

# Student Agency Networked Improvement Community (NIC)

New Tech Network (NTN) schools use project-based learning to empower and challenge students to learn and succeed, to collaborate and communicate, and to engage in the world around them. A critical component of their approach is student agency, or students' capabilities to manage their own learning and be successful in school.

In 2017–18, a research team from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) worked with four NTN schools in three states to determine which teacher practices help or hinder the development of student agency, whether these practices are effective across educational contexts and with different student subgroups, and whether measures of student agency are related to measures of student learning.



## Basics of the Student Agency NIC

- Who:** 25 teachers from four schools in the Midwest
- What:** Engage in Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles to identify practices that support increased student agency.
- When:** April 2017–May 2018
- Why:** NTN teachers do not know which practices are associated with increasing student agency.
- How:** Form a NIC to collaboratively identify, implement, and measure practices designed to increase student agency.

## NIC Activities

**Teachers' aim of the PDSA cycle:** Increase student participation by May 2018 in extension and support activities designed to promote student agency.

**Main area of influence to achieve aim:** Teacher practices that increase student agency

### EXAMPLES OF SECONDARY AREAS OF INFLUENCE THAT TEACHERS ADDRESSED:



Student choice



Student voice



Student self-reflection



Feedback



One-on-one conferencing

### WHAT TEACHERS MEASURED:

**Short-term student outcomes:** Perceptions of and participation in extension and support activities; assignment revisions and resubmissions

**Long-term student outcomes:** Grades and growth mindset

### Spring 2017

- **March**  
Teacher focus groups
- **April**  
Networked improvement community launch
- **April/May**  
Developed Menu of Teacher Practices

### Summer 2017

- **Summer**  
Identification of evidence base for strategies within the Menu of Teacher Practices

### Fall 2017

- **Fall**  
Student baseline survey
- **October**  
Analysis of root problems and development of aim statement
- **December**  
Identification of areas of influence needed to achieve the aim

### Winter 2018

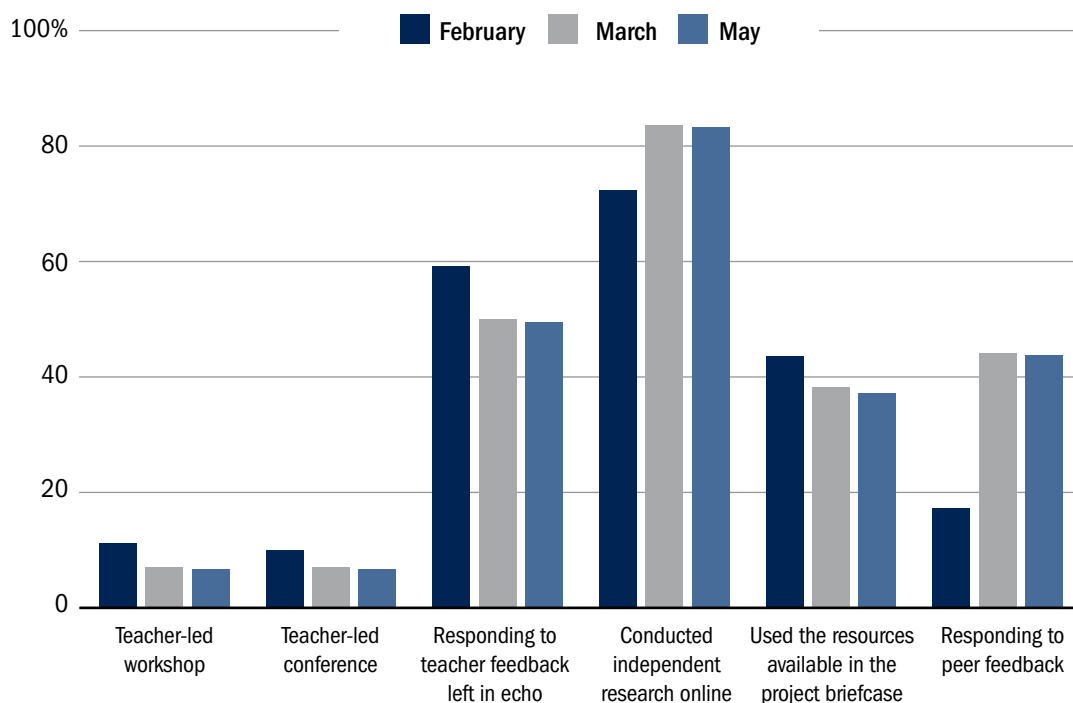
- **January/February**  
NIC discussion of change ideas and hypotheses
- **February/March**  
PDSA cycles
- **May**  
Debriefing of PDSA cycle data

# Examples of Change Ideas Tested by the NIC

**Change:** Teachers provided students with more information about tasks, as well as additional resources and feedback, so students could revise and improve assignments until mastery was achieved.

**Takeaway:** Over time, students started to see their independent work and student-led activities as contributing more to their learning than teacher-led activities.

## Percentage of Students Who Said a Resource “Contributed a Lot” to Their Learning



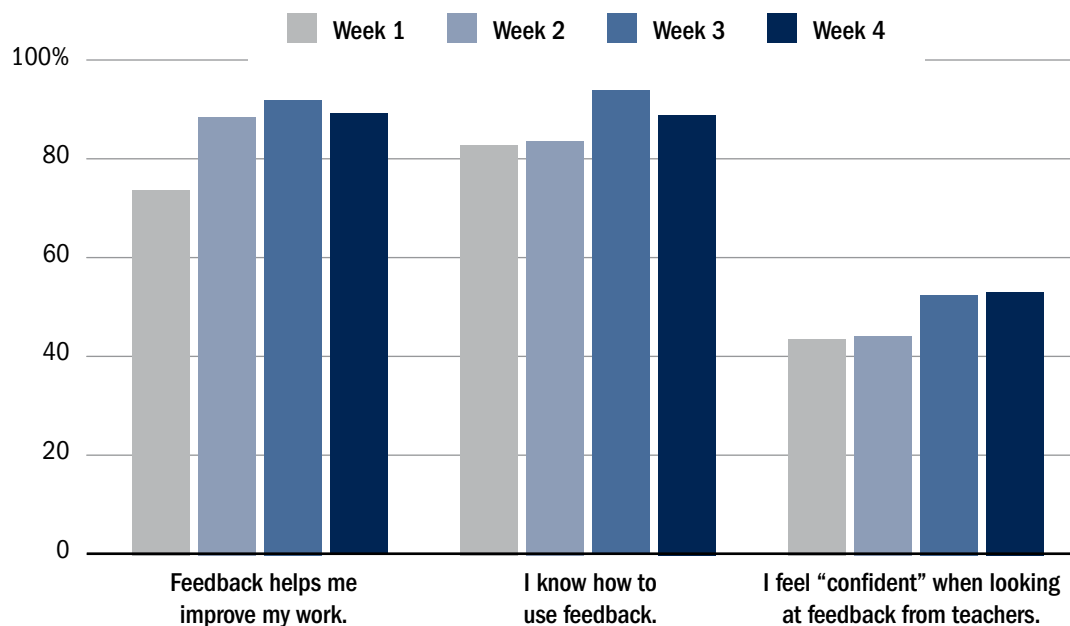
**Teacher Quote:**

“Agency really in the past ... was like this vague term that ‘Yeah, I want my students to have that.’ But this was one way that we could actually define [and] measure a specific aspect of agency that fit within the agency rubric.”

**Change:** The teacher provided students with personalized verbal feedback on assignments.

**Takeaway:** Over time, students’ views about teacher feedback as well as their understanding and levels of confidence in how to use it improved.

## Percentage of Students Agreeing With the Following Statements



**Teacher Quote:**

“We’ve looked at agency for three years, and I think the big change this year for me was moving from agency being something that we talk to kids about to being something that we attempt to facilitate and engage them with.”

## NIC Members' Reflections

"In previous years, we would talk about agency. We would say, "Oh, well, you need to have a growth mindset for...." We would tell the students, "This is what you should be doing to show agency." But I never got to use my classroom to facilitate it, and I never saw myself as a vehicle for student agency, that there were specific things that I could do that would help students show agency or scaffold that agency for them. I think the big change for me with the change idea was moving it from something that we talk about to something that we facilitate and something that we show and model for students."

"It felt manageable as we were going through the process that it was something we could hone in and we could fine tune but it wasn't overwhelming and it was exciting to see actual data to assess whether it was working or not."

"I felt like everybody got on board and was at least most of the way in agreement that's what they wanted to do. And then I like that we had set times, we knew every two weeks we were going to get back together and review things. It was really nice to have the research group with us to keep us focused. They did a great job of pointing things out and summarizing some of the things that we had sent to them. I'm hoping that we might be able to try to do that ourselves next year."

"I appreciated working with the [NIC] program to develop a change idea...so often as a teacher you end up wanting to change 20 things and you do your best at that, but you never really are able to find a good way to assess whether it was working. Whatever you have time for, you implement, whatever you don't falls off to the wayside. When we implemented this change process it was so focused. We came together as a team. We really tried to decide what it is that we truly want to change - something that's manageable, something we can collect data on, something we can look and see "did it make a difference" and we came up with a way that we could implement it all together even though we had different subject areas."

**To learn more about Networked Improvement Communities visit <http://tinyurl.com/airnetwork>.**

To learn more about student agency, visit [sclresearchcollab.org](http://sclresearchcollab.org).

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