

Evidence of Transformation: Positive Shifts in Instructional Mindsets Following the UnboundEd 2025 Standards Institute™



Executive Summary

Districts nationwide grapple with a persistent challenge: improving outcomes for all student populations without lowering expectations or compromising academic rigor. Disrupting predictable patterns of student achievement demands a fundamental shift in educators' mindsets and instructional practices (Hussein, 2025; TNTP, 2018). UnboundEd's Standards Institute is designed as the critical intervention to address deficit mindsets and provide instructional strategies that promote consistent success across all student demographics. Our 2025 Standards Institute survey analyses provide evidence demonstrating positive, persistent, and statistically significant changes in two critical areas: asset-based thinking and context-specific teaching mindsets. In addition, qualitative data from follow-up surveys confirm that participants believe they successfully translated these shifts into concrete instructional strategies across all four components of the **GLEAM® Instruction framework**: grade-level, engaging, affirming, and meaningful. Our findings establish that the Standards Institute provides a strong foundation for system-wide instructional transformation.

About UnboundEd and Standards Institute

UnboundEd partners with educators to improve instruction so every single student thrives. Districts today face historic challenges that are both pervasive and worsening: widening learning gaps, declining test scores, chronic absenteeism, and teacher shortages (Comai et al., 2025; Flint, 2025; National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). Students need an instructional experience that provides rigorous and relevant academic content within a supportive environment (TNTP, 2018). Educators need a fresh approach that revitalizes their passion and strengthens teaching practices (Cook, 2025; Hussein, 2025; Nwoko et al., 2025). To create system-wide instructional transformation, UnboundEd partners with schools and districts to cultivate the essential mindsets, knowledge, and skills necessary for change so that all students succeed academically.

Founded in 2015 by a team of former classroom teachers, district and school leaders, curriculum writers, and education experts unified by the desire to see every student thrive in school, **UnboundEd** is a nonprofit dedicated to supporting educators by building their professional capacity and knowledge to deliver evidence-informed, asset-oriented, and rigorous instruction grounded in the belief in every student's capacity to meet grade-level standards. UnboundEd designs professional learning and support services for state, district, school, and classroom levels. UnboundEd's systemic approach aligns all essential facets of education, from the classroom to the central office, enabling change across the system, bringing GLEAM Instruction to life for every student in every classroom.

Through years of action research and practical study, the GLEAM framework was developed with student learning in mind. The GLEAM framework begins with a foundation in *grade-level* learning, ensuring that all students have access to grade-level standards and curricula for college and career readiness. The next GLEAM principle, *engaging*, supports students by fostering their persistence and sense of agency. Next is *affirming*, which focuses on uplifting student identities in service of learning. The final principle, *meaningful*, is achieved by connecting the content to relevant issues beyond the classroom. Meaningful learning bridges the gap between classroom and community, equipping students to see themselves as agents of change with the power to challenge outdated policies and advocate for a more just global society.

With High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) as a foundation, educators' work enacting the GLEAM framework is spearheaded by **Standards Institute**, our immersive four-day experience that empowers educators with the skills and tools to deliver GLEAM Instruction. Standards Institute cultivates a critical mindset shift, moving beyond traditional thinking to disrupt deficit mindsets and foster higher expectations for all students. UnboundEd's GLEAM Hypothesis underpins this strategy: *Only when teacher mindset and teacher planning, along with evidence-informed, aligned curriculum, are put in service of grade-level, engaging, affirming, and meaningful instruction, do we see the teacher actions and student experiences that exemplify the curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking of impactful education.*

For over a decade, Standards Institute has served more than 17,500 educators across 1,266 education systems in 43 states. Multiple Standards Institutes take place each year in different regions of the United States. This 30-hour, in-person, course-like experience brings educators from across the nation or within a district together in content- and grade-specific cohorts to engage in rigorous and meaningful professional learning. Standards Institute also features nationally renowned keynote speakers, time for teams to plan for implementation in their districts, and offers pathways that include Math, English Language Arts (ELA), UnboundEd Planning Process™ (UPP®), and Leadership (with pathway options for Organizational or Instructional), as well as two pathways from **CORE Learning**, a subsidiary of UnboundEd¹: Leadership for Literacy.



¹ CORE Learning provides literacy professional learning that helps educators turn knowledge into practice and practice into impact.

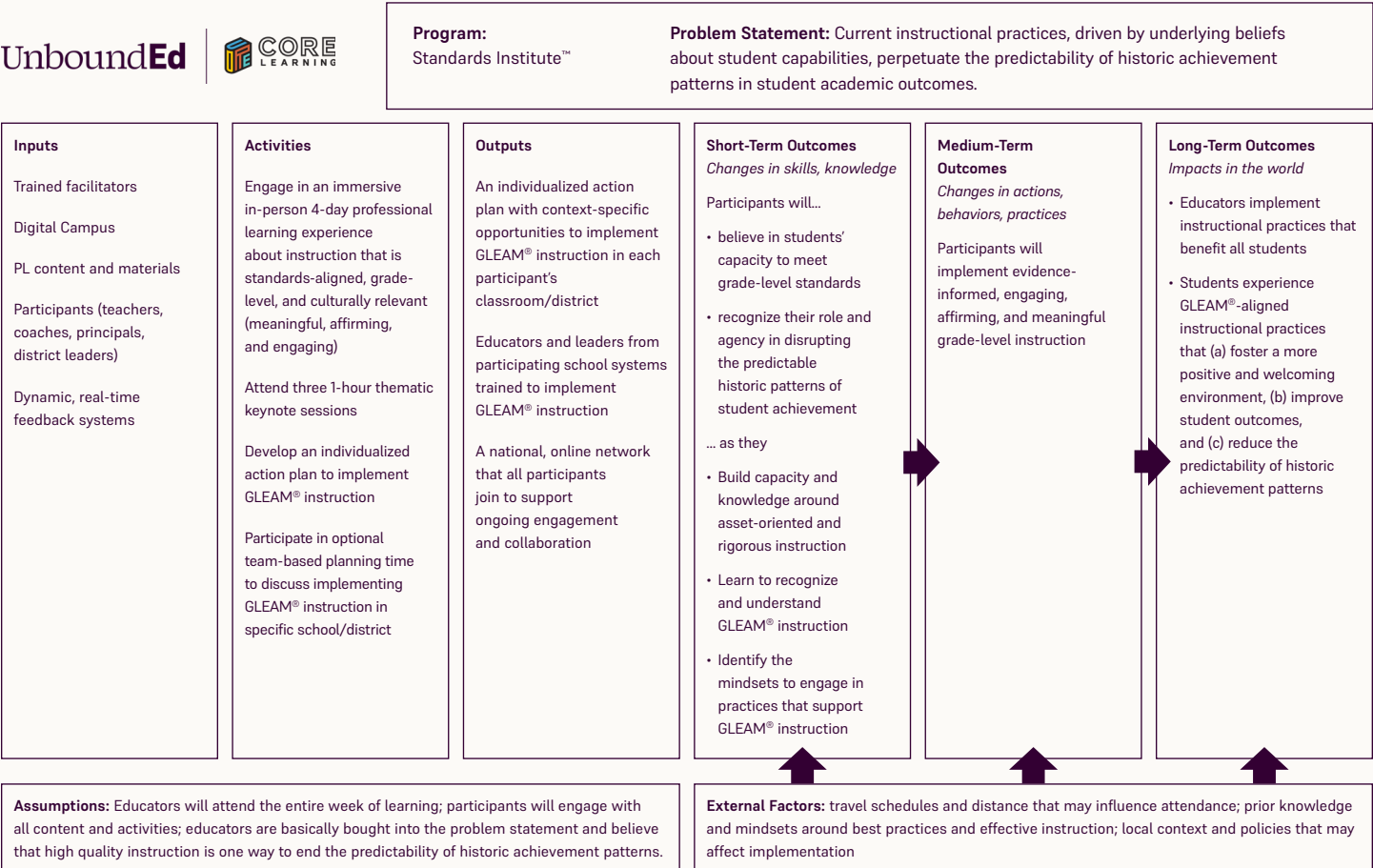
Program Overview and Research Methodology

UnboundEd grounds its programs in established educational research. Incorporating the work of research practitioners such as Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings and Dr. Zaretta Hammond in our GLEAM framework, our content is built on the scholarship of culturally relevant teaching, teacher expectations and self-efficacy, effective school leadership, and content-area best practices, as well as the evidence base for college and career readiness standards (Comstock et al., 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2014; Hammond, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2008; Kelley et al., 2015; Mette et al., 2016).

While Standards Institute is designed to be an immersive, high-impact professional learning experience, our commitment to enduring change requires us to rigorously measure its results and update our content accordingly in a continuous improvement framework. The UnboundEd Research & Evaluation team measures Standards Institute’s hypothesized proximal outcomes (see Figure 1.

Standards Institute Logic Model): sustainable shifts in participant mindsets and practices. Our approach to determining program success involves a multifaceted evaluation process, encompassing both internal metrics and external instruments and research. UnboundEd maintains a dynamic feedback loop during Standards Institute itself. Participants complete a daily survey to provide real-time feedback on sessions and experience satisfaction, which the Research & Evaluation team analyzes and reports each day. This in-the-moment data allows facilitators and content developers to discuss trends and make direct, immediate adjustments to the following day’s content, ensuring an effective response to educator needs. Furthermore, UnboundEd’s Partnerships team supports the long-term sustainability of the learning by providing districts with an overview of the data – compiled by the Research and Evaluation Team – after Standards Institute and holding step-back meetings to recap the professional learning, review its implementation, and determine next steps within the district.

Figure 1. Standards Institute Logic Model



The Research & Evaluation team measures the achievement of our intended outcomes (shifts in mindsets and practices) for Standards Institute using both quantitative and qualitative data in a pre-survey, a post-survey, and a follow-up survey. The pre-survey is administered in the week prior to Standards Institute and establishes a baseline for participant mindset and knowledge; the post-survey measures immediate shifts in mindset, knowledge acquisition, and participants' plans for implementation at the end of their experience; and the follow-up survey, administered three to six months after Standards Institutes, gauges whether and how participants applied GLEAM instructional strategies and identifies any barriers to implementation. We measure these self-reported outcomes

Key Findings: Documenting Mindset Shifts

The 2025 Standards Institute received 1,048 responses to the post-survey from 1,672 total attendees, yielding a 63% response rate. The overall findings demonstrate exceptionally strong participant satisfaction and a high intent to apply new learning immediately.

Attendees consistently cited Standards Institute as one of the most effective professional development experiences they have participated in. Key satisfaction and application metrics include:

- The 2025 Standards Institutes achieved a cumulative Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 74, meaning a significant majority of participants were Promoters (78%), and indicating a strong likelihood of attendees recommending the program to others.
- Near-universal praise was given to facilitator excellence (98%) for their knowledge, professionalism, and ability to foster a safe and collaborative learning environment.
- Nearly all participants (97%) reported gaining new knowledge. Of those, a majority (64%) expressed a clear intention to apply their new knowledge as soon as possible, highlighting the learning's immediate perceived relevance. Additionally, 98% of participants agreed the content was relevant to their professional roles.
- Participants reported significant mindset shifts, especially pertaining to student capabilities, the importance of rigorous instruction, and the role of engaging and affirming instruction.

through two instruments. The first is a 16-item instrument adapted from "Measuring Equity-Promoting Behaviors in Digital Teaching Simulations: A Topic Modeling Approach" (Littenberg-Tobias et al., 2021). The second is a series of open-ended questions designed to assess participant learning and implementation.

Collectively, this multi-tiered assessment approach spanning pre-Standards Institute mindsets, in-the-moment daily feedback, and post-Standards Institute implementation review provides UnboundEd with evidence of the program's effect on both initial and sustained changes in educator mindsets and practices.



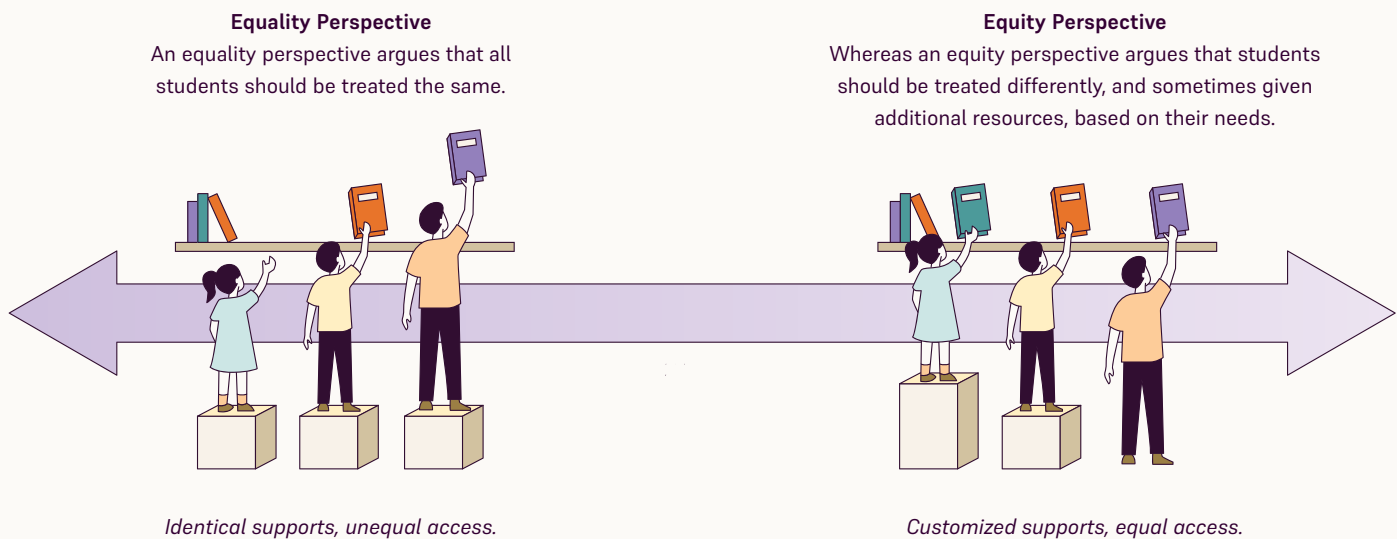
To further analyze self-reported mindset shifts relative to participants' baselines, we matched their pre-survey responses to both their post-survey responses (n=553) and to their follow-up-survey responses (n=86).

² **Net Promoter Score** (NPS) is a customer satisfaction benchmark that measures how likely customers are to recommend a business to others.

MINDSET SHIFTS

As previously noted, we use a set of survey questions adapted from the scales in the “Measuring Equity-Promoting Behaviors in Digital Teaching Simulations: A Topic Modeling Approach” instrument (Littenberg-Tobias et al., 2021). These scales measure constructs focused on Deficit–Asset, Equality–Equity, and Context–Neutral–Context–Specific. The Deficit–Asset scale measures the shift from focusing on student gaps or weaknesses (“fixing” the student) to an asset-based perspective that identifies and leverages existing student strengths to support further learning. The Equality–Equity scale measures the shift from viewing equity as providing equal inputs for all students (“one box to stand on per child”, as shown in Figure 2) to an equity-based perspective that involves matching inputs to support each student’s unique needs, circumstances, and learning profiles. The Context–Neutral–Context–Specific scale measures the change from believing that “good teaching” is the same in all contexts (Context–Neutral) to the view that teaching must be integrated with and reflect students’ communities and home lives (Context–Specific). Littenberg-Tobias and colleagues (2021) envision these mindsets as a line or spectrum: an educator doesn’t sit in one camp or the other, but somewhere along the line.

Figure 2. Equality vs. Equity Perspectives



³ Figure 2 image is adapted from the graphic created by Craig Froehle (2016).

Comparing the data collected at the beginning of Standards Institute to the data collected at the end, we found mostly positive changes in educator mindsets. Specifically, we saw positive, significant changes over the course of Standards Institute on two scales: Deficit–Asset and Context–Neutral–Context–Specific. In general, we do expect these effects to fade over time. Educators attend professional development offerings, acquire new knowledge, and are enthusiastic to apply it in their setting. However, upon returning to their schools or districts, time constraints and other obstacles arise, creating a gap between post-learning intentions and their implementation. This phenomenon is called the problem of enactment (Kennedy, 1999): the unsuccessful attempt to translate new teaching knowledge or theories into practice. Despite believing in new pedagogical ideas, educators often revert to old mindsets and habits because the everyday realities and stress of the school environment override the training they experienced (Costello & Doğança Küçük, 2023; Kennedy, 2016). In our professional learning research, we therefore expect some attrition—that is, we expect that we will see a maximum effect in changes in mindsets immediately after the event concludes, followed by a decline in the weeks and months that follow. The crucial question is whether that initial increase exceeds the attrition that follows: do the changes in mindset that remain persist in a meaningful way? Our research indicates that it does for two scales, Deficit–Asset and Context–Neutral–Context–Specific, with statistically significant changes remaining months after the professional learning.

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To explore whether the results we see are sensitive to educator demographics (such as grade-level, role, race, and gender), we then ran multivariate regressions including a host of controls. This allowed us to model the simultaneous correlation of multiple independent variables (predictors) on one or more outcomes, while controlling for confounding factors. While not causal, this method helped us to better isolate the effect of our program from factors like teacher background.

Below, we discuss these results as well as our qualitative findings.

SHIFT TO ASSET-BASED THINKING (DEFICIT–ASSET SCALE)

Quantitative results: After including controls, we found that attending Standards Institute was associated with a positive, statistically significant effect on the Deficit–Asset mindset scale (see Table 1). Not only was there an increase in each item individually, but the average effect on this scale was also positive and consistent across a variety of model specifications (see Figure 3), as outlined in the sections below.

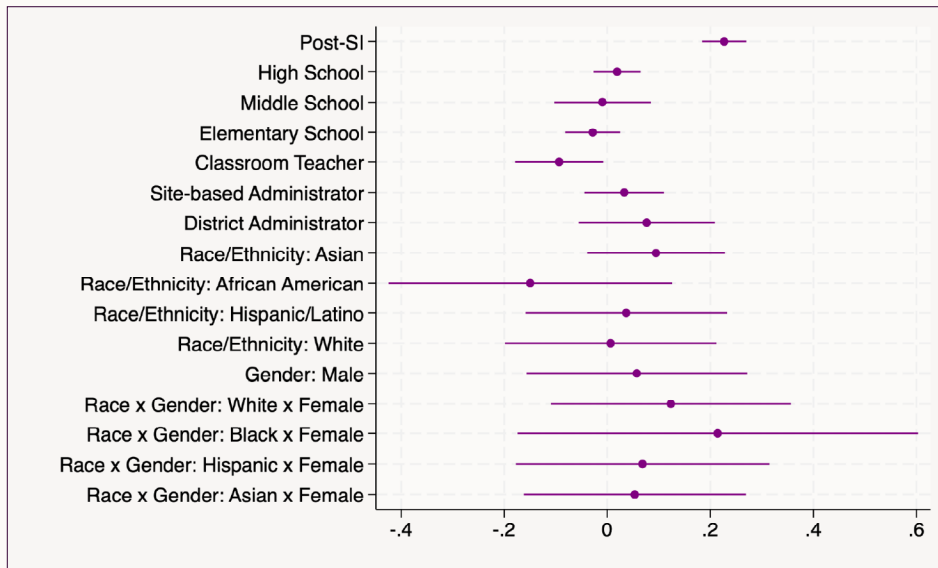
Table 1. Item by Item: Deficit–Asset

Question	Pre	Post	Follow-up
Teachers should have high expectations for all students.	5.67	5.90	5.78
Every student can be successful given the right supports.	5.64	5.83	5.72
Teachers should identify all students’ strengths, even if they do not fit within traditional school norms.	5.63	5.84	5.71
It is a teacher’s job to challenge all students academically.	5.59	5.74	5.64
All Items	5.63	5.83	5.71

Deficit-Asset Regression Results

- The effect size and direction of the change were consistently positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).
- Classroom teachers, on average, answered the Deficit–Asset questions less positively than others.
- Race and gender were not associated with the way participants answered the Deficit–Asset questions.

Figure 3. Deficit–Asset Regression Results



Qualitative perspective: Participant responses highlighted a critical shift from deficit- to asset-based approaches, centered on elevating expectations and recognizing students’ “Funds of Knowledge”—the variety of skills, knowledge, and competencies gathered from students’ community history and everyday lives (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018). Themes from their open-ended responses in the follow-up survey included:

- Universal high expectations: The shift toward the belief that all students can complete grade-level work, and that maintaining high expectations, challenging students through productive struggle, and using scaffolds are some strategies to unlock that potential.
- Asset-based approach: Deliberate effort to move away from “student-deficit thinking” towards focusing on what students can do, rather than what they lack, and encouraging colleagues towards the same.
- Intentional relationship building: Engaging in relationship building with students to understand the “whole child” (their interests, background, and circumstances) to inform instruction and provide greater academic support.

One educator’s feedback highlighted the impact of the aforementioned themes, and the shift from a deficit to an asset mindset: “Standards Institute deepened my understanding of how educator beliefs directly influence student outcomes. One powerful takeaway was recognizing how low expectations—often rooted in unconscious bias—can limit student access to grade-level content. The institute emphasized that all students, regardless of background, are capable of engaging in meaningful, challenging work when given the right support. This shifted my mindset from ‘meeting students where they are’ to ‘moving students toward where they need to be,’ with a focus on equity, high expectations, and intentional scaffolding.”

SHIFT TOWARD SYSTEMIC RESPONSIBILITY (EQUALITY-EQUITY SCALE)

Quantitative results: Standards Institute did not result in a statistically significant change across any of the models on the Equality–Equity subscale (see Table 2). Quantitative measures for this scale were mixed, and in some instances, mindsets trended in the opposite direction, possibly suggesting that deeply ingrained beliefs about “earning” grades and “working hard” are challenging to change in a short professional learning experience. This is consistent with the “backfire effect” described by Nyhan & Reifler (2010). The backfire effect is triggered when information challenges a person’s core belief. For example, if a person believes that working hard yields rewards no matter what, they will double down on that belief and close their mind to information that opposes it. Consider the American Dream—the idea that everyone in the United States is given the opportunity to be successful. Over the course of Standards Institute, participants are asked to interrogate that claim and consider the systems that might enable or hinder that dream for students. Depending on how closely an educator holds that belief, the backfire effect could come into play and account for the negative effect on that item presented in Table 2. In short, where the information presented during Standards Institute that supported the Deficit–Asset and Context-Neutral–Context-Specific mindset scales may have already loosely aligned with educators’ beliefs about their roles in schools, Equality–Equity taps into something much deeper: a belief that goes beyond the role of schools in our society.

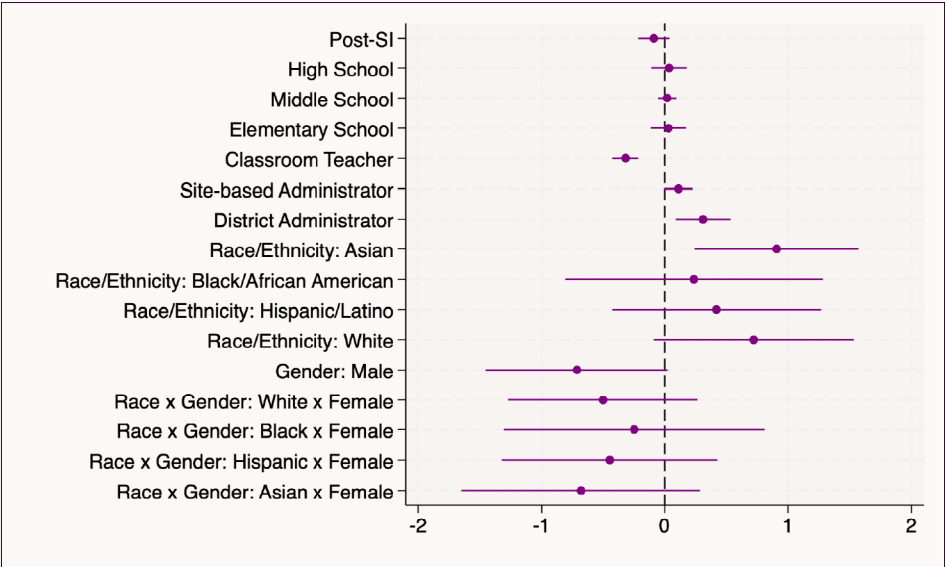
Table 2. Item by Item: Equality-Equity

Question	Pre	Post	Follow-up
Success in school is primarily the student’s responsibility.	4.19	4.40	4.29
All people are born with the same opportunities to be successful.	4.97	4.90	4.79
Today’s schools help all students equally.	4.99	5.06	4.93
Anyone who works hard enough can do well in school.	3.76	3.98	3.54
Students from poor families have the same opportunities to succeed as students from rich families.	4.94	4.94	4.99
Teachers do not need to know much about their students beyond their grades and behavior in class.	5.33	4.99	5.41
All students should be expected to follow the same traditional school norms.	3.87	3.98	4.15
All Items	4.58	4.60	4.61

Equality-Equity Regression Results

- There was no statistically significant change across any of the models on the Equality–Equity subscale (see Figure 4).
- Classroom teachers, on average, answered the Equality–Equity questions less positively than others.
- Race and gender were not associated with participants’ responses to the Equality–Equity questions. One exception to this is observed among female Asian participants (n=23).

Figure 4. Equality–Equity Regression Results



Qualitative perspective: Despite the lack of quantitative change, participant survey responses showed a shift from treating all students the same to recognizing systemic barriers, ensuring equitable access, and affirming unique identities. This included:

- Systemic responsibility: Educators moved away from viewing student failure as dependent on individual effort or shortcomings (e.g., lack of motivation or family issues) to recognizing inequity as a systemic problem that must be actively addressed. For example, providing all students with equitable access to challenging content and ensuring that Multilingual Learners and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are included in core instruction with the necessary supports, rather than being tracked into separate, lower-level classes.
- Universal access and scaffolding: Educators reported realizing their agency to actively design instruction with scaffolds and supports to ensure equitable opportunity for all students. This included prioritizing universal access to rigorous, on-grade-level content and tasks, and reducing remediation practices that pull students out of class or back to below-grade-level materials.
- Differentiated instruction and affirming identity: There were noticeable shifts away from the belief that all students “learn the same” towards designing differentiated instruction to effectively meet diverse needs, acknowledging and affirming students’ unique identities, cultures, and allowing varied ways of demonstrating knowledge.

In summary, while the quantitative data showed no evidence of a mindset change on the Equality–Equity scale, the qualitative data provide insights into how participants are translating core concepts into action by using specific skills to support individual student needs.

A participant effectively captured this conceptual shift from individual failure to systemic understanding, noting: *“One powerful learning... ‘inequity is not an accident—it’s a design.’ This shifted my thinking from seeing student outcomes as reflections of individual effort or background to understanding how systems and educator mindsets often create and sustain unequal access to opportunity.”*

INTEGRATING LIVED EXPERIENCE
(CONTEXT-NEUTRAL-CONTEXT-SPECIFIC SCALE)

Quantitative results: The shift on this subscale (see Table 3) showed a consistent, positive, and statistically significant change from pre- to post-Standards Institute. The effect size was similar across all statistical models (see Figure 5).

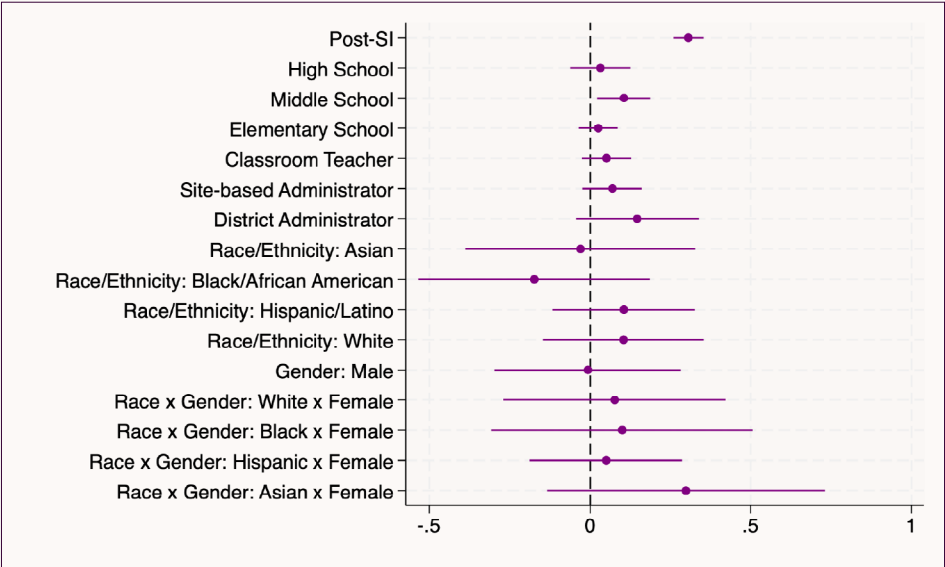
Table 3. Item by Item: Context-Neutral-Context Specific

Question	Pre	Post	Follow-up
Acknowledging the context in which the school is located can help students learn.	4.83	5.35	5.20
Students’ surroundings affect the way they engage with the material.	5.15	5.48	5.33
Engaging with the community can help motivate students.	5.41	5.66	5.49
Communities play a big role in students’ success.	5.30	5.48	5.44
Educators should include elements of students’ lives outside of school in their teaching.	5.41	5.69	5.65
All Items	5.22	5.53	5.42

Context-Neutral–Context-Specific Regression Results

- There was a consistent, positive, and statistically significant change from pre- to post-Standards Institute on this subscale. The effect size was similar across all models.
- Role, race, and gender were not associated with participants' responses to the context questions.

Figure 5. Context-Neutral–Context-Specific Regression Results



Qualitative perspective: Participant responses demonstrated a shift away from generic content toward culturally and experientially relevant materials, grounding learning in students' immediate worlds. This change is reflected in the following areas:

- Culturally and experientially relevant content: Educators moved away from the idea that all students connect to the same materials and intentionally integrated diverse texts, discussion topics, and lessons that connect to students' personal contexts.
- Real-world and community connections: Participants realized the value of making content relevant by anchoring it in students' immediate world and by designing lessons that connect to real-life applications and community experiences (e.g., using local data for math graphing activities).
- Acknowledging students' lived experience: The focus shifted toward recognizing that communities and home lives affect learning, moving directly against a context-neutral approach where academic content is detached from the student's experience.

In summary, participation in Standards Institute was associated with positive, persistent, and statistically significant changes toward making learning more context-specific, resulting in an increased commitment to culturally and experientially relevant instruction.

One educator's feedback offered a comprehensive summary of the personal transformation that occurred: *"Learning from Standards Institute deepened my understanding of how beliefs about student potential directly shape instructional choices and outcomes... Through the institute's focus on equity, high expectations, and the GLEAM framework... I came to understand how this belief often stems from adult biases rather than student capacity. The institute emphasized that access to grade-level content is a civil right, and that when we provide appropriate scaffolds, affirm student identity, and build on their knowledge and strengths, all students can engage meaningfully in rigorous work. It shifted my thinking from a deficit-based mindset to an asset-based, instructional equity lens, where my role as a leader is to remove barriers, not lower expectations."*

Translating Mindset Shifts into GLEAM Instruction

We have shared how shifts in educator mindsets were correlated with Standards Institute attendance. The consistency of these results was maintained even after controlling for several factors across diverse settings. But how did these mindset shifts show up in instruction? At the end of Standards Institute, 97% of participants reported learning something new they planned to try in their classrooms. Our follow-up survey showed that 78% of respondents believed they had successfully implemented their plans or new strategies from Standards Institute. While that number alone does not give us insight into *how* their learning translated into instruction, we did ask open-ended questions to collect specific examples of practice changes that educators attributed to their Standards Institute attendance.

GRADE-LEVEL

Grade-level is the foundation for GLEAM Instruction and must be present before the other elements for it to be effective. Participants' responses from follow-up surveys showed a collective shift in instructional focus toward actively ensuring all students access and succeed with rigorous, on-grade-level content, the core tenet of GLEAM's "grade-level" component. This was evident in three key areas:

1. Scaffolding practices were shifting away from remediation to actively prioritizing scaffolding students *into* grade-level materials and tasks, using methods such as pre-teaching vocabulary, providing sentence frames, and utilizing visual aids.
2. Teachers were conducting deep dives into their standards and standards-aligned planning in collaboration with colleagues, tracking vertical alignment across grades, and eliminating non-aligned activities to maintain the full rigor of the curriculum.
3. Districts and schools were intentionally adopting and implementing HQIM with fidelity and integrity, leveraging pacing guides and planning supports rather than modifying them to move away from grade-level work.

These actions align with the "GL" of the GLEAM framework and focus on ensuring all students have access to and succeed with rigorous, on-grade-level content.

In addition, to better understand how these mindset shifts translated into practice, we analyzed participant-reported changes through the lens of the GLEAM framework—the central instructional model of Standards Institute. UnboundEd's definition of grade-level, engaging, affirming, and meaningful is as follows:

- **Grade-level:** Instruction that is aligned with the grade-appropriate college and career standards.
- **Engaging:** Instruction that fosters persistence, active learning, and academic agency by tapping into students' assets.
- **Affirming:** Instruction that builds a caring, collaborative classroom community by uplifting students' identities and experiences in service of learning.
- **Meaningful:** Instruction that cultivates civic agency and critical thinking by making learning relevant to issues students encounter beyond the classroom.

ENGAGING

Participants reported implementing new practices to create more engaging classrooms, leading to both higher student participation and greater academic agency. These instructional shifts focused on three main areas:

1. Promoting student collaboration through techniques like "turn and talk," discussion-based reading routines (e.g., reciprocal teaching), and Math Language Routines (MLRs)
2. Fostering student autonomy by involving students in creating goals, soliciting their input on assignments, and implementing student-led conferences
3. Integrating interactive learning methods, such as hands-on activities, project-based learning, and technology

These instructional strategies highlight the ways that educators were incorporating the "E" of GLEAM Instruction and witnessing, as a result, increases in active student participation and classroom discussion.

AFFIRMING

Affirming practices are centered on creating supportive relationships and environments while ensuring that content reflects students' identities and lives. Educators shared ways to achieve this through three important shifts:

1. Increased and explicit effort toward intentional relationship building and striving to understand the “whole child”—including their interests, background, and circumstances—to better inform instruction
2. Focus on student identity and experience by having teachers intentionally select classroom texts and discussion topics that reflect students' diverse identities, cultures, and lived experiences, and by auditing materials for broader representation and connecting content to students' daily lives
3. Creating an environment that allowed students to feel safe, supported, and confident in taking academic risks. Educators shared how they were actively using inclusive practices and asset-based approaches while challenging “student-deficit thinking” among colleagues (or themselves) to foster this environment

These actions center on making the content relevant and connecting with students' identities and lives, bringing the “A” of GLEAM Instruction to life.

MEANINGFUL

Participants across all grade bands shared the actions they were taking to make content meaningful – a key component of the GLEAM framework – with a dual focus on connecting learning to students' lives and promoting deeper analysis. Educators were making meaning for students in three important ways:

1. Creating real-world and community connections by designing lessons that integrated real-life applications and community experiences, such as using local data for math graphing activities, local phenomena for science, or incorporating community connections into classwork
2. Promoting critical inquiry by using instructional practices that included higher-order questions and writing prompts to push students toward deeper analysis, exploring context and perspective (especially in traditional or Eurocentric materials), and encouraging classroom debates that challenge norms
3. Fostering civic agency, where teachers were incorporating activities that required students to go beyond comprehension and take action, such as applying learning to a local problem or social issue, or writing persuasive letters about school or community issues

These educator moves provide the “M” of the GLEAM framework by focusing on contextual relevance, real-world application, and critical inquiry.



SYSTEMIC SUPPORT FOR GLEAM INSTRUCTION

Responses from Standards Institute participants highlighted the importance of receiving systemic support for the planning and implementation of GLEAM Instruction principles to create change at the school and district levels. Leaders who attended Standards Institute shared the ways they are integrating the GLEAM framework into three key areas of school operation:

1. Professional development and coaching were adopting the GLEAM Instruction principles for professional learning, school goals, and instructional reform, and were accompanied by ongoing coaching on formative assessments and lesson design.
2. Observation and feedback cycles had been updated, with leaders implementing “GLEAM Learning Walks” or aligning learning walks to the framework to provide routine observation and feedback focused on evidence of student engagement and rigorous instruction.
3. Planning alignment ensured that the elements of GLEAM Instruction were embedded directly into common planning time documents, enabling teachers to collaborate and reflect on each component as they design lessons.

The learning at Standards Institute that leads to these mindset shifts and changes in practice transforms instruction to better support every learner through the use of GLEAM Instruction.

A participant illustrated the systemic impact of the work with GLEAM Instruction, emphasizing how the partnership with UnboundEd became foundational for their instructional transformation, particularly in serving diverse student populations: *“Our district serves a diverse student population across elementary, middle, and high schools, with a significant percentage of Multilingual Learners, students with disabilities, and students from historically marginalized communities. The partnership with UnboundEd began as part of a broader equity initiative and has grown into a cornerstone of our instructional transformation. All instructional leaders and teachers participate in ongoing professional development focused on the GLEAM framework. This includes unpacking the “Equity Principle,” understanding how identity and agency influence learning, and practicing asset-based approaches to instruction.”*



Limitations and Future Research

While Standards Institute consistently garners high satisfaction among participants and meets Tier 3 evidence under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Institute of Education Sciences, 2025; U.S. Department of Education, 2016), and our validated survey tools consistently demonstrate positive and statistically significant shifts in educator beliefs and behaviors, our current evaluation approach is subject to inherent research limitations. First, the limited response rates affect our analysis, as not all participants completed all surveys (Pre-Standards Institute survey, Post-Standards Institute survey, and Follow-up survey) necessary for matched, longitudinal analysis (2025 Total attendance: 1,672; total response rate: 63%; pre/post matched n=553; follow-up matched n=86). Second, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential validity and reliability issues such as social desirability bias, recall bias, and misinterpretation of questions. Finally, this study is not a causal analysis. While we observe statistically significant changes in self-reported mindsets and knowledge post-Standards Institute, we cannot causally attribute these changes exclusively to Standards Institute, as participants may have engaged in other supplementary professional learning activities that contributed to these shifts.

Future research and data-collection efforts will be expanded to move beyond correlation and to more rigorously validate the long-term impact of Standards Institute on practice and student outcomes. The immediate next step is to collect objective classroom observations to understand how shifts in self-reported mindsets and knowledge translate into teacher practice, especially over time. This will also help us better situate the quantitative findings from the post-surveys discussed above. Conducting longitudinal classroom observations, however, requires overcoming significant logistical hurdles related to time, human resources, validated rubrics, and aligning district calendars. Crucially, establishing a causal chain outlining the effects of the Standards Institute requires approaching district relationships differently, including thinking through comparison groups.

Achieving the most distal outcome of our logic model undergirding Standards Institute, changes in student outcomes, adds further complexity, as it requires multi-year district partnerships and the establishment of complex legal data-sharing agreements well in advance to ensure the protection of educator and student data. We are currently establishing the necessary structures and engaging long-standing district partners interested in collaborating on these substantial research studies. These efforts are essential to fully grasp the changes Standards Institute causes, particularly in educator practice and student outcomes.



Conclusion: Transformation and Systemic Change

The findings from the 2025 Standards Institute provide compelling evidence that UnboundEd successfully influences the critical mindsets and practices necessary to eliminate the predictability of student outcomes.

Collectively, the data showed that participation in Standards Institute correlated with three fundamental shifts:

1. From Deficit to Asset-Based thinking: Educators moved to acknowledge and leverage students' existing strengths, leading to universal high expectations and the application of students' Funds of Knowledge
2. From Context-Neutral to Context-Specific: Teachers prioritized culturally and experientially relevant content, grounding learning in students' lived experiences and community connections
3. Translation to Practice: Educators reported translating their learning into actionable strategies across all four GLEAM Instruction components (grade-level, engaging, affirming, and meaningful instruction), with a particular focus on effective scaffolding and equitable access to rigorous materials

As one educator powerfully noted, the implementation of this work is not just an instructional shift, but a systemic one: *"... If this level of teaching/learning is truly valued and implemented across the district, the shift in student learning, engagement, and achievement will be transformative for our students' futures. They will be prepared on a global level, and it would translate into a dynamic shift for our city from redlining and poverty to prosperity and opportunity."*

Next Steps: Invest in Transformative Professional Learning

Standards Institute is more than professional development – it is the foundation for lasting instructional change. We encourage district and school leaders to explore how Standards Institute can be integrated into your vision for system-wide transformation.

Where to Go From Here

The findings in this report point to a clear conclusion: when educators strengthen their beliefs about what students can achieve and align instruction to grade-level expectations, student learning opportunities expand. The next step is turning these insights into action.

Deepen Your Understanding of GLEAM Instruction

Build a stronger foundation by exploring the core principles and practices of GLEAM Instruction:

- [What Is GLEAM® Instruction?](#)
- [GLEAM® Instruction: Mindsets & Planning](#)
- [GLEAM® Instruction in the Classroom](#)
- [The Extraordinary Potential of Grade-Level, Engaging, Affirming, and Meaningful \(GLEAM®\) Instruction](#)

Explore the Data

Continue your learning with additional resources that provide deeper analysis of the data and findings referenced in this report:

- [Shifting Educator Mindsets: What We Learned From Our 2025 Standards Institutes™](#) (Unbound2025 presentation)

Reflect on Your Current Reality

Use these tools and resources to examine how closely your current instructional practices align with a GLEAM vision for teaching and learning:

- [GLEAM® Instructional Vision Alignment Checklist](#)
- [The GLEAM® Hypothesis](#)
- [Justice Seekers: Pursuing Equity in the Details of Teaching and Learning by Lacey Robinson and the UnboundEd Community – Get your copy here!](#)
- [GLEAM®: Teaching at the Level Every Student Deserves – Get your copy here!](#)

Consider:

- What beliefs about student potential are shaping instructional decisions in your school or district?
- How consistently do students experience grade-level, engaging, affirming, and meaningful learning?
- What systems, structures, or professional learning opportunities could strengthen implementation?

Learn From Schools and Districts Doing the Work

See how educators across the country are bringing GLEAM Instruction to life and creating meaningful change for students:

- [GLEAM® Instruction Showcase](#)
 - » 2026 GLEAM Award Recipients
 - [Monterey Peninsula USD + UnboundEd: The Promise of Grade-Level Learning for Every Single Student](#)
 - [UnboundEd + Green Bay Area Public Schools: How Green Bay Made GLEAM a Districtwide Commitment](#)
 - » 2025 GLEAM Award Recipients
 - [How Synergy Academies Is Bouncing Back From COVID Stronger Than Ever](#)
 - » [GLEAM® Showcase – Synergy Charter Academy](#)
 - [Empowering Every Student: How Springfield Public Schools + UnboundEd Created a Culture of Success](#)
 - [Meeting the Challenge: How Des Moines Public Schools Are Delivering Rigorous, Meaningful Learning for Every Student](#)
- [Leading Change With GLEAM® as an Anchor: The Wayne WRESA Story](#)
- [Enabling Conditions for GLEAM® Instruction: Packing for the Journey in Green Bay, WI](#)
- [The Art of GLEAM® Instruction: Bringing Transformative Instruction to Life](#)
- [Unbound2025 Keynote: The GLEAM® of It All](#)

Take the Next Step

If you are ready to strengthen instructional practice across your school or district, explore an upcoming [Standards Institute](#) to learn about available pathways, dates, and registration options.

For a more strategic conversation about implementing GLEAM Instruction, contact the [UnboundEd Team](#) to discuss how professional learning experiences such as Standards Institute can support your instructional vision and goals.

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