

Good morning Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain, and members of the committee:

For the record my name is Robin VanBuren. I am currently a Vice Principal with a focus on the middle school at Faulconer Chapman School in Sheridan. I have spent 9 years in the district as a middle school teacher, teacher leader and collaboration grant manager.

In the early part of my career, I often wondered about the way the work was being done. It seemed like an endless loop of finding a solution that worked somewhere else, spending money on it and giving limited training to teachers, starting the program with a lot of enthusiasm and watching it fizzle out quickly. This process frustrated teachers and left them feeling like their professional expertise was irrelevant.

Our involvement with the Collaboration Grant and our Chalkboard Coach completely shifted how we identify, analyze, and solve problems through a systems approach that makes sense for our local context. In this process, teachers were empowered to bring their expertise to the table and collaborate with their peers to make lasting systemic changes across the district.

As one teacher leader from the work said, and I quote, "It was empowering to be able to build a system from the ground up." "Decisions were based on the question, will this improve outcomes for students?"

Gathering insight from the teachers was the first step in really building systems from a user's perspective. That work pushed us to start to see the system from the most important people in it, the students. Currently our teaching and learning team, which includes all administrators, teacher leaders and classified leaders, is in the process of conducting empathy interviews with our students of color. Our goal is to understand why the system is working for some and failing others, in order to improve it. What we learn from our students will directly impact the decisions that are made for the direction of not just one school, but an entire district.

Please support the Governor's Recommended Budget for the Educator Advancement Council, so that educators can continue the important work of building systems that make sense for their local context and puts their students at the center of the work.

Thank you,

Robin VanBuren