The CAR Metaphor

**Destination** - improving student learning

**Vehicle** - an effective PLC

**Map** - the curriculum

**Guideposts** - assessments

**Terrain** - the climate and culture of a school

At the beginning of the 2016-17 school year, a pilot project entitled *Blended Online Learning Modules for Professional Learning Communities* was launched by the New Jersey Department of Education and the Foundation for Educational Administration. The goal of the pilot for Year 1 was for pilot school districts to increase the capacity of New Jersey school educators to work in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) by using the Blended Online Learning Modules and the Connected Action Roadmap Framework (CAR).

The School of Education at Stockton University provided two External Evaluators, Kimberly Lebak & Patricia Weeks, to conduct a study of the project. Their key findings are positive and include the following:

1. Data revealed that the majority of PLCs in the Pilot utilized the Connected Action Roadmap (CAR) Framework to focus conversations and professional learning activities around areas of curriculum planning, instruction, assessment, and culture and climate of schools, with the greatest emphasis placed on unpacking standards and developing units of study.
2. Coaching support, resources, and training of participant pilots were instrumental for implementation of the CAR Framework.

3. An increase in the number of operating PLCs: schools with existing PLCs improved their functionality with a greater/deeper understanding of the role and function of effective professional learning communities as collaborative communities of practice focused on increased knowledge and enhanced understanding of a PLC.

4. ALL teachers in the Pilot reported that their PLCs articulated a shared mission and norms.

5. The majority of PLCs were successful in focusing conversations and professional learning activities around the CAR Framework.

6. There was a significant increase in time spent to align standards, strengthen learning goals/ instructional strategies/activities/resources, formative assessments, and summative assessments as measured on pre and post surveys.

7. Aspects of school culture and climate were addressed through integrating social-emotional learning lessons and clear expectations for student behavior into the curriculum.

**Takeaways: Year 1**

...from the Pilot Project Participants

... on purpose

“After receiving the training from CAR, not only did I feel that it focused on our PLCs but it really created an understanding of why we’re doing it. It’s not just a piece of paper now for PLCs. It’s staff members understanding one another, having the same expectations. It’s staff members understanding that we’re all in this together and understanding why we’re here. And that is, of course, to improve student learning.”

Christy Longo, R. Gordon Elementary School, Roselle Park

“CAR pulls together all of the pieces, all the essential pieces: the teaching, learning, and assessment cycles. And those pieces have been around forever. They fit naturally and coherently together when the CAR Framework is put in place because the conversation focuses on delivering, reflecting on, and revising the curriculum.”

Dr. Donna McInerney, FEA

“... I have spoken with a few teachers who have PLCs but don’t use CAR, and for a lot of them it’s searching for that sense of purpose. They say we meet but we don’t know what to talk about, or we meet and we don’t know where our struggle is, or we meet and our PLC got off task. So, I think that having the Roadmap keeps our PLC from going off target and being more purposeful and more meaningful.”

Jamie Centrella, Caroline Ruetter School, Franklin Township

“The CAR Framework is that easy. It’s not something that is loaded with jargon and loaded with It has to be this way. It’s just simple. How are we going to make changes in curriculum and instruction to improve student learning and that’s what we are all about!”

Frances Kenny, R. Gordon Elementary School, Roselle Park
Takeaways: Year 1
... from the Pilot Project Participants

... on process

“We focused a lot on a discussion of standards, and I think that looking at the Roadmap as almost a diagram as to this is where we are starting, this is where we’re going; it was easy for us to figure out – almost as if you were following a map. We’re starting here. This is our end point, and this is the direction to go with each specific standard.”

Jamie Centrella, Caroline Ruettter School, Franklin Township

“We all have a destination we want students to get to. It’s different for everybody but we always know what the end goal is. We don’t always know how to get there. What CAR does is it facilitates that. It gives you all the tools and the “car” to get there.”

Laura Satterfield-Mathieu, Janis Dismus Middle School, Englewood

“The Blended Online Learning Modules have every resource you could want. It becomes a real database, a resource, a repository of best practice information.”

Rosemary Seitel, Janis Dismus Middle School, Englewood

“Many of the teachers and administrators from the pilot districts were surprised to see how quickly their Professional Learning Communities went from being unfocused and ineffective to organized and coherent through structured, important, and meaningful conversations that can lead to improved student learning.”

Daniel Higgins, NJPSA/FEA

“I would say definitely put the keys in, turn on the car, and let it go. You know, it’s a hard process, change is always hard, but you have to keep the faith in the process, and really believe and trust in your staff and the administrators; together we can achieve whatever that goal is. I think that CAR really does that for you.”

Mariette NG, Janis Dismus Middle School, Englewood

... on learning

“So, learning makes sense . . . and when a kid can walk away saying, I remember that and it makes sense, you should feel pretty good about yourself as an educator.”

Alice Camac, Emma Attales School, Absecon

“And this Pilot really has shown people the difference between professional development and professional learning. This is ongoing, job-embedded, shared leadership, learning from one another . . . and for a new teacher, being in a PLC with veteran teachers, this is the best professional learning you can ever ask for!”

Rosemary Seitel, Janis Dismus Middle School, Englewood
Takeaways: Year 1
... from the Pilot Project Participants

... on outcomes

“One of the most significant changes in these pilot schools using CAR has been the effect it has had on the teachers using the Framework, how they work together in teams, and how they feel they have grown and become better teachers and better leaders.”
Daniel Higgins, NJPSA/FEA

“CAR really has changed our culture. We have core values in this building, one of them being family. And you can’t have family if you’re in isolation and working as a separate silo. CAR has allowed us to come together in our core values, so we’re not just saying it. But, we are living it as well.”
Laura Satterfield-Mathieu, Janis Dismus Middle School, Englewood

“Well, most certainly, the CAR experience in this school has allowed us to really see what laser-like focus on student achievement looks like. But, more importantly at least from my perspective, it also gives you an in-house development of your next level of leaders. It allows them to become more mature, and more consistent, more decisive and stronger. Because of those things, you can expect not only to see student achievement change exponentially, but the culture of your school to grow as well.”
Rosemary Seitel, Janis Dismus Middle School, Englewood

As the Pilot Project begins Year 2,
I offer this thought:

Growth and learning are the business of schooling. To perform our mission well, collaborative professional learning is not an option; rather, it is the fabric that holds the most potential for high performing, quality public education in this century.

Marie M. Adair, Executive Director, New Jersey ASCD