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# ARLP NEWS YOU CAN USE TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

*This issue: **How leaders actually grow***



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## LETTER FROM THE CEO

# Capacity Is the Gift That Stays

October is National Principals Month, a time when the nation's principal associations set aside to celebrate the people who lead our schools<sup>1</sup>. It is a fitting month for this issue, because so much of what we have learned at ARLP about how leaders grow, we learned in rooms full of principals.

Many of the leaders I work with, in school systems, health centers, and public agencies, are tired. Years of constant, relentless change have left good people running on fumes. When that happens, it is tempting to hand them one more program or one more solution. I have come to believe that is the wrong answer. What leaders need most is capacity: the skill, the confidence, and the relationships to keep getting good things done long after any consultant has gone home.

That is why our work rests on a simple premise. Adults grow as leaders by working on real problems, reflecting with a skilled partner, and following through on clear commitments. We keep the work confidential, practical, and measurable, and we ground it in Ubuntu: *I am because we are*.

This issue puts that premise to the test. Our feature, **How Leaders Actually Grow**, looks at what the research says about coaching, reflection, continuous improvement, and commitments. Then we go inside the **Principals' Community of Practice in Galt Joint Union Elementary School District**, where every principal and every teacher has learned the same improvement cycle, and where principals have gathered on one another's campuses for five years to read data, learn from each other, and move real problems forward. I am grateful to Superintendent Lois Yount and to Galt's principals and teachers for letting us share their story.

At the end of this issue you will find two invitations. The first is to keep learning with our self-paced online courses. The second is personal: I would love to hear the story of your leadership journey. Whether you are a new assistant principal or a seasoned CEO, book a conversation with me. And if you are an executive leading through a strategic inflection point, we can talk about whether Executive Strategic Advisory is the right partnership for this season of your work.

Before October ends, I have one small ask. Thank the principal who shaped you. Send a note, make a call, or tell them in person. They rarely hear it, and they deserve to.

Warmly,



**Alan Rogers, Ed.D.**  
Co-Founder & CEO



**Rebekah Rogers, M.A., M.S.W.**  
Co-Founder & President



## October is National Principals Month

Thank the principal who shaped you. They should hear it.

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## FEATURE

# How Leaders Actually Grow

*Real work, a trusted partner, and three commitments, and what the research says about each.*

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## Leadership is getting good things done

I define leadership simply: it is getting good things done. In today's complex world, the hard part is doing that well, and doing it again next month.

Many of the leaders I work with are exhausted. Their organizations have lived through years of constant, relentless change, and they are running on fumes. When results stall, the reflex is to send leaders to another training. A workshop can spark an idea. On its own, it rarely changes what a leader does on Monday morning.

Adults grow as leaders a different way. We grow by working on real problems, reflecting with a skilled partner, and following through on clear commitments. That premise sits under everything we do at AR Leadership Partners (ARLP).

The research is consistent on one point. Leaders learn most from challenging work, but only when they get honest feedback on it. A study of 60 managers across 225 on-the-job experiences found that stretch assignments build leadership skill with diminishing returns, and that access to feedback offsets those diminishing returns (DeRue & Wellman, 2009). Hard work teaches. Hard work plus a thinking partner teaches more.

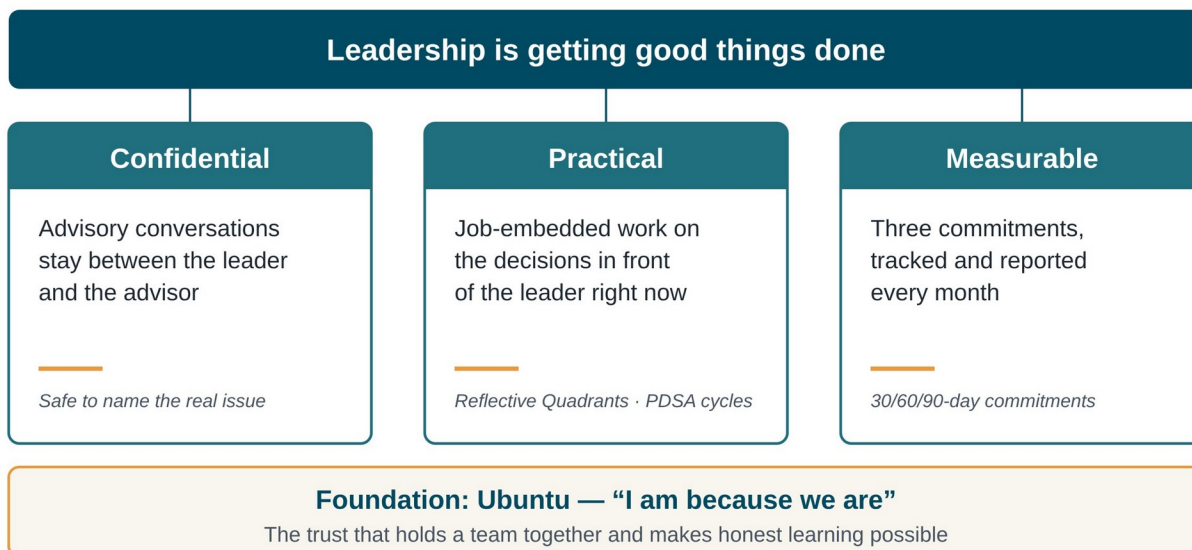


*Leaders at work in an ARLP working session.*

## Three conditions for growth

At ARLP, growth rests on three conditions. The work is **confidential**, so a leader can name the real problem. It is **practical**, built on the decisions in front of the leader right now. And it is **measurable**, anchored in three commitments that are tracked and reported each month.

## Three conditions on one foundation: how leaders grow at ARLP



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Figure 1. Three conditions on one foundation: confidential, practical, and measurable work, resting on Ubuntu.

## Four tools that carry the work

Conditions set the stage. Tools do the work. Each of the four below comes from ARLP's Quantum Learning Leadership Institutes and my years leading and advising school systems, health centers, and public agencies.

### 1. Ubuntu: "I am because we are"

Ubuntu is a philosophy of deep interconnectedness. In an organization, it means a leader's success depends on the trust and unity of the whole team. Strategy does not move through isolated authority. It moves through shared purpose and aligned execution.

Management scholar Mzamo Mangaliso (2001) argued that organizations built on ubuntu's compassion and communality can gain a real competitive advantage. Amy Edmondson's (1999) landmark study of work teams adds the mechanism: when people feel safe to speak up, ask questions, and admit mistakes, teams learn faster and perform better. Ubuntu is how we build that safety on purpose.

### 2. Reflective Quadrants: navigating hard conversations

Hard conversations and unmet expectations trigger reactive decisions. Reflective Quadrants is a structured process I developed to slow that moment down. It helps a leader separate facts from assumptions and find the root cause of a performance gap before acting. The result is a leader who walks into a hard conversation with clarity, poise, and empathy.

Reflection pays off in measurable ways. In a field study, new customer-service agents who spent 15 minutes at the end of each training day writing about their key lessons scored 23 percent higher on their end-of-training assessment than peers who did not (Di Stefano et al., 2016). The researchers found reflection worked by deepening understanding and by building self-efficacy.

### 3. Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles: test small, measure, adjust

PDSA turns good intentions into evidence. **Plan** a small change and a prediction. **Do** it on a small scale. **Study** what happened against what you expected. **Act**: adopt it, adapt it, or abandon it, then run the next cycle.

The method works when it is done with discipline, and that is the catch. A review of 73 published healthcare PDSA projects found fewer than 20 percent fully documented a sequence of iterative cycles, and only 15 percent of those analyzed used quantitative data at monthly or more frequent intervals (Taylor et al., 2014). Most teams called it PDSA and skipped the cycles. Our institutes train teams to run the full loop, small and often.

### 4. 30/60/90-day commitments: execution discipline

Frameworks create value only when they are paired with follow-through. Every leader I advise sets three commitments, one each for the next 30, 60, and 90 days. We track them in a monthly progress summary and recalibrate them each quarter against the organization's strategic priorities.

Two bodies of research explain why this works. Specific if-then plans (“when X happens, I will do Y”) make people markedly more likely to reach their goals (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). And monitoring progress helps people reach their goals, with stronger effects when the progress is written down or reported to someone else (Harkin et al., 2016). A monthly written report to a trusted advisor does both.

## The evidence behind each practice

Every practice in the ARLP approach lines up with a published finding. These are findings from the research literature, not ARLP's own results.

| ARLP practice                    | What it looks like in the work                                   | What the research found                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Source                                      |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Confidential 1:1 partnership     | One leader, one advisor; conversations stay private              | The strength of the coach–client working alliance tracks outcomes: a moderate, consistent correlation ( $r = .41$ ) across 27 samples and 3,563 coaching engagements. Newer trials suggest the alliance matters most early on. | Graßmann et al., 2020; de Haan et al., 2020 |
| Job-embedded learning            | Sessions built around the decisions in front of the leader now   | Challenging assignments build leadership skill; feedback keeps the learning going when the challenge is high                                                                                                                   | DeRue & Wellman, 2009                       |
| Sustained advisory over a year   | 24 scheduled sessions plus as-needed access                      | Coaching improves performance, well-being, coping, work attitudes, and goal-directed self-regulation, and has a positive effect on organizational outcomes                                                                     | Theeboom et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2016   |
| 360° review followed by advisory | Confidential survey and 10–16 interviews, then a private debrief | Feedback alone produces generally small gains. Leaders who worked with a coach afterward set more specific goals, asked their supervisors for ideas, and improved more.                                                        | Smither et al., 2005; Smither et al., 2003  |
| Ubuntu                           | Trust and shared purpose as the base of team performance         | Teams where people feel safe to speak up learn more; ubuntu-based management can be a competitive advantage                                                                                                                    | Edmondson, 1999; Mangaliso, 2001            |
| Reflective Quadrants             | Structured reflection before a hard conversation or decision     | Deliberately articulating lessons from experience improves later performance more than added experience does                                                                                                                   | Di Stefano et al., 2016                     |

| ARLP practice                                 | What it looks like in the work                                     | What the research found                                                                             | Source                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| PDSA cycles                                   | Small tests of change, measured and refined                        | The method's value depends on fidelity: iterative cycles, small-scale tests, and frequent data      | Taylor et al., 2014                             |
| 30/60/90-day commitments with monthly reports | Three written commitments, tracked monthly, recalibrated quarterly | If-then plans raise goal attainment; monitoring progress helps more when it is recorded or reported | Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006; Harkin et al., 2016 |

Table 1. ARLP practices matched to published research.

## How big are the effects?

The practices behind this work produce effects that range from small to medium-large in published research. Researchers report these as standardized effect sizes; by convention, 0.2 is small, 0.5 is medium, and 0.8 is large.

### Coaching and if-then plans show the largest published effects

Standardized effect sizes (d, g, or  $\delta$ ) from published studies · research findings, not ARLP results

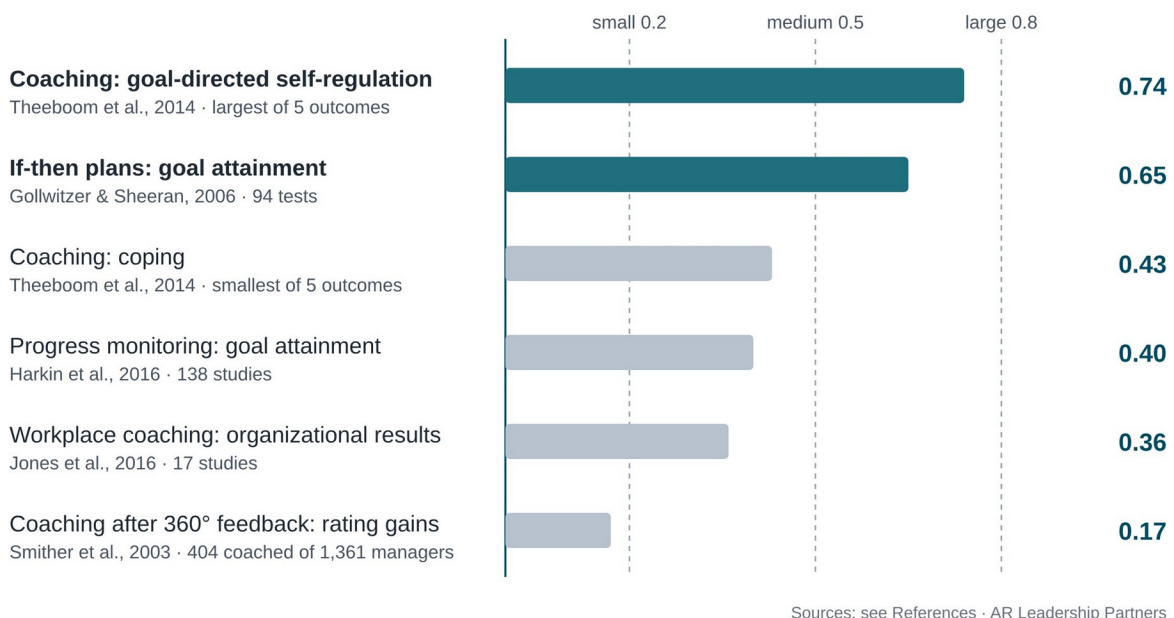


Figure 2. Published effect sizes for practices used in ARLP advisory. Research findings, not ARLP results.

An effect size of 0.5 means the average person who used the practice outperformed about 69 percent of the comparison group. The studies measured different outcomes in different settings, so read each bar on its own rather than adding them up.

## News you can use: four practices to start this month

You do not need a formal engagement to put these ideas to work. Pick one, start this week, and check yourself in 30 days.

- ☐ **Write three commitments.** Name one thing you will complete in the next 30 days, one in 60, and one in 90. Write each as an if-then plan: “When the Monday leadership meeting ends, I will send the decision log within the hour.”
- ☐ **Report your progress to someone.** Once a month, send a short written update on your three commitments to a mentor, peer, or supervisor.
- ☐ **Reflect for 15 minutes before a hard conversation.** On paper, separate what you know from what you assume. Ask what the root cause of the gap might be, and what the other person would say it is.
- ☐ **Run one small PDSA cycle.** Choose a single routine, such as how your team starts meetings. Predict what a small change will do, try it for two weeks, look at what happened, then keep it, adjust it, or drop it.

*And underneath all four, practice Ubuntu. Ask your team what would make it safer to raise a problem early, then act on what you hear.*

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Alan Rogers, Ed.D., Co-Founder & CEO, AR Leadership Partners, LLC

## CITATION OF EXCELLENCE

# Reading Data Together, Moving Problems Forward

*Inside Galt's Principals' Community of Practice, where every principal and every teacher learned the same improvement cycle.*

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## A district that decided to learn together

In the spring of 2022, Superintendent Lois Yount and ARLP began planning around a simple question: what would it take for every adult in Galt Joint Union Elementary School District (GJUESD) to get better at getting better? The answer was a shared way of working that every adult in the system would learn.

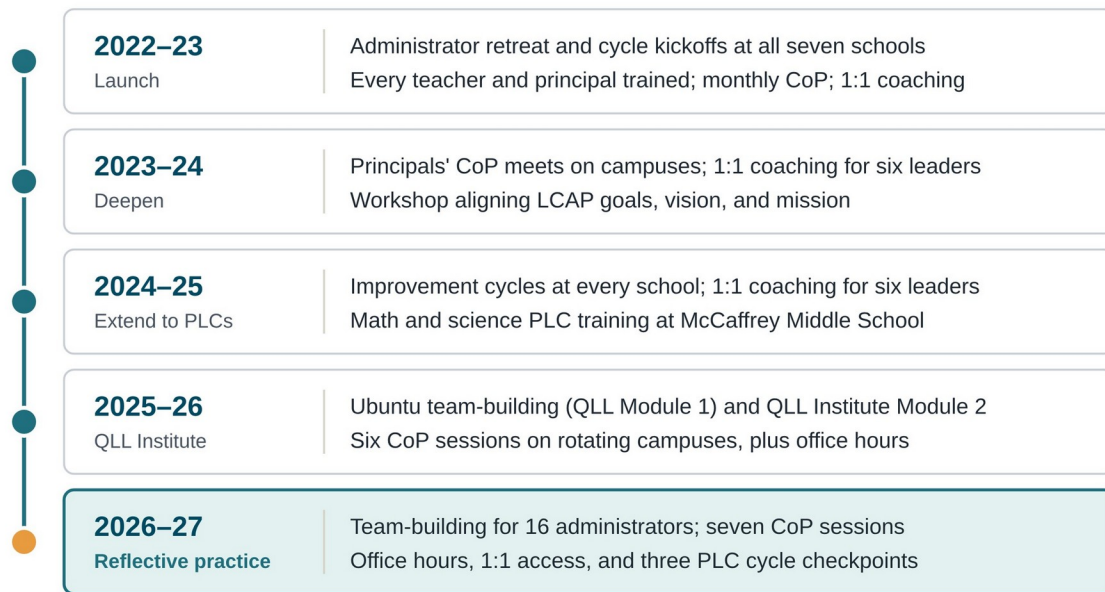
That summer, the district's administrators spent two days together at a leadership retreat. In August, we launched improvement-cycle kickoffs at all seven schools. Every teacher, alongside their principal, learned the Continuous Improvement Cycle from ARLP's Quantum Learning Leadership (QLL) Institutes: Plan-Do-Study-Act, applied to their own classrooms and teams. By October, site teams were back together practicing change ideas and testing them in short cycles.

The Principals' Community of Practice (CoP) grew out of that start. If teachers were going to run improvement cycles, principals needed a place to lead them well: to read data honestly, learn from each other, and carry one real problem forward at a time. Five school years later, that place is still meeting, seven times this year, on a different campus each time.

The CoP is where the whole ARLP suite comes together: the QLL Institute's Continuous Improvement Cycle, the trust-building of Ubuntu, Leadership Team Architecture, and the confidential, commitment-driven coaching of Executive Strategic Advisory (ESA). It serves two purposes at once: organizational improvement for the district and leadership development for each principal.

## Five years, one improvement system: how the Galt work grew

ARLP services delivered to Galt Joint Union Elementary School District, by school year



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Figure 3. ARLP services delivered to GJUESD by school year, 2022–23 to 2026–27.

## Inside a session

Each session runs one focused hour, hosted by a different principal on their own campus. Principals told us they value hosting and visiting each other's schools, so the rotation is part of the design. An optional online office hour follows each session, and principals can book a confidential one-to-one with me between sessions.

Every session follows the same four moves:

- 1. Read.** We start by reading real data together, closely, before we react: what we notice, what we wonder, what might explain it, and what we should watch.
- 2. Learn.** The host principal shares a leadership lesson from their school, and colleagues borrow what works.
- 3. Move.** Each principal names one problem of practice and carries it forward one step, using the Continuous Improvement Cycle.
- 4. Grow.** We close with pluses, deltas, and a personal commitment. By spring, small disciplined moves add up to real results for students.



Leaders learning together at an ARLP gathering.

The year itself is one long improvement cycle. This year's arc moves from setting a baseline in September to carrying the work forward in April.

| Session | Month     | Host campus   | Theme                        | Cycle phase    |
|---------|-----------|---------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| 1       | September | Greer         | Launch & Baseline            | Plan           |
| 2       | October   | Lake Canyon   | First-Quarter Reality Check  | Do             |
| 3       | November  | River Oaks    | Sustaining the Grind         | Study          |
| 4       | January   | Marengo Ranch | Reset & Recalibrate          | Act            |
| 5       | February  | Valley Oaks   | Testing Readiness            | Testing window |
| 6       | March     | McCaffrey     | Convergence Month            | Study          |
| 7       | April     | Fairsite      | Close Strong & Carry Forward | Act            |

Table 2. The 2026–27 Principals' CoP arc.

The toolkit draws on the full ARLP methodology: Ubuntu check-ins and Backstory Cards, the Close Reading Protocol, Reflective Quadrants, driver diagrams, the PLC Five Questions, the ARLP Classroom Walkthrough Protocol, and a 30/60/90-day planning template for principals.

## One system, two kinds of growth

Each ARLP service feeds Galt's CoP, and each one builds the organization and the individual leader at the same time.

| ARLP service                                | What it looks like in GJUESD                                                                                                                      | Organizational improvement                                   | Individual leadership development                             |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| QLL Institute: Continuous Improvement Cycle | Every teacher and principal trained in Plan-Do-Study-Act; this year, PLC cycles due in September, December, and February                          | One shared improvement language across all seven schools     | Principals lead and coach cycles rather than collect forms    |
| Ubuntu                                      | Ubuntu check-ins, Backstory Cards, and a July team-building day for 16 administrators                                                             | Trust across campuses; principals host and visit one another | Leaders practice listening, candor, and "I am because we are" |
| Principals' Community of Practice           | Seven sessions a year on rotating campuses, built on Read, Learn, Move, Grow                                                                      | Data read together; one districtwide focus                   | Each principal carries a real problem of practice forward     |
| ESA coaching elements                       | Confidential one-to-ones, office hours, a 30/60/90-day first move, signed commitments, and as-needed access for the superintendent and principals | The superintendent's priorities translate into site action   | Personal commitments and coaching for difficult conversations |
| Leadership Team Architecture                | Clear roles and monitoring routines between the district office and sites                                                                         | PLC cycles monitored districtwide: "inspect what you expect" | Clarity about each leader's role in the system                |
| Targeted PLC training                       | Math and science PLC training at McCaffrey Middle School in 2024–25, with the ARLP Classroom Walkthrough Protocol                                 | Stronger middle-school collaboration                         | Principals and teacher leaders practice walkthrough feedback  |

Table 3. How each ARLP service supports organizational improvement and individual leadership development in GJUESD.

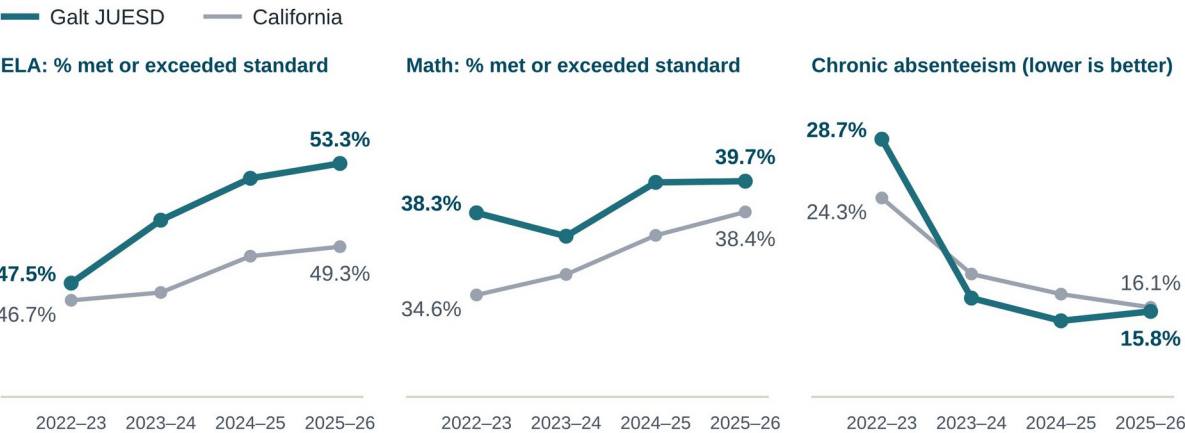
This year's priorities came straight from the superintendent's own reflection: move improvement cycles from a form to fill out to genuine reflective practice, build systems to monitor PLC cycles, turn data reflection into action, and support principals in difficult conversations. The district paired “inspect what you expect” with a companion commitment to ask kind questions.

What the state data show

Four school years of results have now been published since this work began: three years of gains, then a fourth year that held them. Here is what the California Department of Education's data show.

Four years in: Galt held its gains and still leads the state in ELA

Galt JUESD vs. California, school years 2022–23 to 2025–26 · CAASPP and California School Dashboard



Sources: CDE CAASPP research files; California School Dashboard data files · AR Leadership Partners

Figure 4. Galt JUESD vs. California, 2022–23 to 2025–26. Sources: CDE CAASPP research files; California School Dashboard data files.

In English language arts, the share of Galt students meeting or exceeding standard rose for a fourth straight year, from 47.5 percent to 53.3 percent, a gain of 5.8 points against the state's 2.6. On the Dashboard, Galt moved from below standard to above it and has stayed there. Math dipped in 2023–24, recovered the next year, and held steady in 2025–26; Galt stayed ahead of the state each year, though the state gained more over the period. Chronic absenteeism fell from 28.7 percent to 15.1 percent by 2024–25, then edged up to 15.8 percent, just under the state rate of 16.1 percent.

| Dashboard indicator              | 2022–23        | 2023–24        | 2024–25        | 2025–26        | State, 2025–26 |
|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| ELA, points from standard        | –9.8 (Orange)  | –4.9 (Green)   | +2.2 (Green)   | +3.6 (Yellow)  | –7.5 (Orange)  |
| Math, points from standard       | –32.6 (Yellow) | –35.5 (Orange) | –28.0 (Yellow) | –28.7 (Orange) | –38.9 (Yellow) |
| English learners making progress | 54.1% (Green)  | 49.6% (Orange) | 52.7% (Green)  | 47.0% (Orange) | 47.4% (Yellow) |
| Chronic absenteeism              | 28.7% (Yellow) | 16.8% (Yellow) | 15.1% (Yellow) | 15.8% (Orange) | 16.1% (Yellow) |
| Suspension rate                  | 3.5% (Orange)  | 3.2% (Yellow)  | 2.9% (Green)   | 3.3% (Orange)  | 2.7%           |

Table 4. GJUESD California School Dashboard results, all students. Colors are the Dashboard performance levels.

The fourth year deserves a close read. After three years of climbing, 2025–26 was a year of holding. Reading and math stayed above the state, but English learner progress fell from 52.7 to 47.0 percent, just under the state's 47.4, and English learners' scores dipped in both subjects. Chronic absenteeism and suspensions ticked up while the state's eased down. The CoP's Read move was built for a year like this: what do we notice, what do we wonder, what might explain it, and what should we watch? The new results arrived the same month as this year's First-Quarter Reality Check session.

The gains reached the students who most need them. In 2024–25, Galt's socioeconomically disadvantaged, English learner, and Hispanic students each gained 8 to 11 points in ELA and math on the Dashboard, more than the same groups statewide. In 2025–26, each group still scored roughly 20 to 26 points closer to standard than its statewide peers, though the state groups gained ground this year while Galt's mostly held steady or slipped, most of all for English learners.

*A word of care about these numbers.* They describe the district, not the CoP alone: many people and programs contributed, and the data cannot isolate any one cause. The first year shown, 2022–23, was also the first year of this work, so it is a starting point rather than a pre-work baseline. Statewide percentages include grade 11, which Galt does not serve. A Dashboard color reflects both a year's result and its change from the year before, so a district can stay above standard and still move down a color, as Galt's ELA did in 2025–26. Suspension colors use different cut points for elementary districts and for the state, so no state color is shown.

What educators told us

At the end of the first year, in May 2023, we asked Galt's administrators and teachers what the improvement cycle had done for them. Most said it worked, and teachers were candid about what it cost.

| Survey item, May 2023                                    | Who answered        | Agreed or reported yes |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Gained three or more new leadership practices            | Administrators (13) | 92%                    |
| Tested a change idea with teachers                       | Administrators (13) | 85%                    |
| Their PLCs saw measurable improvement                    | Administrators (13) | 92%                    |
| Another improvement cycle is very or extremely important | Administrators (13) | 85%                    |
| Identified an area for improvement                       | Teachers (151)      | 95%                    |
| Tested a change idea                                     | Teachers            | 86%                    |
| Saw improvement after the first cycle                    | Teachers            | 73%                    |
| Saw improvement after the second cycle                   | Teachers            | 75%                    |
| District-level PLC time is important                     | Teachers            | 78%                    |
| Teachers should be supported in continuing the cycle     | Teachers            | 55%                    |

Table 5. GJUESD end-of-year survey results, May 2023.

Teachers' comments told us why that last number was lower. They wanted more time and less paperwork, and some specialists did not see how the cycle fit their roles. "We loved being able to share resources," one teacher wrote. "It was good to hear what other schools were thinking at our grade level," wrote another.

The district listened. This year, Galt kept the cycle but simplified the form, aligned its vocabulary with the district's PLC work, and set three cycle checkpoints across the year. The superintendent's charge to principals is to make the cycle a reflective practice rather than a form to fill out. In Plan-Do-Study-Act terms, the district studied its own results and acted on them.

## What the research says

**Principals shape the conditions for learning across a whole school.** A synthesis of two decades of research found that effective principals focus on instructionally focused interactions with teachers, a productive school climate, collaboration and professional learning communities, and strategic management of people and resources (Grissom et al., 2021). Researchers still debate how large a principal's direct effect on test scores is (Bartanen et al., 2024), but they agree on how principals matter: through the conditions they create for teachers. Leadership is “second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning” (Leithwood et al., 2008).

**Principals learn best through coaching, community, and applied work.** A national review identified three strategies that matter most: individualized coaching or mentoring, communities of principals, and applied learning on real problems (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Of principals who had a mentor or coach, 87 percent said it contributed to their success, and in one district partnership it took about two years for principals to feel the benefits of their learning community. In a randomized experiment, principals who received coaching alongside feedback changed their leadership more than those who received feedback alone (Goff et al., 2014).

**Professional learning communities improve teaching when they are well developed** (Vescio et al., 2008). Communities of practice, in Etienne Wenger's (1998) original sense, are groups who share a set of problems and deepen their expertise by working on them together. That is what Galt's principals do each month.

**Improvement comes from disciplined, small tests of change.** Improvement science asks educators to make the work problem-specific, see the system that produces current results, and learn through rapid cycles, because “we cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure” (Bryk et al., 2015).

**Trust is the foundation.** In Chicago's long-running studies, schools with low relational trust had only a one-in-seven chance of improving, while half of high-trust schools improved (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Schools strong in all five essential supports for improvement were at least 10 times more likely to show substantial gains in reading and math than schools strong in only one or two (Bryk et al., 2010). Teams also learn more when members feel safe to take interpersonal risks (Edmondson, 1999), and a faculty's shared belief in its own capacity is associated with higher achievement (Goddard et al., 2000).

### What other districts can borrow

- ☐ **Train everyone in one improvement cycle.** When every teacher and principal shares one method and one vocabulary, principals can coach the work instead of explaining it.
- ☐ **Give principals a standing community.** Meet monthly, rotate host campuses, and protect the hour. Expect it to take a couple of years to mature.
- ☐ **Read the data together before you react.** Ask what you notice, what you wonder, what might explain it, and what you will watch.
- ☐ **Carry one problem of practice at a time.** Each leader names one real problem, takes one step before the next meeting, and reports back.
- ☐ **Pair the community with confidential coaching.** Group learning builds shared practice; one-to-one coaching builds the individual leader who has to act on it.

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Executive Strategic Advisory: The 12-Month Leadership Journey

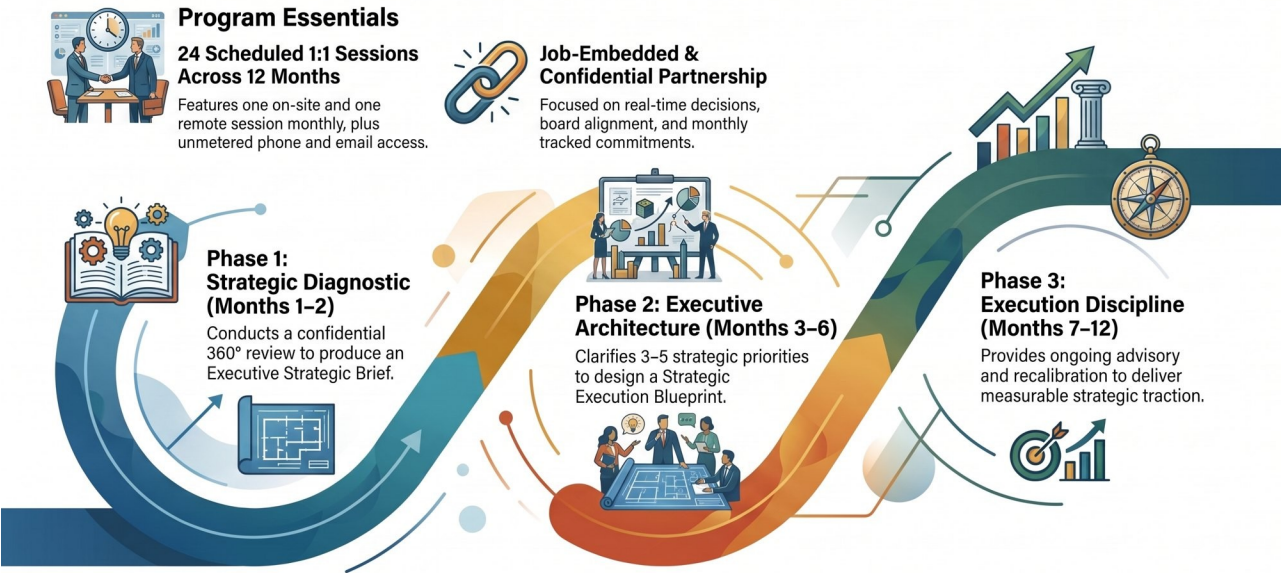


Figure 5. Executive Strategic Advisory moves through three phases, each ending with something concrete in hand.

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| 1. Start a conversation                                                                                                                                                                     | 2. Fit conversation                                                                                | 3. Agreement                                                      | 4. Induction                                                                  |
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Warmly,



**Alan Rogers, Ed.D.**

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Dr. Alan “Al” Rogers brings more than thirty years of experience as a professor, consultant, superintendent, CEO, principal, and teacher. He developed Quantum Learning Leadership and the leadership and organizational improvement systems ARLP uses with health centers, school systems, and public agencies, including Peach Tree Health, UC Berkeley, Horizon Public Charter Schools, the Yolo County Office of Education, and Tuolumne County Administration.



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