

IFL joins NSI grantees for first-year learning celebration in Baltimore



From left to right: Rosita Apodaca, Michelle Bowman, Ryan Mick, Juli Coleman, and Vivian Mihalakis

The Institute for Learning (IFL), joined by the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Urban Education and the Learning Research and Development Center partnered with the Dallas Independent School District (ISD) to serve as a network improvement hub in literacy for 14 Dallas ISD secondary schools serving predominantly African-American, Latino, and low-income students. The project is funded by a 5-year, \$7.4 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The goal of the project, led by IFL co-director [Anthony Petrosky](#), is to support teams of teachers and leadership to use improvement science methods to increase the number of students in the partner schools who are on-track for high school graduation at the end of ninth grade.

Teams of educators from the 14 schools in Dallas ISD comprise a network who meet regularly to focus on the problem of practice, identify the root causes that may be impacting student performance, and collect and study data that will best meet the students'

academic needs. English language arts and writing were selected as the focus of the project because the data show this is an area where students are struggling, and improvement in this area will transfer to other courses across subject areas. After the first year of working in the district, educators are seeing great promise in the power of the network and its impact on the classroom. To see this exciting work in action and the inspirational educators who are part of the network for school improvement in Dallas ISD, check out this [video](#) on the IFL website.

On July 16, IFL directors and fellows joined Dallas ISD leaders, Pablo Singh, Manager, ELAR & Social Studies; Arlena Gaynor Director ELAR; and Shannon Trejo, Deputy Chief Teaching and Learning, and other NSI grantees and supporters in Baltimore to celebrate learnings from the first year of experience around launching a network. The [recorded event](#) featured IFL executive director Rosita Apodaca in a panel interview along with leaders from

other NSI intermediary organizations including Dr. Juli Coleman, deputy chief of improvement, CORE Districts; Ryan Mick, vice president, School Design and Improvement, City Year, Inc.; and Michelle Bowman, associate director of communities, Learning Forward.

The panel, moderated by Vivian Mihalakis, senior program officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, discussed the importance of

context and place in supporting schools as teams of teachers, leaders, and coaches use continuous improvement practices to examine the root causes of the challenges they are tackling.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation recently released a [report](#) describing the work and progress of the 21 organizations it is funding to work with middle and high schools to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable students.

According to the report, in the next 5 years, the foundation hopes to share the following:

1. Whether schools can use the data-driven continuous improvement to drive change that improves student outcomes
2. How schools can use evidence-based solutions and adapt them to maximize their impact in a local context
3. How networks work with schools to implement a continuous improvement strategy
4. Characteristics of effective networks and intermediaries and how they support school-led efforts
5. The current capacity of networks and schools to engage in continuous improvement efforts. ■



From left to right: Tony Petrosky (IFL), Rosita Apodaca (IFL), Pablo Singh (DISD), Shannon Trejo (DISD), Sara DeMartino (IFL)