

# Busting Professional Learning Myths with RPPL

Feb. 15, 2022, 12:00–1:00 EST

**We'll begin shortly.**



CHAT your questions/comments



Your VIDEO can be on or off



Please stay MUTED until Q&As



This session is RECORDED



# Quick Introductions

In the chat, share:

- your **name**,
- your **org**, and
- **what brought you here today.**



# On Behalf of RPPL's Members ...



**Annenberg Institute at Brown University**



**Instruction Partners**



**Leading Educators**



**Teaching Lab**



**TNTP**



**UnboundEd**

# ... and Research Advisory Council ...



**Robert Berry**  
University of Virginia



**David Blazar**  
University of Maryland



**Travis Bristol**  
University of California,  
Berkeley



**Julia Cohen**  
University of Virginia



**Hunter Gehlbach**  
Johns Hopkins University



**Monica Higgins**  
Harvard University



**Constance Lindsay**  
University of North  
Carolina at Chapel Hill



**Eric Taylor**  
Harvard University



**Kirk Walters**  
WestEd



**Judith Warren Little**  
University of California,  
Berkeley



**Suzanne Wilson**  
University of  
Connecticut

# Today's Speakers



**Emily Freitag**  
RPPL Chair  
CEO of Instruction  
Partners



**Sarah Johnson**  
RPPL Vice Chair  
CEO of Teaching Lab



**Heather Hill**  
RPPL Senior  
Researcher  
Professor at Harvard  
Graduate School of  
Education and the  
Annenberg Institute at  
Brown University



**John Papay**  
RPPL Senior  
Researcher  
Associate Professor of  
Education and  
Economics at the  
Annenberg Institute at  
Brown University



**Nate Schwartz**  
RPPL Senior  
Researcher  
Professor of Practice at  
the Annenberg Institute  
at Brown University

# Overview of Today's Event

1. Introductions (5)
2. Dispelling PL Myths (30)
3. More about RPPL (10)
4. How to Join as an Affiliate (10)
5. Closing (5)



# Dispelling the Myths:

What the Research Says about Teacher Professional Learning



**Heather Hill**

RPPL Senior  
Researcher

Professor at Harvard  
Graduate School of  
Education and the  
Annenberg Institute at  
Brown University



**John Papay**

RPPL Senior  
Researcher

Associate Professor of  
Education and  
Economics at the  
Annenberg Institute at  
Brown University

# Overview

We explore common ideas that policymakers, district officials, and professional learning (PL) providers tend to hold about teacher development and PL that are either refuted by or not directly supported by research evidence. These cluster in 3 areas:

## Teacher Learning

**Myth 1.** PL is a waste of time and money.

**Myth 2.** PL is more effective for early career teachers and less effective for veteran teachers.

## Learning Focus

**Myth 3.** PL programs must be job-embedded and time-intensive to be effective.

**Myth 4.** Improving teachers' content knowledge is key to improving their instructional practice.

## Program Structure

**Myth 5.** Research-based PL programs are unlikely to work at scale or in new contexts.

**Myth 6.** Districts should implement research-based PL programs with no modifications.

## Myth 1

PL is a waste of time and money.



### Kernel of truth

Many PL opportunities, as currently instantiated, are expensive and do not lead to improvements in teacher practice or student learning.

## Reality

Evidence shows that PL can lead to shifts in teachers' skills and instructional practice with direct payoffs for student learning.



Decades of research – including robust evidence from gold-standard randomized experiments – show that effective PL programs can help teachers substantially improve students' academic and non-academic performance



Furthermore, teachers improve much more rapidly in some schools than in others, particularly schools where their development is supported by strong school leaders and better instructional feedback.



Strong PL programs that have demonstrated substantial impacts on teacher practice and student learning. For example, recent meta-analyses found substantial impacts of coaching programs (0.12 SD) and STEM PL (0.13 SD) on state student test scores.

## Myth 2

PL is more effective for early career teachers and less effective for veteran teachers.



### Kernel of truth

Teachers do improve their practice more rapidly early in their career because of substantial on-the-job learning.

## Reality

PL opportunities have been shown to support teacher development at all levels of experience.



Research relying on overly strong assumptions found that teachers stop improving after 3-5 years on the job. Recent evidence relaxes these assumptions and finds substantial growth.



Pianta and colleagues found large effects of the MyTeachingPartner PL on a sample of teachers with substantial experience (16 years, on average).



The Instructional Partnership Initiative, which paired teachers to work together in collaborative partnerships based on areas of relative strength and weakness from teacher observation ratings, found equivalent impacts for early career and more veteran teachers.

## Myth 3

PL programs must be job-embedded and time-intensive to be effective.



### Kernel of truth

Teachers must attend at least some PL in order to learn from it, and longer PL provides more time for teachers to dig deeply into content.

## Reality

Programs of varying lengths and formats can produce wide-ranging effects depending on how time gets used.



Lynch and colleagues' meta-analysis of STEM PL programs found no relationship between program duration and effectiveness. "Programs that were limited in duration nonetheless generally had positive impacts on average. ... Several programs that combined new curriculum materials with a short amount of professional development documented moderate to large impacts on student achievement. In contrast, some studies of highly-intensive professional development programs showed little or no impacts."



In her analysis of PL programs, Kennedy concluded that the core condition for program effectiveness was valuable content; more hours of a given intervention will not help if the intervention content is not useful.

## Myth 4

Improving teachers' content knowledge is key to improving their instructional practice.



### Kernel of truth

Teacher content knowledge is a key feature of teacher effectiveness. Gains in knowledge do accrue from programs focused on conveying content to teachers.

## Reality

PL programs that aim directly at instructional practices are more likely to shift student learning than PL programs with a focus on content knowledge.



In a STEM meta-analysis by Gonzalez et al, program gains in content knowledge did not positively correlate with gains in student outcomes. Gains in instructional practice did positively correlate with gains in student outcomes.



This pattern is driven by programs focused on content knowledge with only a modest practice component (e.g., Garet 2010; Garet 2016). These programs saw no impacts on student outcomes.



It is likely that successful programs improve content knowledge *in the context* of new curriculum and practices. The P-SELL curriculum, for instance, raised teachers' science knowledge and instructional practice and ELs' science achievement.

## Myth 5

PL programs are unlikely to work at scale or in new contexts.



### Kernel of truth

Program impacts do tend to be smaller when those programs are “scaled up.” We know that implementation difficulties drive some of these smaller effects.

## Reality

Programs can have positive effects across a wide range of schools, and strong implementation can help sustain effects at scale.



Recent, rigorous evaluations of several large-scale PL programs have found large average effects over a wide range of schools (e.g., Building Blocks (Clements and Sarama); Reading Recovery (May); ASSET’s Advanced Professional Development).



Districts can increase the chances that ANY program will work locally by investing school leadership in new programs and building alignment between the program and any related instructional guidance.

## Myth 6

Districts should implement research-based PL programs with no modifications.



### Kernel of truth

Poor-quality implementation is associated with weaker impacts on student outcomes.

## Reality

Practice fidelity first and adaptation with guardrails second.



Planned adaptation with “guardrails” can enhance program performance. READS (Kim) and KPALS (Fuchs) both show adaptation after an initial implementation year can advantage students.



“Troubleshooting meetings” after initial implementation can also help adapt the program to local contexts (Lynch et al).

# Questions?



Use the CHAT



Come OFF MUTE and ask



# Read all of this in our new brief!

<https://annenberg.brown.edu/rppl/dispelling-the-myths>



Professional Learning:  
Aligning the Evidence

## Dispelling the Myths:

What the Research Says About  
Teacher Professional Learning

Heather C. Hill | Harvard University & Annenberg Institute at Brown University  
John P. Papay | Annenberg Institute at Brown University  
Nathaniel Schwartz | Annenberg Institute at Brown University

Feb. 15, 2022

# So What Is RPPL Anyway?

Why We Created RPPL &  
What We're Studying This Year



**Sarah Johnson**

RPPL Vice Chair  
CEO of Teaching Lab



**Nate Schwartz**

RPPL Senior  
Researcher  
Professor of Practice at  
the Annenberg Institute  
at Brown University

# Who We Are

The Research Partnership for Professional Learning (RPPL) is a collaborative of professional learning (PL) organizations, researchers, school systems, and funders.

# What We Do

RPPL works to advance educational equity and student achievement by studying and sharing the specific features that make some PL programs more effective than others.

# Our Goals

1. **Uplift the current evidence base**
2. **Generate faster and better research on PL**
3. **Create the research and collaborative infrastructure**  
so we can get that better research into practice in  
thousands of districts, schools, and PL orgs across the  
nation
4. **Change who sets the research agenda**

# RPPL's Evolution

## Formation

1. Established concept
2. Held initial conference
3. Signed MOUs

Jan. 2020 - Mar. 2021

Mar. 2021 - Dec. 2021



## Phase II: 3-Year Chapter

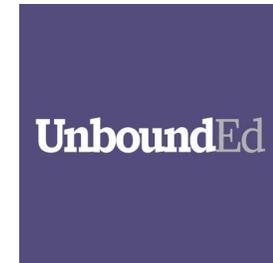
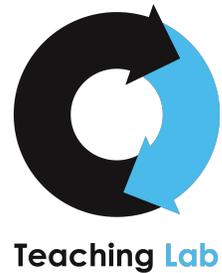
Learn things about PL through three types of research and ecosystem learning and development

Jan. 2022 - Dec. 2024

## Phase I: Planning

1. Established & launched RPPL with funding
2. Wrote our learning agenda and long-term plan
3. Conducted quick-win studies and a shared micro-study

# RPPL Member Organizations



# There Is So Much We Don't Know About PL



## Equity

What works for whom, how, in what contexts, and with what level of impact?



## Time & Format

What is the number of hours focused on a topic or delivered in a particular format that leads to impact?



## Content

What is the specific content knowledge or pedagogical content knowledge teachers should focus on to improve practice?



## Stickiness / Sustainability

What sustains impact on teacher practice and student learning *long after* the end of a professional learning engagement?



## Scale

How do we scale professional learning programs and maintain quality? (Impact declines when a program includes more than 100 teachers.)

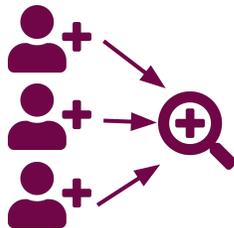
# RPPL Priority Workstreams

## Framework

### Types of Studies

#### ANCHOR STUDIES

Major, cross-organizational studies designed to gain deeper insight on a key topic of interest in the RPPL learning agenda



#### SHARED MICRO-STUDIES

Rapid learning based on repeated minor shifts to organizations' standard operating procedures in order to build quick knowledge about program design



#### CONTRIBUTING STUDIES

Organization-driven studies to take on a question of interest, both to the organization and to the broader RPPL membership



### Ecosystem Learning and Development

#### SHARED LEARNING

Learning, synthesis, and cross-organizational data analysis to understand the landscape of PL and PL research across RPPL membership

#### RESEARCH EFFECTIVENESS

Direct research technical assistance and consulting from RPPL researchers and affiliates to organizations

#### BUILDING RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

Building the infrastructure and model for research between PL organizations, researchers, state/districts, and funders

# RPPL Priority Workstreams

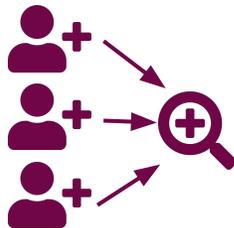
## Types of Studies

## Ecosystem Learning and Development

# Framework

### ANCHOR STUDIES

Major, cross-organizational studies designed to gain deeper insight on a key topic of interest in the RPPL learning agenda



## Anchor Study 2022–2023

How can **PL providers and districts** best use their limited support time with **teachers** around **curriculum** to build stronger instructional practice and better, more equitable outcomes for **students**?

# Questions?



Use the CHAT



Come OFF MUTE and ask



# How to Join Us

Become a RPPL Affiliate



**Emily Freitag**

RPPL Chair

CEO of Instruction  
Partners

# RPPL Ecosystem



# What's An Affiliate?

Any organization, state, or district whose work is relevant to RPPL's learning agenda and wants to stay close to the learning, put into practice relevant findings, and help advance answers to these questions.

**Criteria:** Your mission/work is relevant to professional learning; you engage in supporting PL for teachers, leaders or shaping conditions for PL.

# What Do RPPL Affiliates Get?

## Advance previews of:

- Research findings from studies conducted by RPPL members & researchers
- Landscape analyses and literature reviews on PL research
- Shared measures, tools, and resources created by RPPL members to help conduct PL research

Learning opportunities with RPPL members and researchers, such as Brown Bag Lunches (monthly discussions), topical conversations, and webinars

RPPL communications channels to share opportunities, chat, and exchange information about PL

The pathway to becoming a RPPL member org in 2023, if desired

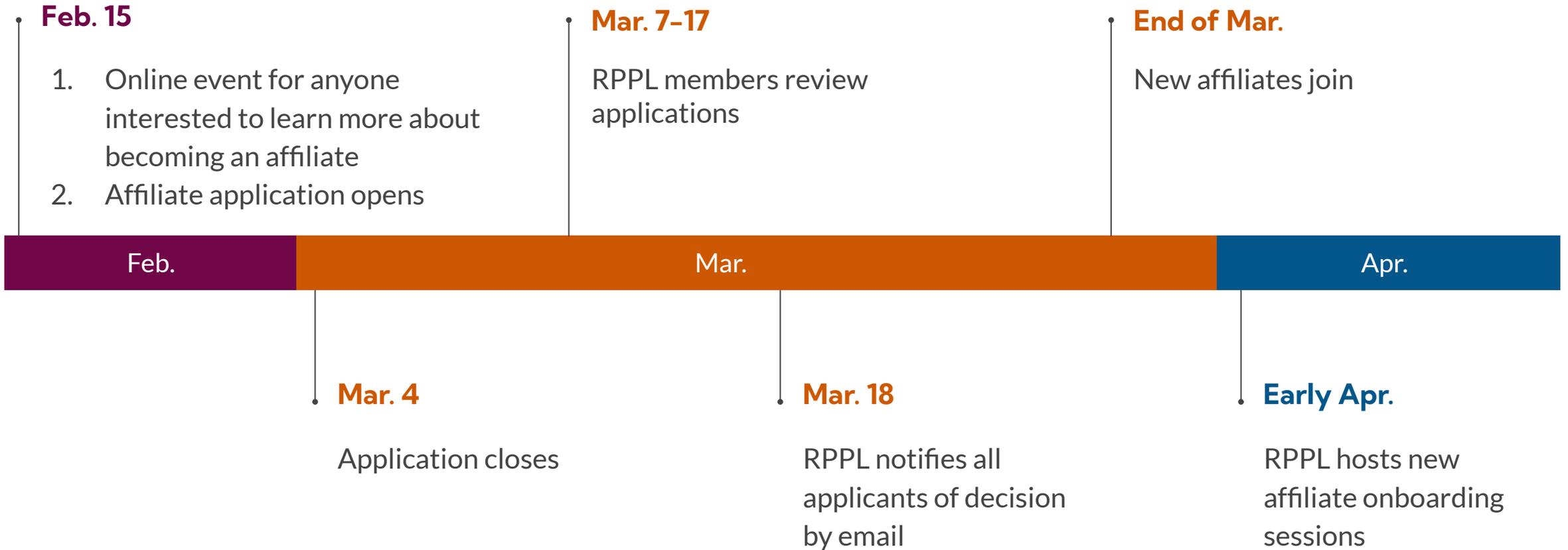
# Affiliate Commitment

Attend monthly RPPL Brown Bag Lunches and briefings; share relevant findings with your team to incorporate into practice.

Share RPPL's research findings and amplify RPPL's communications through your channels.

Share what you are learning relevant to RPPL's learning agenda.

# Timeline to Join



# Affiliate Application

Submit your application [via this Google Form](#)  
by 11:59 pm EST on Friday, March 4.

# Questions?



Use the CHAT



Come OFF MUTE and ask



# Coming by Email

1. Quick survey about today's event
2. Myth-busting brief
3. Affiliate application link
4. Recording





Research Partnership  
for Professional Learning