

Challenge:

In your own words, describe traditional thinking and systems thinking to a colleague.

Activity:

For each scenario below, craft a response for a traditional thinker and a systems thinker. While the scenarios are based on Henry County's Instructional Framework, the scenarios are fictional and do not represent what may or may not be occurring in the district.

EXAMPLE

According to Henry County's Instructional Framework, teachers use a combination of formative and summative assessment strategies. However, learning and test scores are not improving.

Traditional Response: Provide more, or perhaps fewer, assessments and make sure all of the items that are assessed are taught.

Systems Response: First consider how assessments are related to other parts of the system. Are there factors that could be affecting the assessments, ranging from student or teacher absenteeism to assessment fatigue? Next, ask questions about the assessments themselves. Do students feel the assessments represent their learning? Do students self-assess? What evidence or data is there to show that teaching practices change as a result of assessments? Is there more/less improvement in specific grades? A system thinker looks at all the components that may affect the one system of assessments.

According to Henry County's Instructional Framework, teachers participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to plan for instruction with intention. Teachers complain that nothing is achieved during PLC time, and they simply attend the sessions without accomplishing anything significant.

Traditional Response: Make PLC time longer and require documentation of what was discussed and the goals that were established. Require PLCs to hand in all documentation on a weekly basis.

Systems Response: (How do you think a systems thinker should respond?)

According to Henry County's Conditions for Learning, it is important to create a sense of belonging and provide emotionally and physically safe spaces to learn. Some teachers feel that belonging is simply about Social and Emotional Learning, and that is not part of their role or responsibility as educators.

Traditional Response:

Systems Response:

According to Henry County's Conditions for Learning, teachers should be aware of and incorporate the interests and experiences of students when teaching. Beyond an interest survey and occasional check-ins, some teachers draw very little on students' experiences. The prevailing thought among these teachers is that they are the experts.

Traditional Response:

Systems Response:

According to Henry County's Conditions for Learning, students who develop various skills (including self-awareness, communication, decision-making, social awareness, perseverance, grit, and self-management) have increased academic achievement. Students, however, have little interest in improving their assignments or working harder. Many students appear to simply want to pass the class and move on.

Traditional Response:

Systems Response:

According to Henry County's Learning Engagement Instructional Strategies, students need opportunities during the work session to be actively engaged in their learning. Despite the need for higher levels of engagement, teachers primarily teach within their comfort zones and rarely change their strategies. The prevailing thought is, "My students are doing fine, so there's no real need to change."

Traditional Response:

Systems Response:

According to Henry County's Learning Engagement Instructional Strategies, in order to deepen thinking, teachers need to ensure that they are asking the right questions and that all students are answering questions. Many students report that they do not feel comfortable asking or answering questions in class. Furthermore, the focus is on verbal responses, and few accommodations are made for students with speech disorders to fully participate.

Traditional Response:

Systems Response: