IC maps help educators find their way in implementing standards

More than 100,000 copies of the National Staff Development Council’s Standards for Staff Development (NSDC, 2001) are in circulation, helping school leaders plan, design, and evaluate staff development. NSDC holds the assumption that school leaders and professional staff developers who successfully implement the standards will produce higher-quality professional development, higher-quality teaching, and improved student learning. While awareness of the standards is important, NSDC recognizes that awareness alone does not produce deeper understanding and thorough implementation. As a result, NSDC leaders crafted tools to help school leaders and professional staff developers with the practical side of implementing the standards. The leaders chose the Innovation Configuration, or IC, as a tool they believed would be most helpful (Hall & Hord, 2001; Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987; Roy & Hord, 2003).

Studies of policies, practices, and programs have shown that how teachers implement the standards often varies from the vision and expectations of policy makers, program designers, or professional staff developers. In other words, just because the trainer explains and may even model a new reading method, classroom instruction may look very different from that model when teachers return to their classrooms. In addition, teachers make adaptations when they return to the classroom that can vary across an entire school or system. These adaptations can influence the results a district or school achieves compared with expectations based on program results in other schools and systems. District and school leaders, program developers, and professional staff developers concerned about fidelity to a program design use IC maps to facilitate implementation that more closely aligns with their expectations for practice.

NSDC is equally concerned about what happens when states, technical assistance agencies, school systems, and schools adopt the standards. Implementation of the standards in one place can look very different from implementation in another. Previous U.S. Department of Education Model Professional Development Award-winning districts and schools, as well as state-level award winners, have noted that aligning their practice with NSDC standards was one element that contributed to their success and improved student learning. Because of this finding, NSDC became more interested in helping districts to understand the difference between high- and low-level implementation of the standards.

IC maps describe the major components of a program in action. IC maps can vary in their complexity. IC maps for the NSDC standards are among the more complex. Moving the standards into action requires action on the part of many educators, including policy makers and district and school leaders. Also, other education entities, including our colleges and universities, technical assistance agencies, and professional associations, influence what happens in school systems and play significant roles. Leaders creating IC maps recognized the key roles each of these groups play and created IC maps for each. NSDC has published IC maps for 10 groups, including school board members, superintendents, central office staff members, principals, teachers, state education agency personnel, external assistance providers, higher education personnel, professional associations, and directors of staff development.

The IC maps describe two to six outcomes associated with each of the 12 standards for each role. For example, five outcomes are stated for the first standard: Learning Communities for the principal. They include:

1.1 The principal prepares teachers for skillful collaboration.
1.2 The principal creates an organizational structure that supports collegial learning.
1.3 The principal understands and implements an incentive system that ensures collaborative work.
1.4 The principal creates and maintains a learning community to support teacher and student learning.
1.5 The principal participates with other administrators in one or more learning communities.

Each outcome is followed by a description of a series of actions — what the principal will actually be seen doing if the standard is being fully implemented (labeled as Level 1) through descriptions of lesser levels of implementation. For example, under Outcome 1.4: The principal creates and maintains a learning community to support teacher...
and student learning. The levels of implementation are shown in the Innovation Configuration map above.

Looking at a single outcome in isolation of the entire document can cause one to question the choice of particular actions over others one may see as more important. For this reason, it is important that users see the IC as a holistic document, where implementation of one standard is directly connected to successfully implementing others. Unfortunately, deciding which actions occupy each level is not an exact science. The IC developers relied on help from two key sources. The first was to return to the original standard and accompanying rationale and look for indicators of what the developers saw as critical to the standard in action. Then the developers went to the experts, the staff development leaders and providers who had worked with the standards for several years, and asked them to describe their experiences. These individuals offered valuable insight and feedback throughout the continuous development and countless revisions of the maps.

In the end, the Council published the IC maps so all educators will have a clear and richly descriptive vision of what the standards look like in action and will use that vision when helping others implement the standards to improve the quality of professional development for a state, organization, district, or school.

NSDC believes that higher-quality professional learning will produce higher levels of performance for all teachers and students. Thus the Council is committed to producing the resources and tools to help its members and other educators achieve this goal. It is our hope that the IC maps are one of the tools educators find most helpful, and that the maps will be used by countless educators to assist in attaining this goal.

REFERENCES


