

SPOTLIGHT

# Unlocking Leadership Capacity: The Breakthrough Team Approach

*by John J-H Kim and Peter Riley*

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# Unlocking Leadership Capacity: The Breakthrough Team Approach

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**O**n August 25, 2017, Hurricane Harvey hit Texas. Over the subsequent six-day period, the storm unleashed record rains totaling almost five feet in some areas and leaving a foot and a half of water over 70% of Houston's 1,800-square-mile Harris County. This once-in-1,000-year flood event caused an estimated \$125 billion of damage and displaced nearly 37,000 people in Texas alone.<sup>1</sup> One ray of light shone through the destruction: ordinary citizens rowed, motored, waded, and formed human chains through flooded streets to help save family, friends, and total strangers. This tremendous rescue campaign led to over 17,000 rescues. Beyond local community members, volunteers from across the country also joined the effort, using social media and mapping technology to help direct and organize this force of Good Samaritans.

Confronted with a desperate situation, these ordinary citizens stepped out of their traditional roles, leveraged the resources at hand, and worked together with a sense of urgency to achieve a clear and shared goal. This capacity for ingenuity, resourcefulness, leadership, and teamwork exists within each of us, but these skills are rarely tapped in our day-to-day lives.



*DMGroup Spotlight represents the thinking and approach of District Management Group.*



To unlock these peak-performance capabilities, we can tap into a proven approach to building leadership capacity. Robert H. Schaeffer and Harvey A. Thomson's Change Program Approach<sup>2</sup> and Douglas K. Smith

and Charles Baum's Rapid Results Approach<sup>3</sup> are built upon the belief that the best way to develop leadership capacity is not to teach about leadership, but to have people learn leadership skills while working on a vital performance objective in a short time frame. These approaches to leadership development have been successfully applied across the healthcare, technology, manufacturing, and financial sectors, among many others. Drawing on these influences, DMGroup has adapted this model for the public education sector and created a structured process for building leadership capacity in school districts, which we call the Breakthrough Team Approach.

The Breakthrough Team Approach is a powerful and exciting process that allows public school district staff to build leadership capacity while simultaneously achieving measurable progress in dealing with their most significant challenges. To date, DMGroup has worked with over 100 teams, 75% of which have experienced success in achieving their performance objectives. Districts have tackled challenges ranging from high school math proficiency to literacy in early childhood education, school safety, and student attendance. Achieving success using the Breakthrough Team Approach breeds confidence, creativity, and trust among team members and unlocks potential and momentum for further successes.

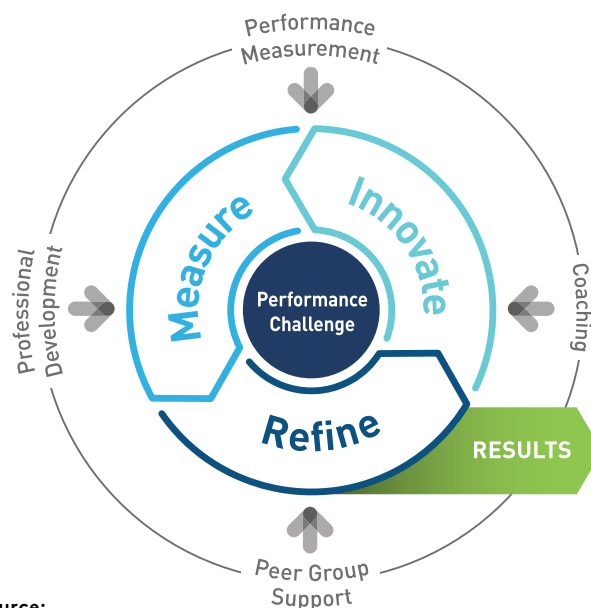
## The Breakthrough Team Approach to Unlocking Potential

### Overview

The core concept of the Breakthrough Team Approach is that the most powerful way to develop leaders is for people to learn leadership skills while working to achieve real performance results, rather than just learning about leadership concepts.<sup>4</sup> In DMGroup's work applying this approach to the public education sector, a district or school typically launches multiple teams simultaneously, with each team composed of a cross-functional group of five to seven members. Each breakthrough team sets about identifying a performance goal with specific metrics to achieve within a short time frame of approximately 10 weeks. Teams then test innovative strategies and track weekly progress with the objective of reaching their goals. The Breakthrough Team Approach pushes teams to iterate in rapid cycles as they concentrate on achieving their performance objectives. Targeted professional development and just-in-time performance coaching support the teams in developing the skills needed to address challenges and overcome obstacles (*Exhibit 1*). The whole process, including an initial planning phase and a retrospective at the end of the work, takes approximately four months.

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### Exhibit 1 BREAKTHROUGH TEAM APPROACH EXECUTION PHASE



Source:  
District Management Group.

### Philosophy and Key Concepts

Central to the Breakthrough Team Approach is the performance challenge, which provides the vehicle for practicing and learning leadership skills. The short time frame creates focus and urgency, motivating teams to innovate, iterate, and, if necessary, pivot in rapid cycles in order to achieve their goals. The power of peer-group dynamics is also an important component of the Breakthrough Team Approach. The cross-functional makeup of the teams fosters collaboration within each team, while launching multiple teams at the same time creates momentum; teams go public with their goals and feel accountable to their team while developing a healthy sense of competition among the cohort. And, rather than teaching about leadership through instruction in standard professional development sessions, the Breakthrough Team Approach delivers in-the-moment professional development and supports teams with coaching to help team members apply these learnings to address challenges and overcome obstacles.

### Performance Challenge: The Gateway to Leadership Development

As the structural foundation to the Breakthrough Team Approach, the performance challenge calls upon participants to commit to an outcome, to aspire to change,

**Like the heroes of Hurricane Harvey, breakthrough team members do not have the luxury of waiting; they are committed to achieving rapid results, which creates urgency and focus.**

and to achieve a result. Staff are empowered to formulate a goal that draws upon the district's broader vision yet is laser-focused, relevant to their individual experience, and important in its impact. Providing a breakthrough team with the autonomy to determine this goal is vital to the performance challenge. This earnest request for staff members "on the front lines" to pursue a goal relevant to them (and their organizations) is invigorating.

Each team takes an overarching organizational goal and breaks it down into components that are highly specific and relevant to the team members. For example, reducing chronic absenteeism across a district by 20% can feel like a large, daunting goal. However, a breakthrough team may target a particular school, student population, or area of need in order to make this goal specific, measurable, and relevant to the individuals charged with achieving it. Success with this discrete, specific goal builds confidence and momentum. In addition, the winning solution that leads to success on this targeted challenge can help to identify a model for addressing the issue more widely.

How is this specific goal created? Once an overarching goal is selected, each team is challenged to design a specific goal that is smaller in scope and relevant to their work, but that will ensure progress toward the overarching goal. They then conduct a root cause analysis, with guidance from DMGroup performance coaches and experts, using the Five Whys methodology. Often, initial solutions are directed at solving the symptoms of a problem, rather than tackling its root causes. To achieve success, each team must begin by taking the time to clearly identify the root cause of its challenge. Once this is achieved, the team can then develop a Specific, Measurable, Aggressive yet Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) goal.

### **Rapid Cycle Time: Creating Focus and Urgency**

Setting a short time frame for achieving the goal is key to creating the focus and urgency needed to drive results. To achieve the goal so quickly, breakthrough teams learn

to experiment and iterate in short cycle times. This same concept is leveraged in the Lean Startup methodology<sup>5</sup> and Agile methodology, used so successfully in software and product development. For the breakthrough teams, the 10-week time frame for achieving their performance challenges is daunting at the outset, but, in the face of such a tight deadline, the teams quickly transition to action. Each team creates a roadmap for achieving its goal over the short time period, and required weekly progress monitoring provides the feedback needed to keep the team on track toward achieving its goal. Informed by this weekly progress monitoring, breakthrough teams begin the cycle of reacting, innovating, and pivoting at a rapid pace. Like the heroes of Hurricane Harvey, breakthrough team members do not have the luxury of waiting; they are committed to achieving rapid results, which creates urgency and focus, driving innovation and creativity.





## Coaching Guides Performance

Meeting a performance challenge in 10 weeks is, as its namesake indicates, a challenge. Therefore, each breakthrough team works with a coach who helps guide them throughout the process. The coach is not necessarily a domain expert, but has the ability to guide the team to develop the leadership and management skills needed to overcome any obstacles.

For example, during one breakthrough team's performance challenge, the team identified a particular district resource that could support its ability to regularly monitor students' math performance. However, in previous years, members of the team had been unable to gain access to this tool despite repeated requests. While the coach could have gone directly to a district leader to remove this barrier, the coach viewed this as an opportunity to build capacity within the team, and worked with the team to clearly articulate the need and outline the appropriate communication plan. The coach then ensured that the team members connected with the appropriate person within district leadership, and followed up to make sure that the conversation was productive. The coach's guidance was instrumental not only in helping resolve this issue, but also in developing the staff's capacity for overcoming similar challenges in the future.

Throughout the course of the performance challenge, coaches develop strong, supportive, and trusting relationships with team members and provide support for the work while ensuring that the breakthrough team retains ownership over executing the challenge. Ed Pratt-Dannals, a DMGroup coach and former superintendent of Duval County Public Schools (FL), commented, "The coach becomes a trusted advisor, who challenges the team to try unique approaches to solving challenges ... resulting in a team that works together, decides which action steps to implement, takes ownership for results, and celebrates success."

## Professional Development Builds Capacity

In addition to receiving coaching throughout the process, each team participates in explicit professional development sessions. In keeping with the spirit of empowerment inherent in the Breakthrough Team Approach, each team selects the topic for its professional development sessions based on the team's specific needs. The professional development can address an array of subjects: setting goals, fishbone diagrams for identifying root causes, workplanning, team building,

**Targeted professional development can immediately be put into action and reinforced.**

using data, problem solving, practicing effective time management, leadership guidance, influence mapping, etc. Some of the professional development sessions DMGroup provides include:

- Leadership and Team Accountability Systems
- Using Data to Improve Student Outcomes
- Breakthrough Team Best Practices
- SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis
- Priority Planning
- Meeting Matrix Planning
- Setting Role Expectations and Accountability Systems



After receiving training, breakthrough teams can begin implementing their learning immediately. The fast-moving nature of the performance challenge allows teams to incorporate the techniques learned via professional development into their weekly activities. Coaches ensure that team members receive continued support and reinforcement as they develop the skills introduced in these sessions.

Districts frequently struggle to provide meaningful professional development opportunities. Given the narrow focus and makeup of a breakthrough team during the performance challenge, districts can leverage

this opportunity to provide targeted professional development that can immediately be put into action and reinforced.

### Peer-Group Dynamics Propel Learning

Before launching the breakthrough teams, the district and DMGroup put significant work into selecting candidates for the teams, with an intentional effort to create cross-functional groupings. Each team consists of five to six members and a team leader, all of whom have daily exposure to the overarching question from an administrative, operational, or academic perspective. Team members are specifically selected based on their eagerness to learn and their openness to innovate and work collaboratively.

The Breakthrough Team Approach relies upon the team functioning as a unit; the goal is significant enough that the team cannot succeed based on the performance of any one person. Through consistent communication and problem solving, the breakthrough team works together to develop a concrete approach to overcoming intra-team challenges. As teams progress through the performance challenge, mutual accountability organically emerges. Individual breakthrough teams also interact with other teams and come to rely on each other for fruitful collaboration and friendly competition. Several breakthrough teams might be working on different pieces of the same overarching district goal and can share what they learn and provide inspiration to one another. For example, one school's barriers to improving ninth-grade ELA proficiency may be different from another's. Yet, the Breakthrough Team Approach develops a peer network in which breakthrough teams will observe the outcomes achieved by other teams. Participants come to understand that, despite their different paths, tangible outcomes are possible. This friendly competition also creates momentum. Generating different strategies to tackle a specific problem can help unearth strategies that can have broader applicability in achieving the overarching goal.

DMGroup's Breakthrough Team Approach for schools and school districts intertwines these components—the performance challenge, rapid cycles, coaching, tailored

professional development, and peer-group dynamics—to create a process that unlocks the potential that exists within schools and districts.

### The Breakthrough Team Approach: Effective at Driving Change for Public Education

The Breakthrough Team Approach is a particularly effective way to unlock leadership capacity and drive change in public education.

Schools and school districts have a plethora of challenges before them. Districts face an environment of constrained resources, rising student needs, and increasingly rigorous standards. Since the Great Recession, both state and local funding have declined across the country; simultaneously, districts have been faced with rising populations of students with special needs, students with social-emotional needs, students eligible for free and reduced lunch, and English Language Learners. The challenges of serving all students' academic and social-emotional needs in a tight resource environment are compounded by the rigorous standards required by the comprehensive school quality indicators established as a result of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

With myriad challenges to address, districts must rely upon the resourcefulness, ingenuity, and collaboration of staff now more than ever. The Breakthrough Team Approach's promise for public education lies in its efficacy in addressing key barriers that often prevent districts from fully leveraging the capacity of their staff.

- **Staff is overextended, but their potential is under-tapped.**

The nation's teaching force has been growing in recent years, which provides an opportunity for districts to tap into the enthusiasm and energy of new staff. But many staff who enter the profession ripe with ideas and passionate about changing their students' lives quickly come to feel overextended by their workload and feel that there

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## The Breakthrough Team Approach focuses on weekly measurements toward a clear, measurable goal, which fosters clarity, motivation, and results.

is limited opportunity to implement their ideas. Attrition in the profession is, in fact, very high, at approximately 8% per year.<sup>6</sup> In many districts and schools, decisions tend to come from the top down; solutions are often prescriptive, with limited opportunities for staff to contribute their ideas. The Breakthrough Team Approach seeks to engage these team members to help craft solutions, drive impact, and lead change.

- **Performance measurements tend to occur on an annual basis, limiting opportunity for correction and dampening motivation.**

With the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and now ESSA, accountability plays a dominant role in the public education dialogue. However, measuring and achieving outcomes in the nation's schools remain a complex and nuanced challenge. Federal and state standards outline annual performance metrics, but districts must identify how to measure incremental performance in order to help educators continuously improve practice throughout the school year. Schools often measure and define success based on activity-centered initiatives instead of results-driven improvement

processes. The outcomes of these activities may not be considered until the semester or year-end attendance rates and standardized test scores are reported, for example, at which point, tying results to specific actions may be impossible. The feedback, opportunity for correction, and accountability and motivation that measurement provides are often not in place. By contrast, the Breakthrough Team Approach focuses on weekly measurements toward a clear, measurable goal, which fosters clarity, motivation, and results.

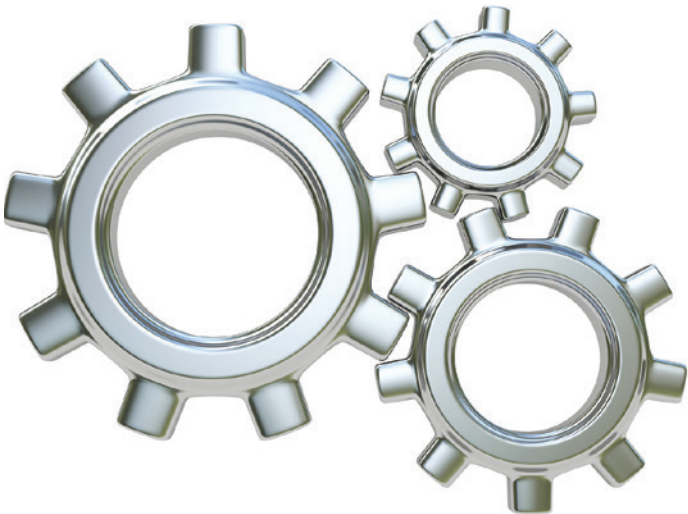
- **Collaboration is a luxury, rather than a necessity.** Leveraging the collective experience and skillsets of staff is challenging to most organizations. In school districts, significant structural barriers inhibit collaboration even though collaboration has been proven to be of value. Approximately 90% of teachers report that collaboration is helpful, according to a study on the impact of teacher collaboration conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan and Vanderbilt University.<sup>7</sup> Even more significantly, the study highlights that “instructional teams engaged in better collaboration also have higher achievement gains in math and reading.” Collaboration is not only an issue among teachers. District staff is organized by function, subject, or building; in many districts, work is so siloed that only the superintendent can get an overall picture of both academics and operations. The Breakthrough Team Approach seeks to break down these silos and encourages cross-functional collaboration to meet a goal.

The Breakthrough Team Approach can help overcome the barriers endemic to the structure and functioning of school districts. Because they are cross-functional, breakthrough teams are structured to break down silos and promote collaboration. With weekly measurements of progress and a 10-week measurable goal, the performance challenge creates feedback, focus, and urgency. By asking staff to come up with solutions, the teams make participants feel engaged and motivated. Rather than receiving





top-down solutions, breakthrough team members are invited to share their ideas, test them, iterate, and develop solutions to the challenges they know all too well. They feel valued and develop greater capacity as they learn leadership and management skills through coaching and targeted professional development. DMGroup has found the Breakthrough Team Approach to be particularly well-suited to overcoming the barriers to change and innovation that exist in schools and school systems. It has proven a powerful method of delivering results for the district while developing leadership and management capacity and unlocking the potential of staff in the district.

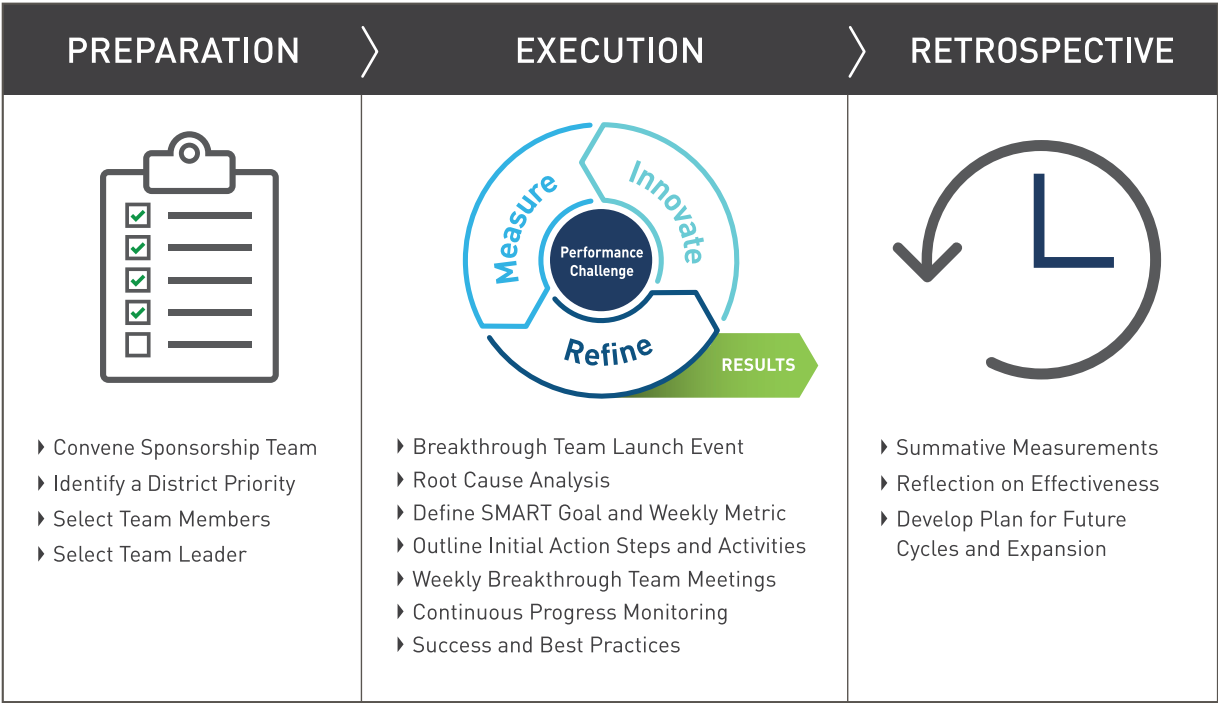


### The Implementation Process

So, what does the Breakthrough Team Approach look like when implemented in your school or district? DMGroup’s Breakthrough Team Approach takes approximately four months from start to finish. There is generally a preparation phase, typically one-month long, during which DMGroup strategizes with the district about objectives and sets the stage. Then the breakthrough teams are launched, and the 10-week process begins. It is capped off with a retrospective.

Often, districts will be so pleased at the number of teams that have reached their performance goals that they will choose to engage in additional 10-week iterations. They want to keep the existing teams intact to maintain their momentum and pursue further successes, and they often choose to enroll new teams in this approach. Below, we outline a clear picture of how the Breakthrough Team Approach is implemented (*Exhibit 2*).

*Exhibit 2* BREAKTHROUGH TEAM APPROACH PROCESS



Source: District Management Group.



## Preparation Phase: Preparing for the Performance Challenge

Prior to launching the breakthrough teams, district leaders convene to identify an “executive sponsor” and a sponsorship team. The executive sponsor is ultimately in charge of the overall effort. This person is often the superintendent, but can instead be the head of an operational unit. For example, if the school district is working to improve on-time arrival of buses, the head of transportation might be the executive sponsor; or, if the district is working to increase enrollment and attendance, the executive sponsor could be the head of enrollment services. The key is to identify a senior leader who has responsibility for the work and has the stature within the organization to help the breakthrough teams realize their goals. The executive sponsor is supported by a sponsorship team of three to five administrative and instructional leaders. This group helps to provide oversight of the effort. Typical responsibilities and expectations of the sponsorship team include identifying the district priorities for breakthrough teams to focus on, selecting participants for the breakthrough teams, monitoring progress, providing support, and driving action.

The executive sponsor and the sponsorship team begin by selecting the priorities for the breakthrough teams to address. These priorities may or may not be driven by the district’s strategic plan, but they should draw upon the district’s instructional, operational, or financial priorities. After identifying the priority or priorities of focus for the breakthrough teams, the sponsorship team, with the support of DMGroup, will select the breakthrough team members.

It is critical that the sponsorship team identify individuals who play a part in influencing the outcomes of a particular priority on a daily basis, rather than only selecting central office leaders who are responsible for the district-level policies. The success of the

Breakthrough Team Approach hinges on involving staff members who are deeply involved in the work on a daily basis and thus may bring a different point of view to the issue. When seeking to address chronic absenteeism, for example, a breakthrough team may include not only attendance counselors but a teacher who experiences consistent tardiness or absenteeism in his or her first-period class, whose involvement and insights may benefit the team. The sponsorship team will also designate a team leader for each team, selected based on his or her reputation as a respected contributor and effective and organized communicator; the role of team leader offers the opportunity to grow and develop significant leadership abilities. After the breakthrough team members are selected, DMGroup will facilitate an introductory conversation between the sponsorship team, breakthrough teams, and DMGroup coaches to preview the Breakthrough Team Approach.

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Once breakthrough teams are in place and positioned to launch, the sponsorship team’s role becomes one of oversight and support. Sponsorship teams can monitor each team’s weekly progress through a DMGroup-developed data dashboard. At three distinct points during the performance challenge, the sponsorship team

will lead check-ins with the breakthrough team leaders to discuss performance and assist in accessing resources or navigating organizational complexities.

## Execution Phase: Racing to Outcomes

### Breakthrough Launch

As breakthrough team members enter the classroom, conference room, or auditorium on the morning of the launch, they mingle with colleagues from across the district while waiting to embark on this journey. The room is typically abuzz with a mixture of excitement, skepticism, and uncertainty. Participants can sense that they are engaging in something new and different, that they are there to address a significant priority for the district, and that they are in it together.

During the breakthrough launch, all the teams learn together about the philosophical underpinnings of the Breakthrough Team Approach as well as the logistical processes and expectations. The teams meet with their performance coaches and participate in relevant team-building activities. After a comprehensive review of the components of the Breakthrough Team Approach, the breakthrough teams separate from the district cohort and begin to work.

- **Conduct a Root Cause Analysis:**

Breakthrough teams are required to think specifically about the priority of focus chosen by the sponsorship team as it relates to their day-to-day work. To deeply explore the issue, team members will push one another to identify the root cause of the problem by asking a series of “why” questions—the Five Whys Approach. As team members delve deeper into each level, they ask one another, with guidance from their coaches, to support their assertions with data. While it is sometimes a frustrating exercise, successfully conducting a root cause analysis ensures that the team is not addressing a symptom but the true root cause of the problem. This positions the team to develop a strong SMART goal.

- **Define a SMART Goal and a Weekly Metric:**

Developing a strong SMART goal for the 10-week period consumes a large portion of a team’s time and effort during the breakthrough launch. Even teams with experience in SMART goal creation

## The Breakthrough Team Approach: A Variety of Applications

DMGroup’s Breakthrough Team Approach builds leadership capacity while addressing important district challenges. Over the years, DMGroup has launched over 100 teams that have used this approach to successfully address a wide range of challenges. Examples include the following:

- **Literacy in early childhood education:**

At one early childhood education center, the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency in one of the district’s language and literacy measures, Comprehension of Age-Appropriate Text, increased from 70% to 80%.

- **Student attendance:** In one school, 32 of 47 selected students with attendance rates between 80% to 89% successfully attended at least 41 of 44 days of school, achieving 92% attendance or greater.

- **School safety:** Incidents at lunchtime were reduced by 30% across six high schools over the course of a 10-week period, compared to the same time frame in the previous school year.

- **Information technology:** Server backups were reconfigured at 10 schools to run on a routine basis over 15 weeks.

- **High school math:** Seventy-five math students in grades 9 to 11 who scored Level 0 on the teacher-made linear equations pre-assessment successfully scored Level 2 or greater on the post-assessment.

The Breakthrough Team Approach has also been used to successfully address issues in food and nutrition services, labor relations, athletics, human resources, adult education, operations, facilities management, finance, ELL, transportation, parent engagement, math, ELA, science, and social studies.

can struggle to develop a goal for a 10-week challenge. A strong SMART goal draws upon the root cause analysis to create a laser-focused goal, highlighting the current state of performance and the desired future state. Because the goal must be aggressive yet achievable within the 10-week period, it can be challenging for a new team to define. Coaches will guide each team to create a clear, outcomes-driven performance goal that will stretch the team but also be achievable. Once the SMART goal is defined, teams identify or develop a metric to measure each week's progress.

- **Outline Initial Action Steps and Activities:**

Finally, breakthrough teams conclude this intellectually rigorous breakthrough launch day by brainstorming their first iteration of activities to drive performance and assigning initial action steps to specific team members.

After this one-day launch, the work begins. Often, during the first three weeks of the performance challenge, teams will express frustration. Struggling to adjust to a mindset of rapid problem-solving in pursuit of near-term outcomes, one participant exclaimed, "This doesn't work in education. This will never work."

## Weekly Progress

The sponsorship team and DMGroup support breakthrough teams as they develop a familiarity with the Breakthrough Team Approach and its weekly processes, which include:

- **Breakthrough Team Meetings:**

All breakthrough team members and coaches meet together once a week for an hour. Sponsorship teams, working with school administrations, ensure that all team members are freed up to make this happen. This is

one opportunity to discuss weekly progress, successes, challenges, "breakthrough" moments, and a plan for the week ahead.

- **Progress Monitoring:**

In preparation for weekly meetings, breakthrough team members measure progress in relation to their weekly metric. This progress is uploaded into a data dashboard to share performance within the team and across the district.

- **Successes and Best Practices:**

Each week, teams receive a districtwide update. Performance coaches share successes and best practice strategies from all breakthrough teams in the cohort to build momentum.

- **Other Performance Challenge Processes:**

During the 10-week cycle, teams hold three meetings with their sponsorship team, a number of targeted professional development sessions, and one official one-on-one coaching session for each member.

Once teams become accustomed to this weekly regimen, they begin to identify the strategies leading to success and have the confidence to pivot from those which do not. Four weeks after one participant declared that "this will never work," that same participant's team improved upon the number of its most chronically absent students attending five out of five days of school per week from 24 to 35 students.

In the final weeks of the performance challenge, with the date of completion rapidly approaching, breakthrough teams are energized to achieve their goals. Participants have struggled and collaborated, iterated and held one another accountable, and ultimately find they have altered their mindsets.

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## Retrospective Phase: Accomplishing Goals and Planning for the Future

Once the 10-week performance challenge is complete, teams conduct a final, summative assessment to determine whether they have achieved their SMART goals.

During this retrospective, they reflect on what went well and what could have gone better. This meeting is a safe zone where participants are encouraged to reflect honestly. Facilitated by the coach, the team is encouraged to embrace a growth mindset and spirit of continuous improvement. In DMGroup's experience with almost 100 teams, most teams come to the retrospective meeting feeling energized and eager to continue their work beyond this 10-week period.

Upon reporting their successes across the district, the community celebrates the efforts of the breakthrough teams. Many districts choose to embark on additional 10-week cycles. They want to maintain the momentum of the teams and often add additional teams. Reflecting on a second 10-week cycle, a coach commented, "The process becomes a deepening of expertise, questioning, and analysis the second time around. It's fascinating and exciting to watch. The challenge becomes more and more transformational as the team moves from managing the transactional components of the process to its becoming a new habit, routine, and way of operating."

## Conclusion

Faced with an ever-rising array of student needs, increasingly rigorous standards, and constrained resources, districts are challenged to meet their all-important mission of educating our nation's students. With no large new sources of funding and no magic bullets in sight, district and school leaders must somehow find a way to achieve more with their existing resources. Perhaps the largest untapped resource in schools and districts are the skills, talents, creativity, and energy of their people. However, the structure of schools and districts often get in the way of unlocking this potential.

At DMGroup, we believe the Breakthrough Team Approach is particularly well suited to overcome the barriers that stand in the way of unlocking the potential that exists within districts. The approach empowers staff to address the challenges they encounter in their day-to-day work. They are asked to share their ideas and collaborate with others. They are asked to test their ideas, innovate, refine their ideas, and even pivot to other ideas in order to find a solution to the challenge. They are challenged to take a discrete piece of a problem and address it with urgency and focus. Along the way, they are armed with skills to help them in this journey and beyond.

The Breakthrough Team Approach is a way of unlocking the incredible human potential that exists all around us. The tremendous capacity displayed by the heroes of Hurricane Harvey needs to be accessed in school districts on a regular basis. The future of our students and the future of our nation are at stake. We urge you to think about the methodology of the Breakthrough Team Approach and seek to use some of these techniques to unlock the potential of your staff in order to drive improvement in your district. ♦

## NOTES

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