



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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The Wisdom of Leveraging Improvement Science Principles in the Time of COVID

New York, NY - GSE Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy (ELAP) faculty members, professor Margaret Terry Orr, Ph.D., and assistant professor Elizabeth Leisy Stosich, are two of five leaders in a district-university partnership who recently shared in a [panel discussion](#) how they used an improvement mindset to inform their crisis response to COVID-19,

Moderated by Ash Vasudeva, vice president, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the panel discussion was part of the Carnegie Foundation webinar series, [Improvement Science in the Time of COVID-19](#), which explores how K–12 leaders and their partners have leveraged improvement-based thinking and practice to respond to the challenges of COVID-19, particularly those related to coherence, equity, and engagement.

According to Orr, one of the first things to consider when Fordham was forced to convert all of its classes to an online format was, would students want to continue. She noted that the resounding conclusion was yes – because the students in the ELAP doctoral program needed a place to stop and reflect on what was happening, and to make whatever was being discussed a useful piece of examining the problems of practice they were facing. “This situation provides opportunities for creativity and opens up a chance to work differently,” she noted. “The COVID crisis has created enthusiasm for people who want to make a difference, people with a passion and a desire to confront the problems of practice in education.”

Stosich added, “We’ve changed the way we think about preparing leaders. We are even more closely integrating improvement science into our work and making actual problems of practice the center of learning.” She commented, “There’s an urgency that’s coming from students who are working in the field every day. By working in partnership over time with our colleagues, we’ve been able to integrate improvement science into our program in a very collaborative way.”

Bronx Borough Office – New York School District executive superintendent and advanced GSE Ed.D. doctoral student Meisha Ross-Porter; Yonkers Public Schools assistant superintendent, GSE adjunct faculty member, and ELAP Ed.D. alumna Andrea Coddett; and NYC Department of Education academic response team director and advanced GSE Ed.D. doctoral student Kris DeFillips joined Orr and Stosich on the panel.

The K-12 leaders agreed that in many cases, the pandemic heightened already-existing crises in their schools and school systems. They were forced to reexamine problems of practice, consider new solutions, and determine how to actually implement solutions that would solve those problems. Most importantly, the leaders shared that they learned to value and tap individual skill sets to overcome problems, regardless of individual titles and roles. The conclusion? Using improvement science is particularly valuable because it can be utilized to help individual schools in a customized way.

As members of the [Improvement Leadership Education and Development \(iLEAD\) network](#), Fordham GSE, Bronx Borough Office – New York School District, and Yonkers Public Schools are committed to the use of improvement science to develop leaders, address local problems of practice, and promote equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for all students. The iLEAD network is comprised of 13 university-district partnerships.