do to pilot and implement the Instructional Framework.

While G.E. Peters was provided \$15,000 a year to cover substitute teachers, it also received additional resources through other partnership engagements with the foundation. This included literacy and curriculum materials, and on-site personnel who supported students through tutoring and teachers as a literacy specialist over multiple years. Creation Village World School received \$1.5 million to support expanding its facilities to serve as a demonstration site for the Instructional Framework as well as multiyear funding to establish an on-site Instructional Framework Coordinator position. But now that the foundation understands the realities of what went into piloting the framework and preparing a school to be a demonstration site, it must examine whether the resources provided to the schools were equitable.

Conclusion

The Bainum Family Foundation's investment in the Instructional Framework for 21st-Century Educators helped teachers engage their students in class and learn how to meet multiple Common Core standards. Participants uniformly said that the foundation should make the framework broadly available. So far, the framework has not made the wider impact that the foundation had hoped for, though plans are still evolving to market it.

Some of the takeaways from this 10-year initiative may seem simple but are nonetheless worth noting. Foundation leaders said they need to listen more to the needs of the people they are trying to assist and bring those people in earlier, not just to provide feedback on a plan that is already hatched but to help craft the plan itself. If the foundation wants to change a system — in this case, the Seventh-day Adventist educational system — leadership will need to find a way to work with that system. Teachers and anyone else responsible for implementing a project will be much more enthusiastic and willing to work on it if they feel they have real input and that the multiple demands placed on them are appropriately acknowledged by foundation staff and adequately compensated.