

Building Relationships in the Working Systemically Approach

In examining the characteristics of struggling schools that have made significant gains, researchers have verified what most educators already know to be true: the quality of the relationships within a school community makes a difference. "In schools that are improving, where trust and cooperative adult efforts are strong, students report that they feel safe, sense that teachers care about them, and experience greater academic challenge. In contrast, in schools with flat or declining test scores, teachers are more likely to state that they do not trust one another" (Sebring & Byrk, 2000).

Building quality relationships within a school or district community is something that takes work, time, and commitment from everyone—commitment to a collective vision; commitment to a structured process of change and improvement; and, perhaps most importantly, commitment to increased student engagement and achievement.

Building relationships is one of the five core competencies on which leaders and staff members must focus while strengthening the core components of a system. It is crucial to an effective systemic approach that school and district leaders create structures and processes that promote collaboration among all stakeholders around instructional issues. These systems and processes encourage professional conversations among the school leaders, the school staff, and leaders at the district level.

The Working Systemically approach includes a focus on relationships, encouraging individuals to have critical professional conversations with others

- within and at different levels in a school/school system;
- from other schools from which a school receives its students;
- from other schools and organizations that will depend on the success of a school's graduates;
- from organizations that provide additional community services to students; and
- from external agencies, organizations, families, and the community as a whole.



A Note from the Director

Building relationships is an ongoing and crucial element of the systemic process. Intentional focus on this competency requires time for meeting, as well as building a sense that we are all "in this together." Trust must be established before those in the system can engage in the difficult conversations often needed to achieve their desired outcomes.

From both SEDL's previous work in districts and schools and the Texas CC's work with our ESC partners, we know that working systemically is not easy. We, too, strive to be more systemic in our work as we guide others in adopting these practices. We recently held our own two-day retreat to brainstorm ways to improve and to work more systemically. We examined data about our progress to date, thought through each person's role in the work, celebrated successes, and identified processes that need to be in place to support a more systemic approach. After each professional development session we lead, we meet to debrief and discuss what went well and what needs to be changed before the next session. Our evaluators provide us with data from the clients' perspective to inform this debriefing. Meeting together on an ongoing basis to examine data and build the relationships required to discuss the changes needed to improve our work takes time, but we believe it is time well spent.

We hope that you will find information in this issue of the Texas Focus that will help you and those with whom you work build the kinds of relationships needed to support systemic improvement within your organizations and communities.

Vicki Dimock, PhD
Director, Texas CC

Developing quality relationships requires establishing respect and trust. Barth (2006) wrote, "The nature of relationships among the adults within a school has greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything else. The relationships among the educators in a school define all relationships within the school culture" (p. 8). He goes on to suggest that while congenial relationships are important, even more important—and certainly more difficult to attain—are the collegial relationships and trust that are built among colleagues while engaged in professional conversation. Barth's

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indicators of collegiality include the following practices among educators: talking with one another about practice, sharing their knowledge of their craft, observing one another while they are engaged in practice, and rooting for one another's success.

Trust is an important factor, as it provides the basis for giving and accepting constructive feedback through professional conversations. Black (1997) notes that the change process is often difficult, but a school staff that is characterized by collaboration and support for each other can make change seem somehow less difficult and threatening. In the long-term, changes find greater acceptance at a school with a healthy culture that allows teachers to express doubts and fears about changes before they are implemented.

Formal structures provide only a skeleton of a productive school. How people behave, interact, learn, and work together is what breathes life into a school (Sebring and Byrk, 2000, p. 442).

In the phases of Working Systemically, skills for building relationships are a focus from the very beginning and continue



to grow as stakeholders at all levels work together to understand the system (Phase I), analyze the system (Phase II), and plan for change (Phase III). This competency is further strengthened in Phase IV, Taking Action and Monitoring Implementation, through ongoing job-embedded professional learning in the form of the Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle (PTLC).



Upcoming Events

School Support Team Summit

As a follow-up to the June forum, the Texas CC will host the School Support Team (SST) Summit on August 25–27, 2008. The school support team training will focus on Working Systemically within districts and schools to increase student achievement.

Objectives:

- Promote coherence in technical assistance provided to Title I Schoolwide districts and schools
- Increase understanding of the phases, levels, components, and competencies that make up the Working Systemically approach to school improvement
- Increase understanding of NCLB provisions related to school support teams
- Identify and prioritize actions for using a systemic approach in implementing school support teams

The PTLC is a process for collaborative planning and implementation of curriculum that is aligned to state standards (Tobia, 2007). Building on the strategies employed in Professional Learning Communities, lesson study, looking at student work, and standards-based instruction, the PTLC provides clear direction for teachers as they work together to improve instruction. Once established, the PTLC becomes a standard way of operating that provides professional development in a collaborative, trusting environment.

At the Texas CC's recently completed cluster meetings with the ESCs, the focus was on planning for the use of the PTLC as a research-based practice for effective professional development.

References:

Barth, R. (2006, March). Improving relationships within the schoolhouse. *Educational Leadership*, 63(6), 8–13.

Sebring, P.B., & Byrk, A.S. (2000, February). School leadership and the bottom line in Chicago. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(6), 440–443.

Protheroe, N., Shellard, E., & Turner, J. (2003). *A practical guide to school improvement: Meeting the challenges of NCLB*, (pp. 106–109). Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.

Tobia, E. (2007, April). The professional teaching and learning cycle: Implementing a standards-based approach to professional development, *SEDL Letter*, 19(1), 11–15.



Resources

Comprehensive Content Centers

Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center (AACC)

Stanley N. Rabinowitz, Director

The Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center is housed at WestEd in San Francisco, California.

<http://www.aacompcenter.org/cs/aacc/print/htdocs/aacc/home.htm>

National High School Center

Joseph Harris, Interim Director

The National High School Center is housed at the American Institutes for Research in Washington, DC.

<http://www.betterhighschools.org/>

Center on Innovation and Improvement

Sam Redding, Director

The Center on Innovation and Improvement is housed at the Academic Development Institute in Lincoln, Illinois.

<http://www.centerii.org/>

Center on Instruction (COI)

Angela Penfold, Director

The Center on Instruction is housed at the RMC Research Corporation in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

<http://www.centeroninstruction.org/>

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

Sabrina Laine, Director

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality is housed at Learning Point Associates (LPA) in Naperville, Illinois.

<http://www.tqsource.org/>

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

Lessons Learned: New Teachers Talk About Their Jobs, Challenges and Long-Range Plans

Issue No. 1

They're Not Little Kids Anymore: The Special Challenges of New Teachers in Middle and High Schools

<http://www.ncctq.org/publications/LessonsLearned1.pdf>

Issue No. 2

Working Without a Net: How New Teachers from Three Prominent Alternate Route Programs Describe Their First Year on the Job

<http://www.ncctq.org/publications/lessonslearned2.pdf>

This is a report published by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) and the Public Agenda and is based on a research survey which included 641 first-year teachers who spent their first year teaching in the nation's high schools and middle schools. The survey explored the differences between elementary and secondary levels in the following areas: teacher motivation for coming into the profession, their opinion on their level of preparation, their level of satisfaction with mentoring and support as a new teacher, the challenges of teaching in a high-needs school, their ideas on improving the teaching profession, and the importance of teacher salary. This study has implications for improving the way new teachers are prepared, mentored, and supported in our high schools and middle schools. "While majorities of all new teachers say they are generally satisfied with their administrators and fellow teachers, new high school and middle school teachers are significantly less content." Just a quarter (26%) say they get excellent advice from fellow teachers on lesson plans and teaching techniques, compared with 39% of elementary school teachers. New secondary teachers are also less satisfied with the administrative support they get, such as adequate resources (32% of secondary teachers compared to 50% of elementary teachers) and instructional leadership and guidance (30% of secondary teachers compared to 46% of elementary teachers).

The report revealed agreement among first year teachers at both secondary and elementary levels when asked about ideas for improving the teaching profession. For all new teachers, regardless of teaching level, two items topped their list of recommended improvements. First is reducing class size and second is giving teachers better preparation to individualize teaching in a diverse classroom. Perhaps most alarming for those concerned about teachers' ability to reach out to diverse students

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is the attitude as to whether severely disadvantaged students can learn in school. While the vast majority of elementary school teachers (80%) say that “good teachers can lead all students to learn, even those from poor families or who have uninvolved parents,” significantly fewer new high school and middle school teachers (62%) say this.

The above report reinforces the importance of building relationships as part of the Working Systemically approach, especially among new teachers. These teachers report a greater need within the first year for additional mentoring and support from other teachers, as well as support and guidance from administration. The PTLC also serves to support teacher articulation and discussion groups by engaging teachers in an ongoing, cyclical process designed to improve

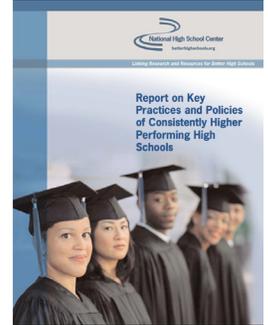
- the quality of professional development;
- professional collaboration among staff;
- the use of data to inform instructional and programmatic decisions;
- the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with state standards;
- monitoring of student learning; and
- leadership support systems for continuous school improvement.

National High School Center

Report on Key Practices and Policies of Consistently Higher Performing High Schools

http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/ReportOfKeyPracticesandPolicies_10-31-06.pdf

This report highlights a study from October 2006 which focuses on successful high schools, highlighting the ways in which many superintendents, principals, teachers, and students are setting and meeting high expectations for all students. While these evidence-based practices can inform high schools across the country, this report has been developed specifically with state-level leaders in mind, providing them with suggestions on how they may support initiatives that are linked with accelerated learning.



An overarching thematic framework emerged as the National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA) took a close look at the practices that distinguished higher performing schools from average performing schools. While details of the schools' approaches sometimes varied, the common areas of focus did not. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach that these schools and their districts have taken, they share a set of basic elements comprising a higher performing high school framework. Some common elements include the following:

- They set explicit academic goals that are aligned with and often exceed state standards.
- Their focused professional development activities support a culture of collaboration.
- Educators embrace broader learning objectives than just their own subject matter and use differentiation strategies to reach students at all levels.
- Teachers interpret student achievement data to make decisions about teaching.
- Schools recognize student and teacher achievement within a context of support.





Texas CC Quarterly Highlights

Spring Cluster Meetings – The Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle

Regional ESCs recently hosted the second round of professional development cluster meetings and are now participating with their districts and schools in implementing Phase III, Planning Action, of the Working Systemically approach. The first day of each cluster meeting involved a discussion with ESC specialists as to the progress their schools and districts are making in Phases I–III (Understanding the System, Analyzing the System and Planning for Change). The importance of building relationships came up frequently during discussions at the sessions.

Some thoughts that were verbalized by ESC specialists were as follows:

- ★ “The Working Systemically approach has opened our eyes to the fact that these band-aids are not going to solve the problem. Unless you do surgery behind the band-aid, it won’t last!”
- ★ “We used some team building activities that were a lot of fun and it became a non-threatening place to say what they wanted to say and it broke down some of the walls.”
- ★ “They didn’t want me telling them what their problem was. They had to analyze their data themselves and use the system tools to produce a visual representation and discuss it. The superintendent spoke up first and couldn’t believe that others had rated themselves so low. That was so powerful, it broke the ice and they talked all day about that. The principals then ended up taking the tool back to their campuses with them.”
- ★ “In looking at school data they realized it wasn’t just their problem, it was everyone’s problem across the district. They decided to look at teacher survey data and hold this same conversation with other district schools. The ideal state was that there would be coherence across the schools. It turned out communication was the issue and they then came up with a lot of strategies to orchestrate time and organize staff to communicate within and among their schools.”
- ★ “Changing the culture of how things have always been done has been our biggest road block. Culture eats change for lunch!”

The ESC specialists, district administrators, and teachers attending the cluster meetings were receptive to learning about the reasons for looking more closely at student work and the steps involved in implementing the PTLC. Attendees mentioned that they thought the process of implementing the PTLC would complement the work they are currently doing in their districts and schools. Others commented that they valued the opportunity to experience the stages involved in the process while learning more about how to look at student work objectively and collaboratively.

These are some thoughts verbalized by meeting participants regarding the PTLC:

- ★ “The PTLC process takes what is happening on your campus and puts it in the limelight for your examination. It forces teachers and administrators to look at the differences in the way content is being taught.”
- ★ “The school we’re working with seems excited but needs to better understand the whole process. Perhaps PTLCs could be the ‘hook’ that gets them interested in the approach.”
- ★ “We are here to impact the learning of children.” (Statement from building principal while looking at the PTLC process)
- ★ “In introducing the PTLC we may want to start out with looking at work that does not even belong to that school—begin the process with something that doesn’t have a vested problem—so they can learn the process first.”
- ★ “This is a great tool for campus administrators. As we go through the appraisal process, we see that several teachers need assistance. Having them observe another teacher can change their instruction without it seeming top down. Administrators love this as it takes the pressure off them because they can then depend on help from other teachers.”
- ★ “Instructional leadership is what we ask of principals. This is a process they can use to help meet that expectation.”
- ★ “This leads to true school reform because principals come and go but if this becomes the way we do business in schools, it will last.”

Third Annual Texas Comprehensive Center Summer Forum: Riding the Wave to Systemic Improvement

The Texas CC presented its annual forum June 11-13, 2008. The focus this year was on Working Systemically to increase student achievement.

Objectives:

- Promote coherence in technical assistance provided to low-performing districts and schools
- Increase understanding of levels, components, and competencies that are essential to systemic improvement
- Increase understanding of NCLB provisions related to school support teams
- Identify and prioritize actions for using a systemic approach in implementing school support teams

News from TEA

Parent Focus Groups

This spring TEA will conduct several focus group meetings with parents of high school students to receive their input regarding opportunities for public school choice and additional learning opportunities available for their children. Public school choice is an option for students at Title I schools to attend another eligible school if the one they are attending has not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two years or more. Schools that have not met AYP for three or more years are also required to offer supplemental educational services (SES) for eligible students while continuing to offer public school choice. These additional services are for children from low-income families and are required to take place outside of the regular school day.

The purpose of the focus group meetings will be to discuss school choice options with the parents and to compile a list of effective strategies to help inform the selection of and improve the use of state approved SES providers. The project was initiated last fall with an invitation—sent to middle and high schools which offer school choice and SES—to participate in the focus group meetings. Each selected school will host a set of parent meetings. To accommodate a variety of work schedules, the first set of meetings will be conducted in an early afternoon session, concurrently in English and in Spanish. The second set will also be offered concurrently in both languages in an evening session. The results of the focus group meetings will be compiled with the purpose of informing schools on better meeting the intentions of NCLB through offering public school choice and SES. This data will also help inform state guidance and support of school choice and SES programs. The TEA focus group meetings are supported in part by the Texas CC, the School Improvement Resource Center (SIRC), and the Texas Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC).

Services to Private Nonprofit Schools

The Texas CC assisted in two TEA training sessions on services to private nonprofit schools on May 12 and 14, 2008. The sessions reviewed the programmatic requirements for consultation and equitable services to private nonprofit schools under NCLB requirements. These sessions were offered for local education agencies and private nonprofit school officials.



On TEA's Web site

Links to Important Information on TEA's Web Site

NCLB E-mail List

www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/list.html

If you haven't already, visit this page to subscribe to TEA's NCLB e-mail list. Get the latest information as soon as it is released! Published weekly by Cory Green, senior director for the Division of NCLB Program Coordination.

Due Dates and Deadlines

www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/deadlines.html

Don't be late! You'll find the deadlines for NCLB forms and reports on this page.

Student Assessment Data

www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/reporting/

Here you can view and/or download results for the state, regions, districts, and campuses.

2007–2008 Schools in Need of Improvement

www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/titleia/sip/2007-08/2007-08_sip.html

Available here will be the final list of campuses in Title I School Improvement for the 2007-2008 school year. Additional information regarding requirements for schools at the different stages of school improvement and a sample parent notification letter may also be found on this page.

Distinguished Performance Schools

www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/titleia/distingschools.html

Access information about the 129 schools in Texas that earned the Distinguished Performance Award and the 13 campuses that earned the Distinguished Progress Award.

NCLB Staff Contacts by Region

www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/contacts.html

Need help? You can find the e-mail address for your NCLB program contact on this page.



Mapping Educational Progress 2008

The U.S. Department of Education has provided data on their Web site on how our nation's schools are doing on meeting the requirements of NCLB, including student achievement in reading and math, high school graduation rates, schools making adequate yearly progress, highly qualified teachers, participation in tutoring and choice options, and more.

See the report regarding educational progress in Texas at <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/results/progress/tx.html>

National Mathematics Advisory Panel

On March 13, 2008, the National Mathematics Advisory Panel presented its final report to the President of the U.S. and Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. Copies of the reports are provided on the ed.gov Web site:

<http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/mathpanel/index.html>

Education News Parents Can Use

The U.S. Department of Education is hosting a television series titled *Education News Parents Can Use*. The series is written for parents and community members interested in ensuring children's educational success. This TV series focuses on schools, learning, and NCLB. The program airs on the third Tuesday of each month during the school year.

Recent segments focused on the following:

April 15, 2008

Early Childhood Education: Good Start, Grow Smart

May 20, 2008

High Performing Teachers: Leading Students to Success in the 21st Century

June 17, 2008

Community Service and Volunteering: Learning Through Character and Civic Development

Check the U.S. Department of Education's Web site for further information:

<http://www.ed.gov/news/av/video/edtv/index.html>

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings Announces Proposed Regulations to Strengthen No Child Left Behind

Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has announced proposed regulations to strengthen and clarify NCLB. As a result of the secretary's travels to nearly two dozen states to discuss the implementation of NCLB, discussions have focused on how states and districts can improve struggling schools, more accurately measure dropout rates and chart student progress over time. Secretary Spellings' proposed changes in regulation include a strengthened focus on notifying families of school choice options and SES, as well as improved accountability and a clarification of restructuring interventions. The secretary also suggested that a National Technical Advisory Council be created and charged with advising the Department of Education on highly complex and technical issues regarding accountability systems, statistics, education standards and psychometrics. Other recommendations included 1) establishing a uniform method and formula for calculating and disaggregating graduation rates and 2) outlining the criteria by which states may include individual student progress in their definitions of AYP.

(Press Release - April 22, 2008)

<http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2008/04/04222008.html>

U.S. Secretary of Education Highlights NCLB at Texas State Capital

On February 29, 2008 Secretary Spellings addressed the Texas Senate Committee on Education and the House Higher Education Committee in Austin, Texas. She discussed how the federal government can support and facilitate further academic gains made by Texas students under NCLB. "Texas is moving in the right direction by raising its graduation requirements, starting with the class of 2011, to four years of math and science. Texas students have also been recognized by the Nation's Report card as ranking in the top half of states in reading and the top ten in math," Secretary Spellings announced. However, she also challenged Texas to ensure that high scores on state assessments reflect high standards as well.

Secretary Spellings urged the nation to prepare every child for the 21st century global economy. She advocated using a growth model for measuring improvement and taking steps to improve high school graduation rates, to ensure that more students take advantage of free tutoring, and to do a better job of recruiting and preparing teachers and placing them in schools where they are most needed.

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The secretary stated, "Six years after No Child Left Behind changed the education game in this nation, we can be proud of where it had brought us. The law's core principles guide our conversation on education, and now is the time to build on the momentum."

(Press Release - February 29, 2008)

<http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2008/02/02292008.html>

ED Pubs Website Has a New Look

The U.S. Department of Education's ED Pubs (Education Publications) Web site has undergone an extensive redesign. The Web site now has an eye-catching, modern look and boasts that shopping for publications is easier. Please visit <http://edpubs.ed.gov> to see for yourself.



Web Resources for Building Relationships

Building Trusting Relationships for School Improvement: Implications for Principals and Teachers

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)

<http://www.nwrel.org/request/2003sept/trust.pdf>

This September 2003 resource from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory is specifically aimed at building and maintaining trust in school settings.

Collaboration: A Framework for School Improvement

International Electronic Journal for Leadership Learning

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~iejll/volume8/Slater5.html>

A publication of the University of Calgary Press, this article stresses the importance for school systems in many countries to develop a more collaborative approach to improvement and restructuring.

Systemic Change Framework, Rubrics Assessment Handbook

National Institute for Urban School Improvement

http://urbanschools.org/rubrics/assessment_handbook.pdf?v_document_name=Assessment%20Handbook

A 2006 framework from the National Institute for Urban School Improvement which helps schools assess their current status and identify future goals. The rubrics help districts, schools, families, and practitioner partners understand what part of the system a particular strategy may target.

The School Improvement Guide: Inquiry and Action

Annenberg Institute for School Reform

<http://www.annenberginstitute.org/tools/guide/index.php>

This is the first of two useful resources from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform that can be used in building relationships. The guide, aimed at state, district, and school administrators, promotes developing the habits of collaboration, discussion, inquiry, and data-informed decision making.

Tools in Practice: Student Engagement

Annenberg Institute for School Reform

http://www.annenberginstitute.org/tools/practice/stud_engage/index.php

A second resource from the Annenberg Institute addresses building relationships with students. It stresses the importance of engaging youth in partnership with adult decision makers in school reform efforts. Students can provide valuable insight one school climate, as well as on curriculum and instruction.



Other Web Resources

Looking at Student Work

<http://www.lasw.org/>

This is a Web site representing the collaborative efforts of educational organizations and individuals who promote looking at student work not only to reflect on student learning and development, but also as a guide for determining professional development, accountability, and standards. The site emphasizes

- teachers looking together at student work with colleagues,
- focusing on small samples of student work,
- reflecting on important questions about teaching and learning, and
- using structures and guidelines ("protocols") for looking at and talking about student work.

Communication Framework for Measuring Teacher Quality and Effectiveness: Bringing Coherence to the Conversation

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

<http://www.ncctq.org/communicationFramework.php>

Teacher quality and effectiveness is a topic of considerable discussion and



some confusion. In this communication framework, Dr. Jane Coggshall gives an overview of teacher quality and discusses the possibilities and limitations of narrowing the focus to teacher effectiveness. The framework consists of four components: communication planning, goal clarification, teacher quality terms, and measurement tools and resources.

Customizable Rating Charts

What Works Clearinghouse

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/>

The [What Works Clearinghouse](#) has recently launched a new tool that allows users to design their own charts by learning outcomes and effectiveness. The tool is based on their reviews of replicable educational interventions in the areas of beginning reading, character education, dropout prevention, early childhood education, elementary school math, English language learners, and middle school math curricula. Educators and the public can use this tool as a resource to learn more about these interventions, their impact on students and schools, and their applicability to local conditions.



Texas Focus

Quarterly publication of the Texas Comprehensive Center at SEDL

Editor: Cathie McQueeney
Texas CC Program Director: Vicki Dimock, PhD

The Texas Comprehensive Center (Texas CC) is one of 16 regional centers established by the U.S. Department of Education. The primary goal of the regional centers is to build the capacity of the state education agencies and statewide systems of support to implement NCLB. Links to the other regional centers, the content centers, and the U.S. Department of Education may be found on the Texas CC Web site (<http://txcc.sedl.org>).

SEDL
4700 Mueller Blvd., Austin, TX 78723, 800-476-6861, www.sedl.org, txcc.sedl.org

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