



Learning Site Toolkit



Introduction What is a Learning Site? How is this different? Toolkit orientation

Stages of a Learning Site

- Stage 1: PREPARATION**
choosing topic; prepping host teacher; driver diagram
- Stage 2: PEER OBSERVATION**
mindsets; pre-observation; fishbone; observation norms
- Stage 3: DEBRIEF**
pre-debrief; excavating questions; debrief protocol
- Stage 4: TAKING ACTION**
change idea; final artifact; virtual follow-up sessions

Additional Resources feedback; logistics; FAQ; links; example

Contact: telescope@bostonpublicschools.org

Website: bostonpublicschools.org/telescope

Summit Resources: tinyurl.com/telescopecarnegie24

📅 2024.03 Telescope @ Carnegie Presentation

📄 2024.03 Telescope @ Carnegie Handout

INTRODUCTION

What is the Telescope Network?

The Telescope Network was founded in Boston Public Schools in 2018 to elevate teacher voice in district level decision-making and to empower Boston educators to drive their own professional learning. The Telescope Network is a partnership between the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) and Boston Public Schools (BPS) and is part of the Office of Educator Development & Leadership (OEDL).

Our Mission

The Telescope Network's mission is to create opportunities for Boston Public School educators to collaborate across the district. We improve learning experiences for all our students when we connect with peers, share our authentic challenges, and learn from each other. To do this work:

- We ASK educators across the district what they want and need to learn next in order to best serve the needs of their students;
- We MAGNIFY effective practices by creating opportunities for effective and reflective educators to share their expertise with their peers; and
- We CONNECT educators to resources, professional learning opportunities, and each other based on their needs and interests.



Additional info: [About Telescope Network](#)

What is a Learning Site?

In a Learning Site, educators come together for an extended peer observation in a live classroom around a common area of practice. Afterwards, participants debrief with the host teacher and set goals for their own classrooms. Participants continue the learning and implement changes in their practice through virtual follow-up sessions. Participants who complete the process earn PD hours and an in-district graduate credit.



How does the Learning Site align with our mission?

- ASK: Learning Site topics are based on real educators' authentic challenges.
- MAGNIFY: Learning Sites elevate effective educators and excavate effective practices.
- CONNECT: Learning Sites create ad-hoc communities that support changes in practice.



How is a Learning Site different from other types of PD?

At the start of each Learning Site, we share the design elements that make a Learning Site different from other professional development experiences:

- 1 **Teachers in the driver's seat.** Our topic was chosen by teachers based on a needs assessment. Host teacher is a "humble expert."
- 2 **Participants in the passenger seat.** This is a "ride-with" and not a "walk-through." We'll learn about the host teacher's context, then observe a lesson, and then meet with the host for a debrief conversation.
- 3 **Students riding along with us.** These students are experts on teaching and learning. They are ready to share what's going on in their classroom. We want the learning to be done *with* students and not *to* students.
- 4 **This is not about the worksheets.** We're not here to copy the host teacher's materials or moves. Instead, focus on the invisible *why* and *how* decisions that motivate those choices. How might these apply to your own context?
- 5 **This is about equity.** We hope you leave with a greater appreciation of what it's like to teach and learn at this school. As a district, we can begin to address gaps in opportunity and resources when we can look beyond our silos, make connections, and see *all* BPS students as *our* students..

Additional info: [2024.03 LS Basics](#)
Video: [What is a Learning Site?](#) (4:30)



How is this toolkit organized?

We've organized this toolkit based on the different stages of a Learning Site:

- **[Stage 1 Preparation](#):** Choosing a topic; choosing a team; vetting host teacher; prepping host teacher & students; articulating change ideas with a driver diagram.
- **[Stage 2 Peer Observation](#):** Setting expectations; pre-observation session; peer observation norms and mindsets.
- **[Stage 3 Debrief](#):** Pre-debrief; constructing excavating questions; debrief protocol.
- **[Stage 4 Taking Action](#):** Creating a change idea; final artifact; virtual follow-up coaching sessions.
- **[Additional Resources & FAQ](#):** Feedback; Logistics; FAQ; Links, Example

Additional info: tinyurl.com/telescopecarnegie24



What roles are involved in a Learning Site?

Host Teacher



- Host teachers is a “humble expert”: ready to share their work with colleagues across the district, and open to feedback
- The host teacher’s job is to open their classroom for peer observation and to reflect on their practice during the debrief

Participants



- Participants sign up to join the Learning Site and commit to attending 3 x 1hr virtual follow-up sessions
- During the virtual sessions, participants create an artifact to showcase their changes in practice

Networker



- Networker helps to lead the planning and promotion for this session, helping to choose the topic and prep the host teacher
- Networker also facilitates (or co-facilitates) the peer observation and virtual follow-up sessions

Other Roles

- **Learning Site Facilitator:** We sometimes recruit an on-site colleague (often an instructional coach or co-teacher) to help lead the debrief segment of the Learning Site.
- **Virtual Facilitator:** We sometimes recruit a host teacher or fellow participant to help lead the virtual follow-up sessions.
- **District Collaborators:** We often organize a Learning Site in collaboration with central office colleagues as co-planners.
- **School Leader:** We always connect with the school leader before the session to clarify the Learning Site process, iron out the schedule for the day, and invite them to join for part of the session.

Additional info: [LS Roles](#)

Examples



LITERACY IN K1 Learning Site

(2023)

Additional info: [Literacy in K1 LS Example](#)



PRODUCTIVE STRUGGLE Learning Site

(2022 & 2023)

Additional info: [Productive Struggle in Math LS Example](#)
Video: [Learning Site Impact](#) (5:30)

Stage 1: PREPARATION

Choosing a topic; choosing a team; vetting host teacher; prepping host teacher & students; articulating change ideas with a driver diagram.

What goes on at this stage?

Host Teacher



- Host teacher has an initial meeting/observation with networker
- Work with the networker to develop a driver diagram

Participants



- Complete the Telescope needs assessment survey
- Sign up to join the Learning Site and commit to attending follow-up virtual sessions

Networker



- Work with the planning team to select a topic and host teacher
- Preview visit to vet host teacher and discuss expectations
- Additional visit with host teacher to draft driver diagram and prepare the students for the visit
- Other Learning site logistics and promotion as needed

How do we choose a topic?

We select topics that represent educator's **authentic contextualized needs**. A great Learning Site topic . . .

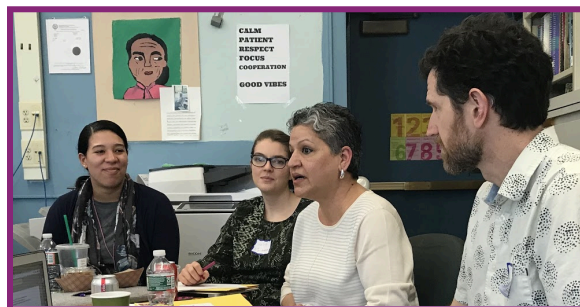
- Aligns with our [needs assessment responses](#).
- Aligns with district/state priorities.
- Comes from educator voice: it is a felt need in the classroom.

Additional info: [Choosing Topic & Team](#)

How do we select a host teacher?

We seek **effective** & **reflective** host teachers.

- Host teachers are recommended by a colleague (admin, peer, other district folks). We gather recommendations through our needs assessment surveys, school visits, 1-1 conversations, exit tickets, and from [other sources](#).
- Host teacher should be a “humble expert”: ready to share their work with colleagues from across the district, and open to feedback and growth.
- We want host teachers who reflect the diversity of our students and our district.
- Ultimately, we ask, “Could other educators benefit from observing & debriefing with this educator?”



Additional info: [Selecting Host Teacher & Site](#)

How do we prepare a host teacher and class?

Before we bring a large group to observe, we'll set up a 1-1 observation and practice debrief with the host teacher to verify that they are ready to host. We also want to make sure that students are aware of the plan and invite them to share their voice and their questions about the process. Occasionally, we include student representatives in our debrief conversation as well.

Additional info: [Prep Host Teacher & Class](#)

How do we construct a driver diagram for the Learning Site?

After an initial observation, we create a draft driver diagram with the input from the host teacher. We use this to demonstrate how their classroom practices align with the Learning Site topic. We also use the driver diagram during our sessions to organize our observation lenses and our menu of change ideas.

Additional info: [Driver Diagram Template & Examples](#)

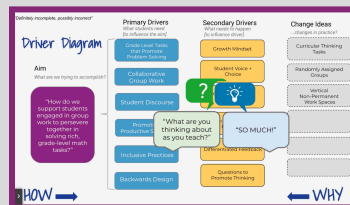
Examples



Host Teacher Profile:

NIA REID-PATTERSON

Additional info: [Reid-Patterson Host Example](#)



COLLABORATIVE PROB SOLVING

Driver Diagram Prep
(2023)

Video: [Driver Diagram Screencast](#) (3 min)

Stage 2: PEER OBSERVATION

Setting expectations; pre-observation session; fishbone diagram; peer observation norms & mindsets

What goes on at this stage?

Host
Teacher



- Join the pre-session to meet participants and preview the lesson.
- Share lesson plans/materials at pre-session
- Teach their lesson

Participants



- Get admin permission/coverage before attending
- Join pre-session to develop fishbone diagram and preview the visit
- Attend peer observation

Networker



- Facilitate pre-session
- Logistics/event management
- Hosting/facilitating peer observation

What happens during a Learning Site pre-session?

We typically gather with participants and host teachers for a 1-hour virtual pre-session the night before the Learning Site. During the pre-session, we . . .

- Create opportunities for participants to build community with each other and share their connection to the topic.
- Create a shared doc to articulate our collective understanding of the Learning Site topic and its underlying challenges.
- Meet the host teacher and get an introduction to their classroom context, their students, and the next day's lesson plans.
- Introduce the driver diagram as a way to visualize our collective understanding of the topic and preview some of the change ideas that we're likely to see during the peer observation.
- Review logistics for the next day (arrival time, agenda, parking, transportation, food)

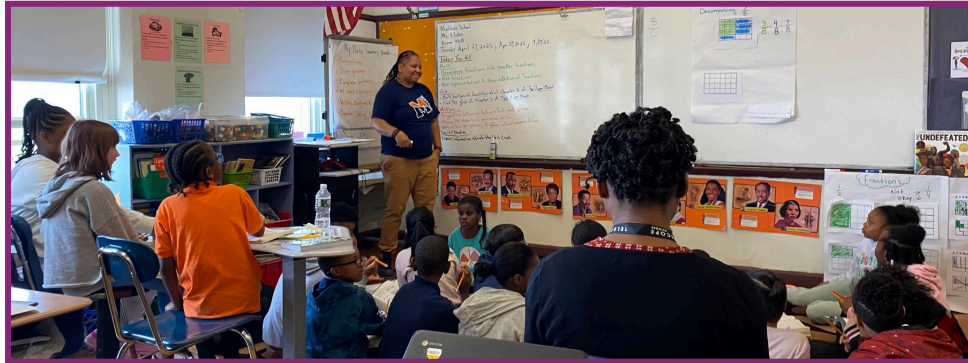


What are our peer observation mindsets?

Before the peer observation (usually during the virtual pre-session), we review these mindsets with participants.

- **Be curious:** We're not here to evaluate the presenter or their schools. Instead, try to be curious, ask good questions, and bring learning back to our own classrooms/schools.
- **Be open minded:** It is human nature to play the comparison game. Instead of thinking, "This would never work for me," try to reframe it as, "This might work in my setting if ..."
- **Be a collaborator:** We all serve Boston students. Sharing ideas and resources with colleagues helps us to desilo and improve learning across our district.

Additional info: [LS Basics](#)

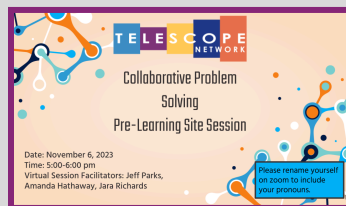


What happens during the peer observation?

The Learning Site includes an extended peer observation (typically 40-60 minutes in the host teacher's classroom). In most cases, this gives us time to see the beginning, middle, and end of a lesson. Before we enter the classroom, each participant chooses a "lens" to focus on--these are based on the secondary drivers from the driver diagram. We ask participants to put away technology and transition from "teacher mode" to "observer mode" before we enter the host classroom.

Additional info: [Peer Obs Notes](#)

Examples



COLLABORATIVE PROB SOLVING Pre-Session Agenda (2023)

Additional info: [Collab Prob Solv LS Pre-Session](#)



COLLABORATIVE PROB SOLVING Learning Site Agenda (2023)

Additional info: [Collab Prob Solv LS Agenda](#)

Stage 3: DEBRIEF

Pre-debrief; constructing excavating questions; debrief protocol

What goes on at this stage?

Host Teacher



- Stay out of the room during the pre-debrief
- Sit in the "hot seat" during the debrief conversation

Participants



- Work with their partners to sort their observation evidence
- Craft an excavating question for the host teacher
- Present their evidence and excavating question during the debrief
- Share a thank you note of appreciation with host teacher/class

Networker

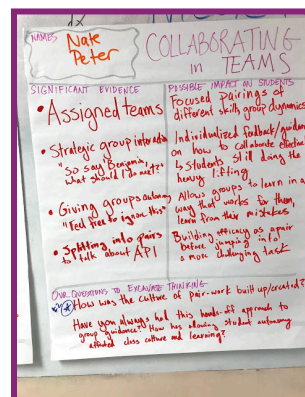
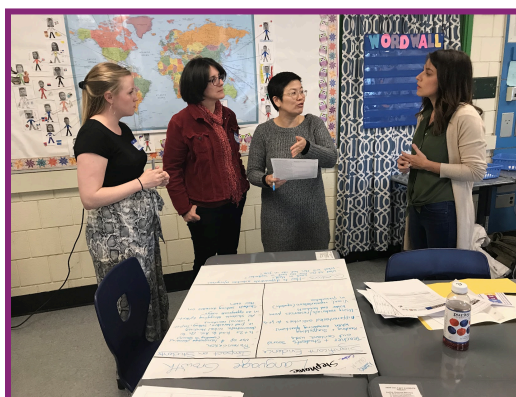


- Facilitate the pre-debrief
- Arrange a playlist of excavating questions for the debrief
- Facilitate the debrief protocol

What happens during the pre-debrief session?

During the pre-debrief, participants take time to reflect on what they saw in the classroom, sort through their evidence, and develop an excavating question for the host teacher.

First, we give participants time to reflect on their own, then time to talk with their small group, and then ask them to synthesize their reflections on chart paper.



Additional info: [Pre-Debrief](#)

What is an excavating question?

An essential element of the pre-debrief is that each group of participants creates an excavating question. These are questions designed to help the host teacher get at the "hows" and "whys" behind their practice. Facilitators coach groups to focus on "Why did you..." instead of "Why didn't you..." questions.

Excavating Question Stems

- What exactly are you doing when you... ?
- What are you thinking about when you...? What's going on in your head?
- How else have you done this before? What made you change your approach?
- Why do you do that? Why does that work?



What happens during the debrief conversation?



Framing the conversation. We preview the conversation and protocol



Microanalysis of teaching. Observers present their evidence and excavating questions



Student impact. Host explains how these practices impact student learning



Alternate perspective question. Host considers other perspectives and contexts



Theory generating question. Host identifies key elements of their practice



Closing. We thank the host teacher and draft our own change ideas

Additional info: [Debrief Protocol](#)

Additional info: [ECTN](#)



Examples



COLLABORATIVE PROB SOLVING

Debrief Conversation (2023)

Video: [Learning Site Debrief](#) (3:20)

Additional info: [Collab Prob Solv Debrief Notes](#)



EFFECTIVE TEAMING Learning Site

(2022 & 2023)

Additional info: [Effective Teaming LS Profile](#)

Stage 4: TAKING ACTION

Creating a change idea; artifact template; virtual follow-up sessions; final artifact

What goes on at this stage?

Host
Teacher



- Welcome to join this or return to their class
- Welcome to join the virtual follow-up sessions or not

Participants



- Select and refine a change idea based on observation & debrief
- Implement small changes to practice and document their impact
- Attend 3 virtual follow-up sessions during the weeks after the site
- Complete a final artifact presentation to document their learning

Networker



- Create artifact templates for each participant
- Facilitate the closing of the Learning Site day
- Facilitate the virtual follow-up sessions
- Add final artifacts to the resource library

How do we close the loop after the peer observation?

After the peer observation and debrief, we reflect on the peer obs and debrief. We ask, “How has your thinking changed as a result of this session?” and then go around the circle to hear from all participants. The host teacher is invited to stay for this part of the session, as it is a chance for the host to hear how their work has impacted the observers.

Additional info: [Reflections & Next Steps](#)

How do we create and refine our change ideas?

Before participants leave for the day, we ask them to identify a change idea. This is a small tweak that they can test drive 2 or 3 times in the next couple of weeks. When participants want to focus on overhauling everything next September, we ask, “What is one part of the overhaul that you could test drive right now?”

In pairs or small groups, participants share and refine change ideas and think about data measures. To facilitate this process, we provide participants with a “data menu” that suggests a few data examples.

During this part of the session, we give each participant a copy of our [final artifact template](#). Participants use this slideshow to document their PDSA cycles throughout the virtual follow-up sessions and reflect on their final learnings.

Earlier this year, we tweaked the format of the artifact template. We made the process more user-friendly by keeping all of the work in one document. Since making this change, we have seen a significant increase in the rate of artifact completion.

My Change Idea:

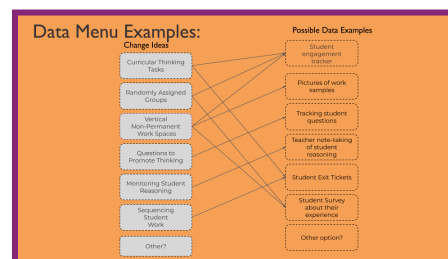
What small, specific change from the driver diagram will you try out in your practice this week?

Please answer the following questions to think through a “Change Idea”

What’s the idea:

When will you implement:

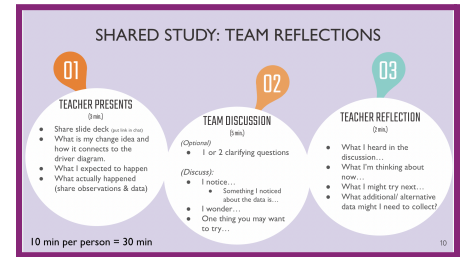
How will you implement:



Additional info: [Final Artifact Template](#)

What happens during the virtual follow-up sessions?

Over the following 6 weeks, participants come together three times for 1-hour virtual follow-up sessions. Each session is the same: Participants break into small groups and use a shared reflection protocol. Each participant shares their change idea, what they expected to happen, what actually happened, and shares their data. The other members of the group provide feedback and then participants decide how to adjust their change idea before the next session. Participants repeat this cycle three times, each time adding to a final artifact slide deck so they can keep track of their progress.



"I've been loving these virtual sessions, especially when we get into small groups to discuss. It has felt very comfortable and nonjudgmental."

- Learning Site Participant, 2023

How does a Learning Site end?

The final stage of the learning site is for participants to reflect upon and synthesize their learning. These final reflection questions are included as part of the final artifact template. These questions are meant to help participants summarize their learning journey: What was the challenge? What did you try? What are the key ingredients? What do you want to try next? This final reflection can be shared with colleagues, submitted as an end-of-year artifact, or can be shared at a future Telescope Network session.

Key Ingredients:
What made this change idea work?

#1 I was very manageable. I was already doing whiteboard work and wanted to improve the routines so students were working better in their groups and being more productive in them. Each change to the routines I made was small and easily implemented, but had a meaningful effect.

#2 I was motivated to implement each change quickly due the weekly virtual session follow ups.

#3 Students already really enjoyed working at the whiteboards, so I had the buy in of students excitement to be there and that leverage made it easier for me to make these needed adjustments to make them more effective for learning

Additional info: [Final Artifact Rubric](#)

Examples



COLLAB PROB SOLVING Learning Site (2023)

Additional info: [Collab Prob Solv LS Example](#)
Additional info: [Participant Final Artifact](#)



Participant Profile: CHRISTINE YANCEY

Additional info: [Yancey Participant Example](#)

TELESCOPE NETWORK ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Frequently Asked Questions

Are Learning Sites effective?

For 2022-23, we hosted 20 Learning Sites with 327 participants. We had 73 participants complete and submit a final artifact.

What Participants Say

- **98%** of participants would recommend this session to a colleague, based on exit ticket responses.
- Teacher: *"I really appreciate how y'all gather information FROM educators to customize PD experiences FOR us."*
- Teacher: *"I always leave a telescope PD feeling so happy because I got to engage in learning new things and meeting new people. I really love it."*



What Central Office & School Leaders Say

- School Leader: *"Telescope Network stands out because it supports cross pollination for teachers. Continuing to push and create these opportunities for teachers is really important."*
- Central Office: *"How wonderful to have a structured space for educators to share their expertise, collaborate and reflect."*
- Central office: *"Telescope is everything PD should be: teacher-centered, relationship-centered, focused on building the capacity of folks to do the on-the-ground work of supporting our young people in their learning. There's space for joy, for vulnerability, for asking hard questions and working collaboratively to move closer to answers to those questions."*

What Researchers Say

- During 2022-23, the Telescope Network partnered with Dr. Ariel Tichnor-Wagner and her research team from Wheelock Educational Policy Center at Boston University to investigate the impact of the Learning Site and Learning Cohort models. After observing 6 Learning Sites/Cohorts with follow-up sessions and interviewing 40+ participants and leaders of these sessions, they found that the "collective Learning Site and Cohort offerings have created spaces that both honor problems of practice that educators face and advance district and school priorities."
- As one participating educator noted in the report, "[This learning site] is honestly the first time it's been a truly teacher-led PD. It wasn't dictated to us like, 'This is what you're doing and how you're doing it.' There was a lot of space for feedback, and it was very clear that the feedback we were providing at the end of each session was being read, acknowledged, and used to improve future sessions, which isn't usually what happens." (p. 15). Read the [full report](#) or [summary presentation](#).



How much does this cost?

This work was initially funded in 2018 by a grant from the Nellie Mae foundation to increase educator voice in district-level decision making. At that time, we hired 2 half-time networkers (Alison and Mark) to build the program. Since then, Boston has expanded its support for this work in several ways:

- **Networkers.** We currently employ a team of 10 networkers, most of whom spend 3 days a week working with Telescope Network and 2 days a week in a school-based role (coach, instructional support).
- **Stipends.** Host teachers typically earn a \$500 stipend for the additional planning and presentation time.
- **Sub funding.** We cover the cost of hiring a sub for participants while they attend a Learning Site.
- **Food.** An important part of the Learning Site model is to treat teachers like professionals, which includes feeding them a brunch or lunch as part of our session.

What else is required to make this model work?

Beyond the financial investment, some key elements that have helped this work in Boston

- **Mindset shifts:** This model requires that a district/school has a growth mindset for adult learners. It also requires that we are willing to trust teachers to voice their needs and navigate implementation of their change ideas.
- **Diverse PD offerings:** We love Learning Sites and also know that we need other models of PD in our district. We sometimes frame the traditional PD as a “level 101” option and offer a Learning Site as a “level 201” option.
- **Collaboration over competition:** Our most successful learning sites are designed in collaboration with other central office departments. We want to desilo district schools and classrooms and also desilo central office departments. For example, In our Collaborative Problem Solving Learning Site, the district math department helped to construct the topic and driver diagram, helped to select and vet the host teacher, and also attended the session to hear how teachers are wrestling with the new curriculum.

How do you handle logistics, promotion, and other details?

These resources give a more detailed explanation of how we plan and promote a Learning Site. If you're interested in learning more, please contact us at telescope@bostonpublicschools.org.

- [Planning 1: Topic & Team](#)
- [Planning 2: Select Host Teacher & Site](#)
- [Planning 3: Prep Host & Class](#)
- [LS Promo/Logistics Checklist](#)
- [LS Roles & Checklist](#)
- [LS Facilitator Agenda](#)
- [Flyer](#) (example)
- [Exit Ticket](#) (template)

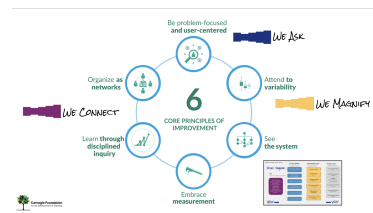
Where did Learning Sites come from?

Our work on Learning Sites has greatly benefited from many foundational sources. Throughout this toolkit, you'll see the influence of PDSA cycles, fishbone diagrams, driver diagrams and other aspects of improvement science. Additionally, we want to acknowledge the direct support of Julie Sloan and Brianna Wilson and our colleagues at Boston Teacher Residency (BTR) and their [Early Career Teacher Network](#) (ECTN). Learning Sites were piloted in Boston through BTR. The Telescope Network team has worked to bring their model to a larger scale and wider audience.



How does this work align with improvement science?

Improvement science appears at different stages in the Learning Site process. We use driver diagrams to help during our pre-session and virtual follow-up sessions. We also organize the virtual follow-up sessions around the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle--asking participants to make a plan, execute it, collect data, get feedback, and ultimately decide whether to adapt, adopt, or abandon their plan. Finally, our team routinely tests our own change ideas to improve the Learning Site process. For example, this spring, we tweaked the final artifact to increase completion rates.



What else does the Telescope Network do?

In addition to Learning Sites, we focus on conducting a needs assessment for educators across the district, planning [other models of professional learning](#), and creating formal and informal opportunities for BPS educators to connect and collaborate with peers.

How can others support this work?

We encourage you to use these materials to bring Learning Sites (or some aspects of Learning Sites) to your own schools and districts. If you use these resources, please reach out and let us know how it goes.

We also are interested in collaborating/consulting with others about this work. Let's talk!

Links/Resources

About Telescope Network

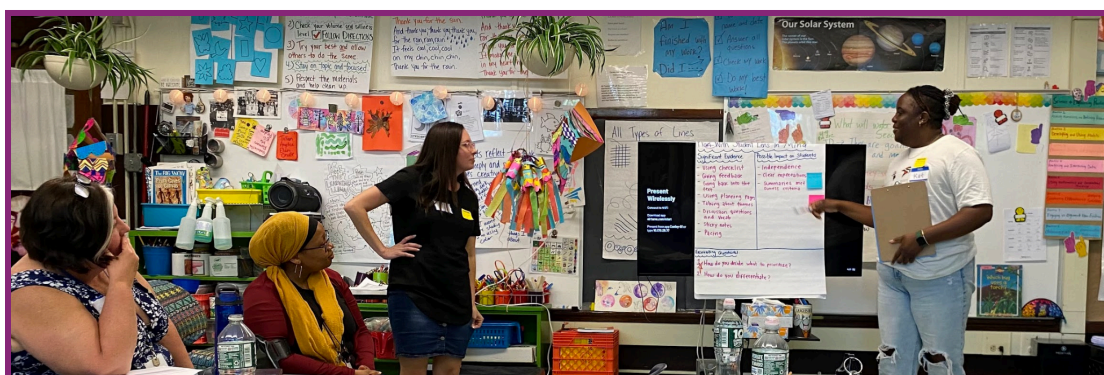
- [Brochure](#) (2024)
- [Telescope Annual Report](#) (2023)
- [Telescope Website](#) (2024)
- [Telescope Events Menu \(2023-24\)](#) (summaries of our programs)
- [Fall 2023 Needs Assessment Report](#) (2023)
- [WEPC/Boston University Research Report](#) (2023)
- [Models of Professional Learning](#) (2022)
- [Theory of Change](#) (2022)
- [Carnegie Summit Resources Page](#) (2024)

Learning Site Handouts

- [Sample Packet/Agenda](#) (2023)
- [LS Basics](#) (2024)
- [Peer Observation Notes](#) (2024)
- [Pre-Debrief](#) (2024)
- [Debrief Protocol](#) (2024)
- [Reflections/Closing the Loop](#) (2024)
- [Thank you cards](#) (2024)
- [Final Artifact Template](#) (2024)

Videos

- [What is a Learning Site?](#) (4:30)
- [Learning Site Impact](#) (5:30)
- [Debrief Example](#) (3:20)
- [How we develop a driver diagram](#) (3:10)
- Carnegie Summit 2024 Recordings
 - [Learning Site Toolkit Presentation Part 1](#) (14:30)
 - [Learning Site Toolkit Presentation Part 2](#) (12:30)
 - [Learning Site Toolkit Presentation Part 3](#) (15:30)



Contact: telescope@bostonpublicschools.org

Website: bostonpublicschools.org/telescope

COLLAB PROB SOLVING Learning Site Example

Stage 1:

PREPARATION



Choosing Topic & Host Teacher

[Choosing Topic & Team](#)

[Selecting Host Teacher & Site](#)



Driver Diagram Prep

[Driver Diagram Screencast](#) (3 min)

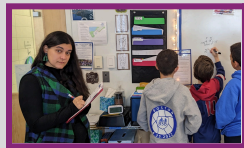
Stage 2:

PEER OBSERVATION



Pre-Session Agenda

[Collab Prob Solv LS Pre-Session](#)

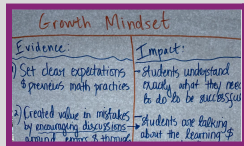


Learning Site Agenda

[Collab Prob Solv LS Agenda](#)

Stage 3:

DEBRIEF



Pre-Debrief Conversation

[Collab Prob Solv Debrief Notes](#)

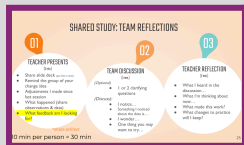


Debrief Conversation

[Learning Site Debrief](#) (3:20)

Stage 4:

TAKING ACTION



Virtual Follow-Up Sessions

[Virtual Sessions Slideshow](#)



Participant Artifact Example

[Sample Participant Artifact](#)

Additional Info: [Collab Prob Solv LS Event Summary](#)