In the summer Journal of Staff Development, you read about a staff developer who was directed to prepare a mandatory training for all district employees on the board of education’s new policy on school safety.

The director of staff development found herself situated between her school board and the superintendent’s direction and her own beliefs about effective staff development. She could easily understand the value of training every staff member in the new district safety policy, yet she also understood that the kind of training being proposed would likely have little or no long-term effect. To read the whole case, visit www.nsdc.org/ethics.

What did others say about this situation? Here are some sample comments.

A superintendent writes:
“There may be huge problems for the superintendent if the staff developer is not able or willing to follow through in some form with training directed for all staff. This is particularly true if this is a hot item of a board member. Almost all states now mandate some kind of development of and training regarding district safety policies, so the superintendent is likely...”

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stuck and needs the support of the staff developer.”

**Another superintendent writes:**

“What the board of education and superintendent want is ‘information shared,’ not staff development. I would work to figure out ways to share the information with staff and all others not using designated staff development time. Maybe someone else, such as the supervisor of support services or safety, can take this responsibility. The staff developer could work with the superintendent privately and then board of education members individually to help them understand that the role of professional development is to focus on improving student learning. I would make my case to the superintendent by explaining how important it is to my credibility with staff to keep the two purposes (information sharing and professional development) separate, leaving an article from a reputable professional journal that supports this position, and sharing a copy of the NSDC Code of Ethics. Then I would ask the superintendent to consider my request that the staff developer act as a resource for these peripheral purposes but not be directly responsible for the training and implementation in these areas.”

**A consultant writes:**

“My instinct tells me that the staff developer can influence the superintendent’s thinking and that in doing so will open the possibility for a more productive future. What would happen if the staff developer put together three alternatives — one exactly as requested by the superintendent and board, another that more deeply addresses the issues of engaging all the potential audiences, with clear outcomes, examples of the types of constructivist activities, measures of success, etc., and a third that is a compromise option, more conservative, but still more engaging? I would not recommend that the staff developer be insubordinate, but I would examine some possibilities that would meet everyone’s needs.”

A staff developer writes:

“When we're given things to do by people who have no concept of the time involved, as this problem seems to indicate. Sometimes, in order to reach the ultimate goals, we need to take a few smaller steps along the way. The staff developer, while keeping her own ethics in mind, needs to accept the board's directive while also helping the superintendent and board understand what is being asked. Sometimes we must build the culture, not by giving up on our own principles and ethics, but by taking the small steps necessary to reach them.”

**A staff developer writes:**

“The first question to ask is ‘Does the director regard the new policy to be a good one?’ It seems equally unethical to train people to implement a bad policy as it would be to train people ineffectively to thoroughly implement a good one. Assuming that the new policy and procedures are reasonable ones, the key to resolving the dilemma is to identify and act on the bottom line, which is to get the board’s new policy implemented effectively. The primary goal, then, is to develop the necessary will and skill among students, staff, parents, and community members for effective implementation. And if a 45-minute presentation at faculty meetings won’t ensure effective implementation, what else is required?”

**Another staff developer writes:**

“Sometimes we’re given things to do by people who have no concept of the time involved, as this problem seems to indicate. Sometimes, in order to reach the ultimate goals, we need to take a few smaller steps along the way. The staff developer, while keeping her own ethics in mind, needs to accept the board’s directive while also helping the superintendent and board understand what is being asked. Sometimes we must build the culture, not by giving up on our own principles and ethics, but by taking the small steps necessary to reach them.”

**CONCLUSION**

Understanding the standards of quality staff development and framing professional development as a means to improve student achievement are important to this staff developer. She has a wonderful opportunity to teach both her superintendent and the board of education about staff development in a school district. Armed with the intention of improving learning for all employees and students and increasing the community’s commitment to student success, she will be able to influence positively how both the staff and community think about staff development.

The dilemma this staff developer faces is not unusual. She will want to consider carefully her options. The Code of Ethics reminds her that “staff development leaders make decisions based on high academic standards for all students. They ensure that staff development activities make a significant contribution to the accomplishment of school system and school goals for student learning.” The code also reminds her of the importance of “only offering services that are consistent with high standards of quality.” With these two principles in mind, she will consider what is best to achieve school and school system goals, as well as what will enable her to adhere to high standards of quality.”