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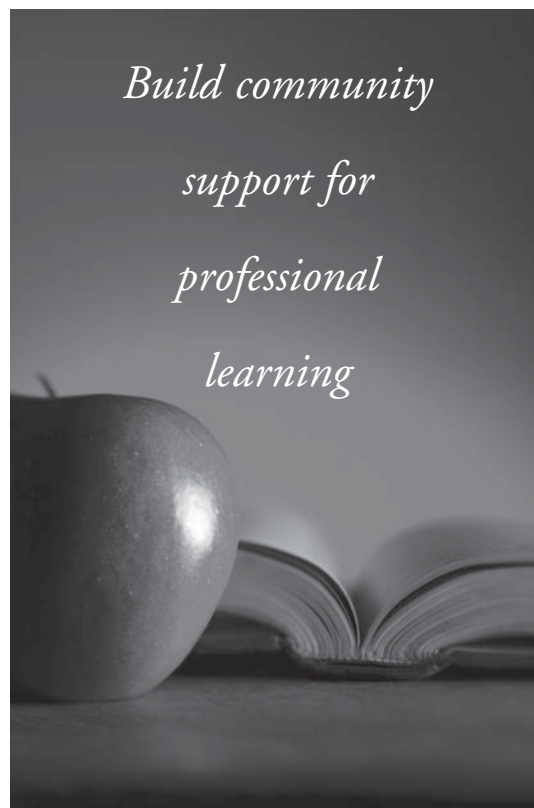
B R E A K THE INSERVICE HABIT!

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

About 10 years ago, teachers at my kids' school spent part of a back-to-school night explaining the new math curriculum to parents. My daughter's teacher focused on what the district wanted children to learn and parents listened attentively.

Then a mother asked a simple question: *If that's what you want children to know, then how are you going to teach them that?*

The teacher stood silent for several moments. Then, as if a light



had flashed on in her head, she grabbed handouts on her desk and began passing them out. "This will explain that," she said.

The bell rang and we all wandered out into the hall, grasping our new handout. "What is this?" asked one parent. "This is just insulting," said another.

Most of us just shook our heads in mild amusement as we tried to comprehend what we'd been given: A sketch of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.

This very talented
Continued on Page 6

What does your community know and believe about teacher learning?

Use the survey on Page 3 with parent groups to stimulate a conversation about their knowledge about teaching and professional learning. The purpose of the discussion is to air parent perspectives on professional development, not to tell parents that their opinions are wrong.

Preparation:

1. Prepare slides of several key points that you want to make during your discussion of teacher learning. The best information to share with parents in your community will be information about the impact of professional development on the learning of your students, perhaps from your school improvement plans or annual school reports.

However, national information can also be helpful during these discussions. In advance of your meeting, visit the NSDC web site — www.nsd.org/library/policy/SDLCharts.pdf — and view slides that NSDC created to advance our policy work. Review those slides yourself to decide which are most applicable for your discussion.

Some that may be especially helpful during a discussion are:

- Slide #4:** Student achievement increases for various expenditures
- Slide #7:** Influence of professional development on student achievement
- Slide #14:** Teachers' views of the effectiveness of collaboration
- Slide #20:** Effects of teaching quality on student outcomes

2. Create a handout from Page 3. NSDC grants permission to any NSDC member to use this survey with parent groups in their communities. Provide pens and pencils for parents.
3. Distribute one copy of the survey to each person in the group. Allow about 10 minutes for parents to respond to these questions.
4. Presenting the results can be done in a variety of ways. Here are two options:
 - Option 1:** Read each question and ask parents to announce their responses publicly.
 - Option 2:** Tabulate the scores using the chart below and present the results to the group before beginning a discussion.

SCORING GUIDE

Indicate the number of responses in each category.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
8.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
11.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
12.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

What do you know and believe about teacher learning?

Please circle the response that indicates your views regarding each statement.

1. I want my child enrolled in a school that has a deep commitment to the continuous learning of the staff.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. Teachers will learn more through collaboration with other teachers than attending workshops.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. Teachers learned everything they need to know about teaching when they were in college.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. What teachers know about their subject area has a direct impact on how much their students are able to learn.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. Teachers should do all of their learning on their own time.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. Science is the only subject in which we know more today than we knew 20 years ago. That means that science teachers are the only teachers who need to keep learning about new content for the subjects they teach.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. Teaching is a natural skill that really cannot be improved upon.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
8. Teachers only need to spend a few hours each year learning how to improve their teaching.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
9. The changing demographics in my community present new challenges to teachers and means that all teachers need to learn how to more effectively teach all children.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
10. Teachers can learn a great deal about children and teaching by talking with other teachers and observing other teachers in their classrooms during the school day.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
11. The quality of teaching has a direct impact on the quality of learning for students.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
12. Only bad teachers need to spend time learning how to improve how they teach. Good teachers will keep getting better without making any special effort.
 Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Sharing what you have learned

Purpose: To give teachers the tools they need to talk with parents and other community members about their professional development experiences

Instructions to facilitators:

- Prepare a handout with the template below.
- Distribute those handouts to teachers at the beginning of each staff development session. Tell teachers that part of what they will be learning each time they meet is how to talk with parents and other community members about what they are learning during staff development this year. Set aside those handouts.
- As you prepare to close for the day, ask teachers to use the handout to write briefly about what they have learned and how they intend to use it to benefit students. Encourage teachers to use this description to write a short announcement for their class or school newsletter. Tell them that they can also use it as a script for what they will say to a parent when they encounter them at school or elsewhere in the community.
- Take about 10 minutes and invite several teachers to role play with you and share their responses as they might deliver them to a parent or other community member.

On _____ (insert date), **staff members** (insert names below):

Met for the purpose of:

This was a valuable use of school time because we:

And we expect this experience to benefit your children by:

Frequently asked questions

NSDC has answered parents' most frequently asked questions about professional learning. You have our permission to use any of these questions and answers in school or district newsletters or to post on your school or district web site as long as NSDC is credited in this way:

Source: National Staff Development Council, www.nsd.org.

Send other questions that you want us to answer for parents to NSDCJoan@aol.com. We'll answer them and add them to our online FAQs for parents at www.nsd.org/talkingtoparents.cfm.

What is staff development anyway?

Staff development describes the time that teachers and principals use to update their knowledge and skills so they can do their work better. Sometimes, it's called professional development, inservice, institute days, workshops, or training. Sometimes, districts enable teachers to use time during school days to meet with other teachers to plan lessons and examine student work. This is also a significant form of staff development. No matter what the name, however, staff development is time when teachers and principals learn more so students can learn more.

Why didn't teachers learn what they needed to know in college like other professionals do?

Most professionals update their knowledge and skills throughout their careers. Would you go to a physician or dentist, for example, who had stopped learning after they graduated from medical or dental school?

It's impossible for teachers to learn everything they need to know for a lifetime of teaching during just a few years in college. Some of the most important lessons can be learned only after they have their own students.

Plus many changes have occurred since teachers graduated from college. There have been new discoveries in science, new research on human learning and teaching, changing demographics in communities, and new expectations for what students should learn in different subject areas. Teachers have to stay on top of all of this in order to be good teachers for your children.

Why do teachers have to take half days off from school for staff development? Why can't teachers do this on their own time, at night or on the weekends so they don't take time away from their students?

The school district has a responsibility for ensuring that teachers are up to speed in what and how they teach. That means the school district is obligated to provide teachers with time to learn during their work day.

Many teachers will choose to take a university course during their personal time but that is different from the learning that the district expects of them and invests in.

Teachers in my child's school spend an hour to an hour and a half every day just talking to each other. I think this is really a waste of time. Why can't they spend that time teaching instead of talking to each other?

When teachers have grade-level or department meetings, they generally use this time to ensure that all teachers are on target with their instruction. They compare lessons, test results, homework assignments, and sometimes they plan lessons that each of them will teach. That helps ensure that students are equally prepared for the next grade.

In schools where teachers just go into their own rooms and teach whatever and however they want, students often finish the year with very different experiences. That can mean that some students are not prepared for the next grade. Regular team meetings are one way to prevent that from happening.

We have too many half days in this district. Teachers are still in the building so why aren't my children in class with them?

When children have a half day off from school, teachers are still working. They're just working in a different way.

Ask the school's principal exactly what teachers are doing during these half days. A second question for the principal is whether other options for teacher learning would be just as effective as half days and less disruptive to a child's school day. (See NSDC's list of options for professional learning at www.nsd.org/talkingtoparents.cfm.)

I hear teachers say that staff development days are a waste of time because they learn nothing. If teachers don't think they're valuable, why does my school keep doing them?

When a teacher complains, ask him or her to tell you exactly what goes on during staff development. Try to determine if teachers had a voice in deciding what they would learn. Ask if this teacher's concerns are shared by others. Did teachers object to learning something new or did they object to the way the new information was provided for them? Were teachers just sitting and listening or were they doing work related to their classrooms? Were they overwhelmed by what they heard? Judge for yourself whether you believe the time could have been valuable for that teacher.

Build support for professional learning

Continued from Page 1

veteran teacher had been caught in a vise. She had been through weeks of intensive staff development to prepare her to teach this new math curriculum. She loved the new curriculum and, as the year proved, was very capable of teaching it to her students. What she could not do, however, was explain to parents what she had

learned about how to change her instruction and how those changes would result in the intended learning for her students. She knew what she would be doing but she did not have the words to express what she knew.

When a teacher cannot explain something to parents, parents become very nervous.

Parents and other community members cannot be expected to support spending money on staff development if they do not understand what it is, why it is necessary, what it looks like, why it looks that way, and what difference it will make for their children. Building their support begins by building their understanding.

When teachers are unable to describe what they have learned and how they will use it, parents rightly become very skeptical about the value of professional development. In an environment where school budgets are being slashed, that skepticism can lead directly to reduced budgets for teacher learning. Parents believe they understand the value of small classes; they do not understand the value

of professional development.

Parents are tough customers to win over when it comes to support for staff development — particularly for traditional forms of professional development that are based on released time. Parents become personally inconvenienced by half-days, days off, late starts, or early dismissals for staff development. Few newsletters or web sites provide much detail to parents about why children are being deprived of instruction while teachers are away learning. Calendars typically list vague phrases like “institute day” or “staff development.” When parents ask what teachers are learning during this time away from students, they often hear teachers say that “inservices” are a waste of time because they never learn anything new.

Teachers are more likely to see value in the time they have during their workday to meet with colleagues to share ideas and examine student work. But parents — and often teachers themselves — are less likely to view that important time as staff development.

This issue is intended to help you as teachers and principals in your district try to communicate the importance of professional development in all its forms to parents and other community members.

Break the inservice habit.

This is a Very Big Rule #1: Stop using the word inservice. Remove it from school district literature and excise it from your vocabulary. While you're at it, stop using “institute days,” “released days,” “PLC days,” even “staff development.” Those phrases confuse rather than illuminate.

Replace those phrases with simple, easy-to-understand phrases: teacher learning, professional learning, or staff learning.

Making this transition will be easier if you also minimize your dependence on released-time forms of professional devel-

opment in favor of learning opportunities for teachers during their regular work day.

Talk about learning alternatives.

To many parents, professional development immediately translates into “workshop” and students being sent home from school. So educating parents about the value of professional learning also means educating them about various learning options — and using more of those options for professional development in your community. See Page 8 for a list of the many “powerful designs” that NSDC believes represent good options for professional learning.

Showcase your teacher learning.

Each time your school or district sets aside time for teacher learning, tell parents about it.

Put a message on your web site or include something in your monthly newsletter telling parents exactly why kids are home for the afternoon and teachers are still working. Be specific. For example:

“Roosevelt teachers will spend two hours on Wednesday afternoon focusing on how they evaluate student writing. English teachers will be sharing and explaining their guidelines for grading English papers, known as a rubric. They will be working with teachers in all subjects to help them understand how they can apply the same rubric to student writing in their classes. That will help ensure that all teachers are grading the same way.

“The work that teachers are doing is connected to one of our district goals, which is improving the quality of student writing. Our statewide language arts assessment tests students on their writing ability and, beginning in 2005, the SAT will also test students’ writing ability.”

If your school has provided time for teachers to meet, include something in each newsletter about how teachers are using that time.

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Parents and other community members cannot be expected to support spending money on staff development if they do not understand what it is, why it is necessary, what it looks like, why it looks that way, and what difference it will make for their children.

Build community support for professional learning

Continued from Page 6

Emphasize the benefits to students.

One of the best arguments that teachers can make about their need for professional development and for spending time with other teachers is that it helps ensure equity for students. That addresses one of parents' greatest fears — that their child will miss something that other children are receiving — said Kris Olson, communications director for Parents for Public Schools.

Write a brochure.

Create a brochure that describes your district's reading initiative, professional meeting time for teachers, or a new position, such as reading coach or instructional specialist. Explain what the new program or position is intended to do, how it has been funded, and reference some of the research that suggests why it's a good strategy for your district.

Distribute it at back-to-school nights, through your newsletters, and post it on your web site.

Take a camera into a staff development session.

Introduce parents to an actual staff development session or a team meeting by broadcasting a session on your local cable access channel or by creating a video.

The advantage of a video is that it can be taken to parent meetings, broadcast on your local cable TV channel, and made available at your local library for checkout. Parents who might otherwise be unwilling to read about professional development option might watch a video because they perceive it as entertainment, says Sylvia Soholt, a consultant with KSA-Plus Communications in Virginia.

Write a column in your school or district newsletter.

In your school or district newsletter, share news about professional learning and answer parents' questions about current ini-

tiatives. We've included FAQs on Page 5 that you can add to your newsletters. However, responding to real questions from parents in your district will make such a column even more readable.

Prepare teachers for spontaneous talk about staff development.

Teachers will not become better communicators unless principals and staff developers spend time helping them learn how to do that. Teachers are unlikely to have formal meetings with parents to talk about their professional learning. Instead, schools should prepare teachers for answering questions from parents during the kinds of encounters that occur naturally in a community — as they shop in the grocery store, leave a religious service, pick up a video, or attend a sporting event.

Start by introducing a communication component into each staff development session including team meetings. See the tool on Page 4 for an example of a handout that could be used for this purpose.

Introduce the handout on Page 4 at the beginning of the meeting or workshop. This will signal teachers that you are expecting them to prepare for how they will communicate with parents about how they are using staff development time, what they are learning, and how their children will benefit from this. Do a short role play in which the facilitator acts as a parent and the teacher is asked to explain what he or she has learned.

With a slight variation, schools with weekly or regular collaborative time for teachers to meet together can use the same activity. If teachers meet daily, ask them to summarize what they have learned each week, perhaps in a learning log that is shared with the principal. The principal also could use a portion of faculty meetings to have a teacher from each team describe the work of that team and how teachers are implementing new learning in their classrooms.

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If not a workshop, then what?

1. Conducting action research projects
2. Analyzing teaching cases
3. Attending awareness-level seminars
4. Joining a cadre of in-house trainers
5. Planning lessons with a teaching colleague
6. Consulting an expert
7. Examining student data
8. Being coached by a peer or an expert
9. Leading a book study
10. Making a field trip
11. Writing assessments with a colleague
12. Participating in a study or support group
13. Doing a classroom walk-through
14. Giving presentations at conferences
15. Researching on the Internet
16. Leading a schoolwide committee or project
17. Developing displays, bulletin boards
18. Shadowing students
19. Coaching a colleague
20. Being a mentor — being mentored
21. Joining a professional network
22. Using a tuning protocol to examine student work
23. Attending an in-depth institute in a content area
24. Writing an article about your work
25. Observing model lessons
26. Reading journals, educational magazines, books
27. Participating in a critical friends group
28. Doing a self-assessment
29. Shadowing another teacher or professional in the field
30. Keeping a reflective log or journal
31. Analyzing the expectations of your statewide assessments
32. Enrolling in a university course
33. Viewing educational videos
34. Maintaining a professional portfolio
35. Studying content standards for your state
36. Observing other teachers teach
37. Listening to video/audio recordings
38. Participating in a videoconference or conference calls with experts
39. Visiting model schools/programs
40. Developing curriculum
41. Doing school improvement planning
42. Examining new technological resources to supplement lessons
43. Being observed and receiving feedback from another teacher or principal
44. Participating in lesson study
45. Working on a strategic planning team

A PDF containing this list and presented in a handout format is available on the NSDC web site, www.nsd.org/talkingtoparents.cfm. NSDC members have permission to reproduce this list of options in school or district newsletters or web sites if they use the following source line: Source: National Staff Development Council, www.nsd.org. All rights reserved.

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