



## **Nebraska Unfinished Learning Series Grades 6-12 Community of Practice**

### **Session 1: Defining our Approach to Addressing Unfinished Learning**

#### **Sarah's Story**

Sarah and her family moved to Omaha, Nebraska, from Little Rock, Arkansas in 2007 when Sarah was five and a half. Sarah started kindergarten at her new school halfway through the year. She loved coming to school and arrived every day excited to learn. Her favorite part of the day was when Ms. Barnsby, her kindergarten teacher, read-aloud and during this time, Sarah often raised her hand to answer questions about what was happening in the book. During the end of the year benchmarks, Ms. Barnsby was concerned because Sarah was behind her peers in mastering foundational skills, as she did not yet know all her letters and the sounds that they made. When she spoke with her colleagues, the reading specialist told her it was likely because Sarah moved halfway through the year, and she'd likely develop that skill over time. However, Sarah continued to show a need with phonemic awareness and decoding as the years progressed. Noticing Sarah's reading challenges and wanting her to feel more successful, her 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers at Brightwood Elementary School made sure to give Sarah lower-Lexile versions of the texts being assigned in class and also provided her with additional time on the school's computer-based reading program during her literacy block.

When assessed in 5th grade, Sarah was identified to be at an instructional level L, reading approximately three grade-levels below her average-achieving peers. When she read aloud, she often made mistakes sounding out words with simple patterns, and her reading was very choppy. When the teacher asked her questions about the text, Sarah often got the answers incorrect, or didn't answer the question at all. Her teachers wanted to ensure Sarah could read by the time she got to middle school, so for the next two years, Sarah was pulled out of the second half of core ELA to receive the school's reading intervention. During this



time, she worked on a computer-based reading program at her level with support from the reading interventionist.

Sarah is now in eighth grade at Brightwood Middle School. She is trending towards earning Ds and Fs on her end of year report card and feels a sense of dread about the academic demands she will face as a high school freshman since she is reading at a 3rd grade level according to the school's leveled reading program. Sarah received intensive support from well-intentioned teachers over the last five years of her education, so why isn't she ready?

## Let's Discuss!

### **In breakout groups, consider:**

- What actions did the teachers take to support Sarah?
- What about "Sarah's Story" feels familiar to you? How/when have you seen this play out in your school?



### **Why isn't Sarah ready?**

- What actions did the teachers take to support Sarah?
- What about "Sarah's Story" feels familiar to you? How/when have you seen this play out in your school?

### Snapshots from The Opportunity Myth

## Opportunity Myth Snapshots

- **Count off by 6**
- **3 min:**
  - **Review** your assigned snapshot from the Opportunity Myth and write a one-sentence summary
- **5 min:**
  - Share your summary with your group and discuss what it means for your work

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### Snapshot #1

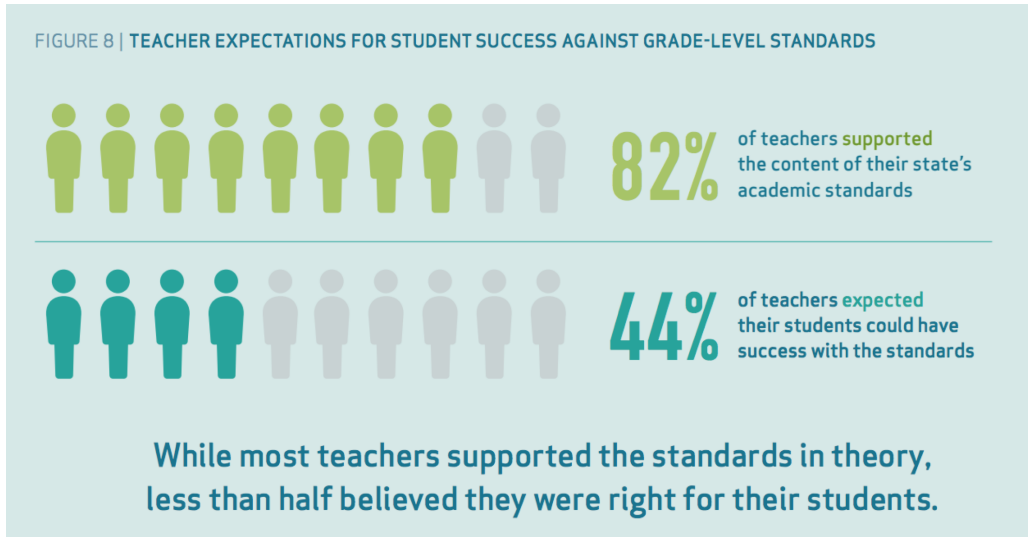
Students' perceptions of their teachers' beliefs also aligned to stronger academic outcomes. Students who agreed that their teachers "think it's important that they learn a lot" did better on all assignments than students who did not think their teachers held this belief. On assignments that were standards-aligned, where students were stretched to do their very best thinking, students who agreed with this statement about their teachers' beliefs met the bar 54% of the time, compared to 38% of the time for students who did not.

**Write your one-sentence summary of this snapshot below**



In classrooms where we observed more grade-level assignments, we also found that students met the bar on those assignments more often than not, even though the bar was higher. When students were tasked with assignments that were appropriate for their grade, they met the demands of those assignments a little more than half the time. That was true of students in nearly all groups—regardless of race or language background. It was also true in nearly all types of classrooms, including those that are often identified as “high-need.” In all of these classrooms, students were more likely than not to have success on assignments that were grade-appropriate—when they were given the opportunity to try.

### Snapshot #3



When this mindset translates into choices about content and instruction—and into the messages those choices send to students—it makes a meaningful impact on students' school experiences and outcomes. When teachers have low expectations, it may also contribute to a mismatch between the grades students bring home and their actual mastery of grade-level work and skills, because those grades often fail to reflect their success on work that is appropriately challenging. While nearly two-thirds of students across our partner districts earned As and Bs over the last few years, far fewer met the grade-level bar set by their state's standardized assessments. In one partner district, less than 20 percent of B students did so.

**Write your one-sentence summary of this snapshot below**

### Snapshot #4



Compared to classrooms containing mostly (>50%) students of color, classrooms with mostly white students tended to receive:

**1.5x MORE** grade-appropriate assignments

**3.6x MORE** grade-appropriate lessons

Compared to classrooms with primarily (>75%) low-income students, classrooms with primarily higher-income students tended to receive:

**2.1x MORE** grade-appropriate assignments

**5.4x MORE** grade-appropriate lessons

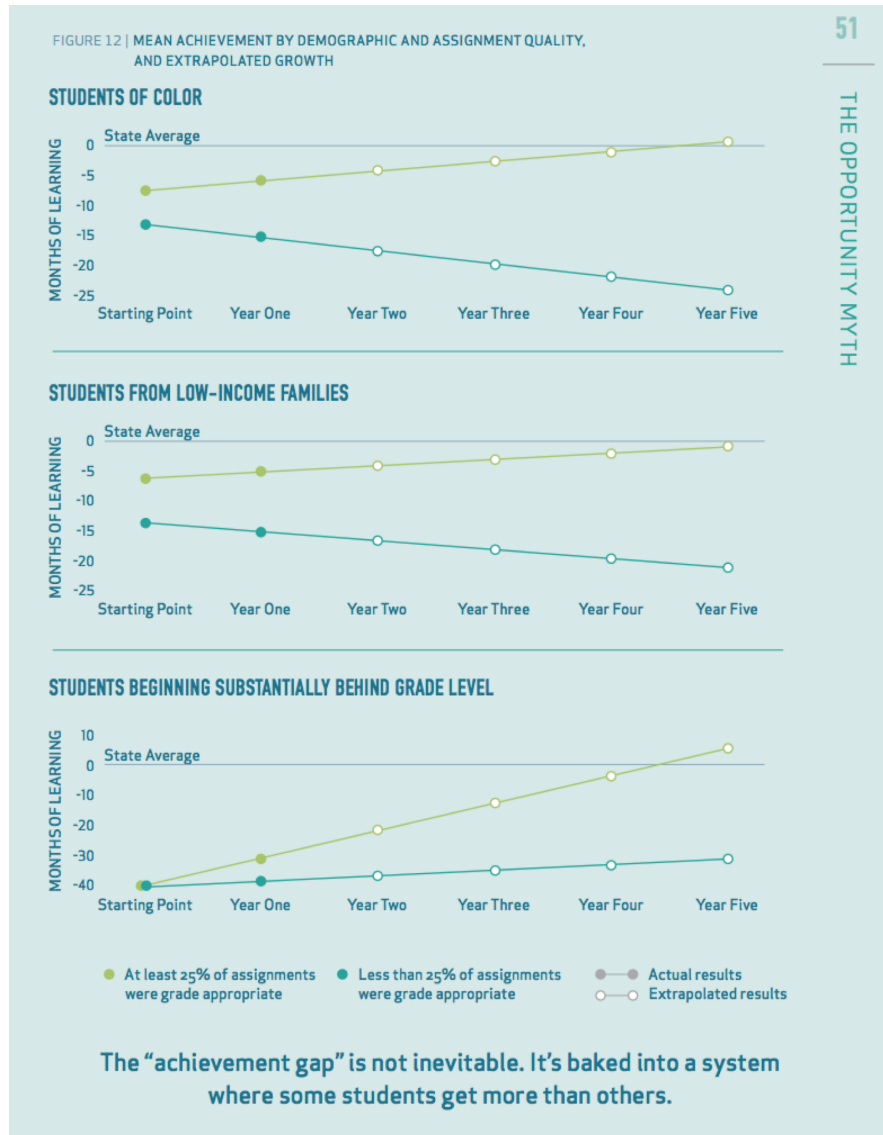
While we found that students of all backgrounds were capable of doing grade-appropriate work when given the opportunity, some groups of students were consistently given fewer of those opportunities. Students of color and those from low-income backgrounds were less likely than their white and higher-income peers to be in classrooms with grade-appropriate assignments and strong instruction. These gaps are *not* explained by the fact that a disproportionate number of students in those subgroups start the year behind grade level. It's conceivable, for example, that teachers would peg their assignments to their students' prior levels of achievement—giving a fourth grader an assignment meeting first-grade standards if that student has previously been working at a first-grade level. But that did not prove to be the case. Even when we controlled for prior academic achievement, classrooms with more low-income students, for example, had fewer high-quality academic experiences than others. Among all students who began the year with achievement above the state average, students from low-income families were in classes that typically provided grade-appropriate assignments only 20 percent of the time, compared to 30 percent of the time for students from higher-income families.

**Write your one-sentence summary of this snapshot below**

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## Snapshot #5



Write your one-sentence summary of this snapshot below



### Snapshot #6

When students who started the year off behind grade level were given more grade-appropriate assignments, stronger instruction, deeper engagement, and higher expectations, the gap between these students and their higher-achieving peers began to narrow substantially—by more than seven months of learning in a single school year based on better assignments alone. If that growth remained steady and cumulative, year after year, we can extrapolate that students who started the year behind grade level would catch up to their state average within five years. Their classrooms would not need to be perfect: In the classrooms where we saw the most growth, students worked on grade-appropriate assignments just 52% of the time (compared to 26% across all classrooms). Even raising the floor by a reasonable amount can make a meaningful difference. The “achievement gap,” then, isn’t inevitable. It’s baked into the system, resulting from the decisions adults make, consciously and unconsciously, about which students get what resources. It’s a gap of our own design.

**Write your one-sentence summary of this snapshot below**

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## **Redefining Intervention as a Continuum of Supports: Sarah's 8th grade year at Brightwood Middle School**

Ms. Yardley, Sarah's 8th grade ELA teacher completed benchmark testing in December, and noticed that Sarah had areas of unfinished learning, particularly in reading fluency (she is reading around a 3rd grade level), in reading complex grade-level words, and in comprehension (and Ms. Yardley thinks this is likely because she is still learning to read and understand the grade-level text independently).

Ms. Yardley's next unit is poetry, and although she knows that some students have read poems before, most of her students have not. Based on the trends she saw across the benchmark assessments, Ms. Yardley decides to strategically build supports into the Core ELA Curriculum in order to activate the students' background knowledge and increase their ability to read the complex grade-level text. Her goal is to enhance the students' ability to read and understand the text; not to lower the rigor of the instruction.

**Day 1 of poetry unit:** At the start of the 60 minute core ELA block, Sarah and her classmates play a brief "four corners" game that helps them activate what they already know about poetry, and then Ms. Yardley leads the class in a quick discussion about poetry. After this opening activity, Sarah follows along as Ms. Yardley reads "The Road Not Taken" aloud to the class. Ms. Yardley asks them to identify the "gist" of the poem so Sarah turns and talks to a partner and afterwards, they debrief their responses with the class. Then, Ms. Yardley asks partners to reread the poem together and identify what dilemma the poet is facing in Stanza 1. As the class reads, Ms. Yardley goes over to Sarah's table and provides another fluent read aloud of the stanza one more time before asking Sarah and her partner to read it together. As Sarah and her partner work together, Ms. Yardley asks them, "What does, "Sorry I could not travel both' mean?" and "How do you know?" and Sarah gives her responses orally, pointing out the evidence she is using to answer those questions, and then she writes it down. Then, Ms. Yardley reminds them of the focus question, "What dilemma is the poet facing?" so that Sarah and her partner can review the entire stanza and reflect on their discussion before sharing out. After 3 minutes, the partnerships share their responses with the table group, and then they debrief with the class.



After summarizing the first stanza, Ms. Yardley asks the class to reread the poem again in partnerships and this time asking the class to respond to the question, “What choice does the poet appear to make in stanza 4? How do you know?” Ms. Yardley shares that there is a tricky word in the second stanza - the word “hence,” which means “to come,” or “in the future.” She then directs the table groups to chorally read stanza 2 together and then answer the question, “In stanza 2, what words does the author use to compare the two roads? What does this tell you about them?”

She then asks partner groups to read the third stanza silently to themselves first and then aloud in groups, taking turns to read one line each. While the students are reading the stanza silently, she goes over to Sarah and asks Sarah to whisper read the third stanza to her. As she does so, she notices that Sarah misreads “trodden” and “trod” gives her feedback, then asks her to reread the sentence once more. She also gives a quick definition of “trodden” to Sarah - “it means stepped on” before the group reconvenes to discuss the focus question.

**After reading about Sarah’s experience in the classroom, identify:**

- What scaffolds does Ms. Yardley provide for **all** students?
- What scaffolds does Ms. Yardley provide **specifically to Sarah** to support her fluency and comprehension needs?
- What does this case study tell us what intervention “as a continuum of supports” might look like in the classroom, particularly for students with unfinished learning?



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Common Examples of Deficit-Based Language	
"You don't know my kids."	"I have all struggling students."
"They can't do that."	"Our IEP students can't..."
"She is never going to get it."	"That is my low group."
"He needs an easier task."	"He can't focus for that long."
"They don't have help at home."	"These students are below grade level."
"My kids aren't motivated."	"Those kids have IEPs—the Special Ed teacher deals with them"
"She is an English Language Learner, so of course she can't_____"	

**Which examples have you heard the most in your schools? How might this be problematic?**

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## Reframing Deficit Language & Mindsets

*Tonya Ward Singer*

<b>Deficit Language</b>	<b>Reframed Language &amp; Mindsets</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• our students can't...</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• some of our students are still learning to...</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• EL students can't...</li><li>• IEPs can't...</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• name specific students and the data showing exactly what they have not yet mastered or are challenged by</li><li>• we need to create more opportunities for our ELs to...</li><li>• how might we better help our SWD with...?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• my students are different...</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• some students have unique and profound challenges, but all students can learn and be successful with grade-level work with the right supports</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• poor readers / low readers</li><li>• slow group</li><li>• low group</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• students working toward reading proficiency</li><li>• students with unfinished learning in math</li><li>• students not yet reading and writing on grade level</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• he can't stay focused</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I haven't yet successfully engaged the student</li><li>• I haven't yet supported the student to build stamina for...</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>these students don't have the knowledge necessary to...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all students have some relevant knowledge and experience</li> <li>how can we find the relevant experience and connect to it?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>students aren't motivated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>we have not yet successfully motivated students to...</li> <li>how might we change our instruction to engage all?</li> </ul>

### **Key Moves for Reframing Deficit Language**

**We can practice addressing deficit-based mindsets by:**

1. **Listening and noticing** when it happens
2. **Asking questions** to understand what the person means and encouraging them to see the situation differently:
  - What do you mean by...? Can you be more specific?
  - What else could be going on here?
  - What's another way of thinking about this situation?
  - What could we be doing differently? What opportunities and supports do we need to create for students to be more successful?
  - What does the student/family bring that we can use and build on?
3. **Responding** with "I used to think/feel... Then I found out... Now I know/think/feel..." statements that push back with empathy.
4. **Providing an example** of how to reframe the language with a growth mindset, specificity, ownership, inquiry, and/or cultural relevance

## Supporting an Asset-Based Mindset

### An example conversation:

#### 1. Ask a probing question

"I noticed you said the student was a SPED student, which is why he received lower level texts. Can you tell me more about that? What are you noticing he needs support with?"

#### 2. Share your journey as a learner and advocate for assets-based thinking

"I wanted to share something I just learned called "The Opportunity Myth" about granting all students access to grade-level text, and I learned that the way we talk about our students impacts the instruction we provide... It turns out that..."

#### 3. Provide an example of how to reframe the language

"What might happen if we thought about this student as one who is approaching proficiency...how might this change the supports we offer him?"

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### Reflect on today's learning

What idea or key take-away is most important from today's learning?

What is one specific action you plan to take as a result of today's learning?

### Next Steps: Complete the Self-Assessment

Access and make a copy of the self-assessment here:

<https://tinyurl.com/ELASelfAssessment>



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