

Supporting Diverse Learners: A Whole-School Approach

OVERVIEW

B'Yadenu—Hebrew for “in our hands”—is a whole-school approach to planning and implementing professional development with the aim of embedding effective, sustainable, and adaptable practices that, together, make Jewish day school education more accessible to diverse learners. In so doing, schools will elevate the quality of education for all students.

B'Yadenu is, at base, a strategic planning process which has been organized into 12 distinct “Building Blocks.” Spread across four phases—**Initiate**, **Assess**, **Plan**, and **Implement/Refine**—the process leads educators to:

- ✓ **Pinpoint areas for growth** in a school’s educational program, using the needs of diverse learners as the lens through which to assess and enhance current practice;
- ✓ **Set goals** that encourage an entire school faculty to improve together;
- ✓ **Implement professional development** that effectively boosts staff capacity to achieve these goals; and, finally,
- ✓ **Embed a system of measuring impact** and refining professional development so that schools will realize the ultimate goal of enabling all learners to be successful in classrooms and beyond.

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

At the end of the 12-Building-Block cycle, which typically takes about one year to complete, school leaders and faculty can expect to:

- ✓ Develop a cohesive school-wide approach to address the learning needs of all students and, in so doing, coordinate and integrate the many initiatives the school may already have in place;
- ✓ Embed new pedagogical strategies in teachers’ daily practice, together with a routine of consistent reflection by teachers on the impact these strategies are having on meeting the diverse learning needs of all students and, in particular, of the least confident learners; and
- ✓ Increase retention of students with special learning needs and generate higher satisfaction among parents of students with special learning needs.

SUPPORTED BY

THE B'YADENU PROCESS

Schools undertaking the B'Yadenu Project will engage in the following:

- ❖ **Form a Project Leadership Team** – Empowered by school leadership, this group of 6 – 10 individuals (including administrators, teachers, specialists and others) will manage and drive the B'Yadenu process throughout the 12 Building Blocks. (**Building Block 1**)
- ❖ **Schedule Periodic Leadership Team Sessions** – Several of the 12 Building Blocks entail team sessions (suggested 90 minutes each), and, to ensure the integrity and efficacy of the B'Yadenu planning process, these meetings should take place every 3 – 6 weeks. (See the diagram on p. 4 for an approximate timetable of the process, including when team sessions should occur.)
- ❖ **Communicate Effectively To School Community** – Because B'Yadenu prompts a whole-school approach to managing change, all stakeholders in the school (teachers, parents, students, board members, etc.) must understand and buy into the process throughout. (**Building Block 2** and **Building Block 3**)
- ❖ **Conduct an Honest Self-Assessment** – For a school to meaningfully determine its areas for growth, the project team must observe and reflect upon a broad range of current needs and practices (using the tools provided in **Building Block 4** and **Building Block 5**). Such an analysis should draw upon insights and information provided by both team members and others throughout the school.
- ❖ **Align Professional Development to Specific Goals** – Once areas of growth are identified, the team will establish goals as to exactly how the school *can* improve and, in turn, how specific professional development activities can enable educators to strengthen their instructional practices such that students become more effective learners. (**Building Block 6** and **Building Block 7**)
- ❖ **Implement Intensive Professional Development** – The core purpose of B'Yadenu is to put in place the professional development (PD) activities that will drive real change in educator practice (and, in turn, the student learning experience). Therefore, the school must commit both the financial and human resources required to make sure that the PD activities will generate the intended effects. (**Building Block 9**)¹
- ❖ **Implement Effective Impact Measurement** – School leaders will only be able to gauge whether the PD activities have been effective if the school puts in place a robust system of

¹ Because B'Yadenu is a process, rather than a fixed curriculum, *each school's professional development plan will be unique*. Still, experience teaches that the activities and learning identified through B'Yadenu planning leads educators to focus professional development in one of three categories: (a) Strengthening instruction; (b) Addressing social regulation/social- emotional challenges; or (c) Fostering a culture of inclusion.

measuring changes in educator practice and student learning over time. (**Building Block 8** and **Building Block 10**)

- ❖ **Launch a Cycle of Continuous Improvement** – Although the B'Yadenu Project has been organized into 12 chronological steps, the final two Building Blocks do not actually represent a conclusion. More accurately, **Building Block 11** fixes a protocol for *continually* analyzing impact data and fine-tuning activities to optimize professional development. **Building Block 12** returns the project team to early stages of the process to re-conduct an assessment of current practice to identify areas for growth, re-establish growth goals, and re-set professional development to enable the attainment of these goals, all while continuing to measure progress towards meeting them.

To learn more about the 12 Building Block process, consult the graphic on the following page. The vertical text in the dark blue arrow (left) communicates an approximate timetable and the boxes to the right indicate the major time commitments expected for each Building Block.

HOW GATEWAYS CAN HELP

Though the responsibility for change in practice ultimately rests with the teachers and leaders in each school—this is the meaning of B'Yadenu, after all—throughout the process, Gateways professionals can act as indispensable “guides on the side,” who provide the objective and seasoned perspective so necessary when endeavoring to generate whole-school change.

B'Yadenu advisors intervene at key points in the process, including:

- ✓ As schools **Initiate** the project, they help with the formation of the leadership team and the development of overall project goals;
- ✓ In the **Assess** phase, they provide a self-assessment instrument, along with objective feedback on the strengths and areas for growth in serving all learners that educators have identified;
- ✓ During **Planning**, they advise how to generate the professional development activities that will yield the intended strengthening of practice; and
- ✓ As schools **Implement** the cycle of professional development, they assist in setting up the data collection methods needed to gauge the effectiveness of professional development and its impact on instruction and student outcomes.

If your school is interested in working further with Gateways professionals to develop and implement a customized whole-school growth plan, contact the Center for Professional Learning at cplinfo@jgateways.org or by phone at (617) 630-9010.

B'YADENU PROJECT PROCESS MAP



Team returns to Building Blocks 4 and 5 to actualize continuous improvement cycle