Supporting Individual and Group Learning for School Leaders: Minnesota Data and Assessment (MnDAL) Literacy for Leaders and Educators

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Learning Journey Journal

September 2024

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The Minnesota Data and Assessment Literacy (MnDAL) course is a series of on-demand learning modules aimed at supporting educators and leaders to use assessment and data to transform teaching and learning.

The MnDAL course is differentiated through two paths: one for teachers and one for building/district leaders. The modules within the course are grouped into strands by topic: Systems Thinking, Assessment Literacy, Formative Assessment, and Data Use. The modules within the course were developed in partnership with WestEd and made available to educators and school and district leaders across Minnesota in the fall of 2023. They can be accessed through MDE's Testing 1 2 3 website.

The MnDAL course was developed based on survey results that indicated a need for improving assessment and assessment system practices across the state.

The MnDAL modules are designed to support professional learning of both individuals and groups of learners. This Learning Journey Journal showcases the experiences of leaders engaging with MnDAL as individuals and in groups to provide some key tips for others engaging in these different contexts to help ensure success for your own learning and that of others when beginning your own learning experience.

Two Examples of Approaches to Individual MnDAL Module Learning

Individual Learning Approach #1

District Name: Ada-Borup-West District
District Type: Rural, K–12 School
District Size: Small
Region: Northwest

In a small, rural district in Minnesota, Ada-Borup-West district leadership often serve in multiple roles (e.g., one individual serving as a District Assessment Coordinator and the Curriculum Coordinator). Having multiple roles allows these leaders opportunity to consider mechanisms for and impacts of change from multiple points of view. This can be advantageous as many smaller or rural communities in Minnesota are in the early process of shifting their current assessment systems to be more equitable, comprehensive, and balanced.

One such district is currently shifting its assessment system to increase knowledge and capacity to provide evidence needed to inform educational decisions to improve student outcomes. An important first step in this process is to develop a shared understanding of data and assessment literacy across the district. The District Assessment and Curriculum Coordinator, Deanne F., who serves multiple roles, began by reflecting on her own data and assessment literacy and began looking for resources to support her own professional learning needs before developing a shared understanding at her site.

The MnDAL course gave her a chance to explore and build on her existing data and assessment literacy knowledge. Given the current capacity and size of the district, she was the only member of the district leadership team who was able to engage deeply with the MnDAL modules in the first year. This individual was able to join MDE's Community of Practice (CoP) where she had opportunities to collaborate with other leaders from around the state who were also interested in improving their assessment systems. She found this collaboration opportunity with other leaders invaluable to expand her own learning, particularly when the opportunity to work with other colleagues in her own district was not available.

During the CoP, the district leader noted how learning was different for individual users versus those who engaged as a team or group. She reflected on how different her journey might have been if she had a partner who was familiar with their site-specific context to share in the learning journey. While she felt supported in learning when engaging with the modules individually, she identified that there was power in having a partner to further discuss the learning and its application to the specific context of her site.

After reflecting on experiences as an individual learner, the district leader shared a few key tips for those just beginning their MnDAL learning journeys.

Key Tips:

- Take a learner-stance when engaging with the modules. While the ultimate goal is to locate resources to support data and assessment literacy at local sites, having a learner stance helps deepen data and assessment literacy, understand the research behind it,

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and identify and reshape preconceptions or misconceptions, resulting in being better able to support learning locally.

- Identify learning outcomes before engaging with MnDAL modules in order to discern the most relevant content to your local context. Determining what you intend to happen as a result of engaging with the MnDAL course content will help provide a focus to guide learning.

- Join a group or community to support learning. The COMPASS Community of Practice provided support that aligned with the district's ultimate goal of shifting its local assessment system to be more balanced, comprehensive, and equitable by identifying the specific modules to engage in and providing space to engage in deep conversations with colleagues working toward a common goal.

Individual Learning Approach #2

District Name: Austin Public School District
District Type: Small City, K–12 School
District Size: Small-Medium
Region: Southern

In the southern part of Minnesota, Austin Public Schools has a robust data system structure that includes regular professional learning. The district engages in both asynchronous trainings in its own learning management system and in live trainings for its staff.

When MnDAL was released, the district was interested in exploring the modules in relation to its existing professional learning. Specifically, whether the modules could be useful to help build shared learning around different assessment tools and their purposes.

At first, the district explored the modules in sequential order, moving linearly from one module to the next in a strand. As they became familiar with the modules, they quickly realized the value of thinking of MnDAL as an à la carte option with different entry points and learning pathways to support personalized learning.

Key Tips:

- MnDAL can meet learners where they are in their learning journey rather than expecting everyone to start at the same place. The modules support a wide range of data and assessment literacy and learners. New learners who may need more support

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in building their data and assessment literacy can have a different entry point into the modules than more experienced learners who may have a rich data and assessment practice and be familiar with some of the research and tools to support them.

- MnDAL modules can be explored individually, by topic rather, or with fidelity to sequence within a strand. MDE has developed several roadmaps, available on Testing 1 2 3, to help users who want to focus learning around specific topics or areas of learning.

Two Examples of Approaches to MnDAL Module Group Learning

Group Learning Approach #1

District Name: ISD 94, Cloquet School District
District Type: Alternative High School, in K-12 school district
District Size: Small-Medium
Region: Northeast

At an alternative high school in Cloquet School District in northeastern Minnesota, professional development is held at the forefront and the school engages in several strategies, including data analysis, to identify common needs across the site. The school's data analysis revealed the need for a consistent, standardized grading practice across classrooms. Recently, the alternative high school engaged in a book study on equity and grading.

As a district with a school identified for improvement under Minnesota's accountability system, the district had an existing relationship with an advocate with the Minnesota Service Cooperatives. The advocate's familiarity with the MnDAL course allowed her to identify modules that would be most beneficial for the school and provide resources to help guide the school's professional development on equitable grading. The advocate and the school leader

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met weekly to explore modules, discuss resources, and create or adjust a plan for delivering the information.

The district has dedicated time for regular, weekly professional learning in PLCs. This dedicated time has created the conditions necessary for successful ongoing group learning in an environment where staff feel supported in their exploration and investigation of complex topics. Their shared learner stance allows staff to engage in rich, thoughtful discussion and consider topics from multiple angles and contexts. It has also led to a solid understanding of where staff are in their learning journeys and the right bite size of information to explore at each session.

The district utilizes a professional learning model in which information is delivered to building leaders first and then shared by leaders at their school's PLCs. Once a month, the district's Building Leadership Team (BLT) meet to engage in their own professional development; in this case, how to implement equitable grading practices. The process involved the BLTs reviewing specific modules together, reflecting on current grading practices, and determining which module content to share with their staff at their weekly PLC meetings. The ongoing partnership and regular meetings between the MSC and district helped the district adjust its professional learning plan in response to PLC and BLT meeting feedback. This allowed for the identification of specific resources in MnDAL or additional resources in response to any issues that arose. In addition, BLTs were able to bring challenges with implementation at their sites back to the BLT meetings where they could work together to identify and overcome barriers.

The school is continuing its work on equitable grading and lessons learned is informing the rollout of this professional learning to all of the schools in their district using the same BLT-PLC model. By working in groups, learners have pushed their own learning further than as individuals.

Key Tips:

- Advocates from the Minnesota Service Cooperatives can help districts determine appropriate pathways through MnDAL, aid in developing professional learning, and identify learning outcomes.

- Ensure professional learning is ongoing and responsive to your site's needs and learning culture. Ensure that learning is focused to achieve the identified learning outcomes.

- Identify a topic that applies to your district and work with a school or small group of schools to develop and refine a professional learning experince before rolling it out district-wide.

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Group Learning Approach #2

District Name: ISD 196, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools
District Type: Suburban, K–12 School District
District Size: Large
Region: Twin Cities

A large district in the southern suburbs of the Twin Cities has a new model for data use and a revised assessment department to help support schools in using the new model. The assessment department's staff come from different backgrounds, and each member brings with them a unique perspective to their role. These unique perspectives and backgrounds have allowed the department to shift from fulfilling data requests to becoming an integral part of the district's decision-making process.

A three-member team from the assessment department engaged with the MnDAL course. They decided on an approach to learning that worked well for them. Each member completed the modules individually. Then, the team met about two weeks later to engage in a discussion about their learning. This dedicated meeting time gave the team a clear deadline by which to complete each module, prepare discussion topics, and consider how to apply learning to their own context. After meeting as a team, they joined MDE's monthly Community of Practice (CoP) meeting to engage in conversations with other district leaders across the state. They found the consistency in this routine supported learning, giving each member enough time to complete their own individual learning, expand upon that learning as a team, and be well prepared to engage in rich discussions at the CoP.

Having gone through the same learning experience as a team, they now feel well-prepared to support educators in their data use. Finding routine and having consistent professional learning over the course of the year meant they could dive deeply into relevant topics and revisit earlier learning to reinforce concepts.

Key Tips:

- Establish a learning culture with some degree of accountability at the start of learning.

- Provide time for individual learning of content before coming together as a group to discuss and deepen learning and being to think through practical application of learning for a given context.

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Conclusion

The MnDAL modules are designed for flexible use to fit the learning needs and contexts at your site. Regardless of whether you engage with the modules on your own, with a partner within your school site, or with a group outside of your site, there are some ideas that will help maximize their use. Here are some key takeaways:

- Identify learning outcomes you wish to achieve with MnDAL modules prior to engaging with them; it's helpful to have key learning topics or areas of focus.

  - Note: MDE has released Roadmaps that identify key learning topics and the modules to engage with to support learning. These roadmaps can be accessed from MDE's *Testing 1 2 3 On-Demand Learning* web page.

- Engage with the modules individually, then connect with a partner or small group to further discussions and develop shared understanding.

- Ensure learning is ongoing throughout the year and focus on small, bite-sized chunks of learning.

- The modules can be used to support learning at all levels for a personalized learning experience to meet the learner where they are at.

- Engage with the modules with a learner-stance to understand the concepts, activities, and utility in use to be better prepared to support learning at your site.

To help MN districts and schools make decisions about priority topics in the MnDAL Course, MDE and WestEd developed the MnDAL Roadmaps which identify specific topics of learning and provide a sequence or pathway of suggested modules. These Roadmaps are available on MDE's Testing 1 2 3 website. Additional roadmaps may be added as new priority topics are identified.

For more information about MnDAL and supports for learning, please contact MDE at compass.mde@state.mn.us