

# THE LEARNING System

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF DISTRICT LEADERS ENSURING SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

## WEIGHING IN

*Georgia schools use online survey to evaluate effectiveness of professional learning programs*

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

**F**ew states have moved as far as Georgia in recognizing the relationship between high-quality professional learning and improved student achievement.

In 2003, Georgia adopted the NSDC Standards for Staff Development (renamed the Georgia Standards for Professional Learning) and asked each school district to also adopt the standards. Every school is required to develop a school improvement plan and those plans must include a professional learning plan.

“Our state encourages teachers to sit down and think about the needs of the kids and the adults in each school system. And then we encourage them to ask where they can find the resources to do this. That’s the opposite of the way most systems work. We’re trying to get the planning, not the budget, to wag the dog,” said Steve Preston, the state’s director of professional learning.

In spite of good intentions, however, Preston soon realized that schools and districts also need to know how well practices are aligned with the standards.

Enter NSDC’s Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI). Through the efforts of NSDC

Deputy Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in Austin, Texas worked with NSDC to develop a “valid and reliable” tool to answer that question. Initially produced as a 60-question paper-and-pencil survey, the SAI was soon transformed into an online tool that could be used by numerous schools in a district or in a state.

Two years ago, the Georgia Department of Education arranged to become the first state to provide the SAI online so every school in the state would have easy access to it. Georgia does not require



*Continued on p. 6*

### WHAT'S INSIDE

#### District Leadership

What factors to consider when choosing a new generation of principals.

**PAGE 2**



#### Focus on the NSDC Standards

Pat Roy (above) asks: Are new programs worthy of your time and resources?

**PAGE 3**

#### NSDC Tool

What a district leader needs to know about Identifying Future Leaders.

**PAGES 4-5**



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is NSDC's  
Distinguished  
Senior Fellow

*Effective  
principals  
understand that  
teachers need to  
nurture their own  
learning, as well  
as that of their  
students.*

## Ability to grow teachers is a crucial skill for principals

Spring is on the horizon, bringing with it a perennial chore and opportunity for school systems: Who should lead schools next year? This has become a more daunting task as baby-boomer principals begin to retire and as other principals buckle under the demands of national and state accountability laws. School system leaders worry both about where the next generation of principals will come from and how quickly they will master the intricacies of their complex roles.

Selecting new principals can be a mistake-prone process. In some cases, superintendents merely reassign principals, reasoning that just because a principal did not succeed in one school does not mean he or she won't succeed in another. Sometimes this works, but, in too many cases, the wishful thinking and patience of school system leaders results in subjecting students and teachers to long periods of mediocre leadership — or worse. In other cases, choosing principals is tainted by politics, parents, and teachers comfortable with the *status quo*, or an attitude of “We've got to put Joe somewhere.” These approaches usually come back to haunt the school system, either producing little or no improvement in student performance or leadership debacles that generate controversy.

There are, of course, myriad considerations to take into account when selecting principals. They must have the basic management skills to keep their schools safe and secure. They must know how to develop school climates that enhance the productivity of educators as well as students. Because it is a rare candidate who has all the characteristics a school system wants, choosing among potential school leaders is often an agonizing exercise in judgment, balancing a candidate's strengths and weaknesses with a school's needs.

There is, however, an important characteris-

tic that most superintendents and school board members overlook when selecting a new principal. Does the candidate have a plausible strategy for the intellectual development of the school's faculty? Fostering the intellectual development of teachers is not a priority in most schools because it is crowded out by competing, high visibility demands on principals. Many people believe teachers who are “highly qualified” know all that is necessary to manage their classrooms and effectively engage students in learning, though disaggregated student performance data suggest otherwise. The view persists that after teachers complete their pre-service education, there is no reason for their intellectual development to be a priority.

This is one reason so many teachers are not realizing their potential. They are working very hard, but they are not learning what they need to be more effective practitioners and help more of their students perform proficiently. As a result, increasing numbers of teachers are becoming frustrated and dispirited, with eroding self-efficacy.

Effective principals understand that teachers need to nurture their own learning, as well as that of their students. They know, too, that this learning must be continuous rather than episodic and that it is the principal's job to provide the encouragement, time, and structure that supports it. This requires, in turn, principals who understand and value new, more productive modes of professional learning and know how to use them to increase teachers' performance levels. None of that will happen, however, unless school system leaders forcefully communicate their expectations that principals will attend to the intellectual development of their faculties. Sending that message cannot begin too soon, particularly during the process of selecting and assigning principals for the forthcoming school year.



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003)

## Are new programs worthy of your time and resources?

I can see their eyes glazing over when I suggest to central office staff that they become informed consumers of educational research. Their experiences, unfortunately, have been clouded by graduate programs requirements and poorly written, unengaging reports of disembodied studies of unfamiliar programs. I am not suggesting that central office staff select educational research for casual reading. Rather, central office staff need to become critical consumers of education research. Why? **To determine whether new programs have any evidence of impact on student learning.**

In the late 1990s, NSDC examined 496 professional development programs to determine if they achieved results related to student learning. Many were well-known initiatives conducted in multiple sites, involving thousands of teachers and administrators, and costing thousands of dollars. Yet, only 26 programs (or 5%) had evidence of impact on student learning (Killion, 1999). Would school board members, the superintendent, and parents want to know whether their investment in new programs and strategies had a likelihood of resulting in student learning? This question can be answered by critically reading educational research.

Central office staff will find program evaluation studies are the most useful to examine. These studies generally are designed to determine program impact. Some questions when analyzing research include:

- Is the research design appropriate? *Is there a comparison between students from the beginning of the year and at the end? Were there compari-*

*sons between similar groups of students — some who participated in the program and others who did not?*

- What student population was involved — *suburban, rural, urban, or combinations?*
- How many students were studied? *Were there enough students in the study so that the results could be applied to other students in different settings?*
- What was the demographic profile of the school or district? *How different or similar was the school or district from yours? Would those differences make a difference in implementation or results?*
- What were the major components of the professional development design? *Did it involve study groups or classroom coaching or occur over a two- to three-year period? How was follow-up and support provided?*

- Were student results measured using valid and reliable instrumentation? *Or are instruments designed by individuals without review or is a standardized rubric used for scoring?*
- How are results reported? *Does the study use effect size, correlational coefficients, or percentages?*

The kind of professional development described in the NSDC standards implies long-term, on-going focus and support. When done well, it is a major expenditure of staff time and energy as well as financial resources. It seems essential for central office staff to do their homework to ensure that the programs identified for implementation are worthy of the efforts necessary to implement them. Becoming a critical consumer of educational research therefore becomes an essential role of central office staff.

### RESEARCH-BASED

Staff development that improves the learning of all students prepares educators to apply research to decision making.

### REFERENCES

**Killion, J. (1999).** *What works in the middle: Results-based staff development.* Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

## Identifying future leaders

**F**ormer school administrator Jim Slosson says he created the Lunch Bucket Leadership Scale after observing good, sometimes great, leaders in action. Some of them were military leaders, some were in insurance companies, schools, printing shops, and restaurants. He says his tool was validated by observing an outstanding, school superintendent who turned a less-than-ordinary district into an exceptional organization.

Slosson asks the right questions but with a sense of humor. He suggests using the tool to identify future leaders in your organizations.

“Somebody once said that managers do things right while leaders do the right thing. That needs to be expanded: Good leaders do the right thing at the right time in the right way for the right reason,” he said.

### Lunch Bucket Leadership Scale

#### **PLAYS THE COURSE** (*Sticks to the knitting*)

Doesn't get diverted by what other people or organizations are doing and doesn't allow the urgent to dominate the important. Makes decisions based on where our organization needs to go and what needs to happen next. Resists fads.

1	2	3	4	5
Never saw a program he or she didn't like and try to implement		Generally focused but tends to bleed on every hill		Always patches the hull before rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic

#### **HAS A PLAN** (*Not necessarily a great plan*)

Has a clear idea of what the organization should be doing. Because there are goals, problems stay problems instead of becoming insurmountable obstacles. Polishes the plan and is willing to work and rework the plan as experience and realities dictate. Sees and uses opportunities.

1	2	3	4	5
Not a clue. Lost the ball in high weeds		Can formulate a plan when given general instructions		Has a clear idea of what to do and how to begin

#### **STANDS FOR SOMETHING** (*Won't stand for just anything*)

Has a clear sense of values and a moral code that is articulated. Members know leader's personal code of conduct and expectations of ethics within the organization. Others know what the organization believes because expectations are clearly communicated.

1	2	3	4	5
Whatever is most expedient; two-faced; weasel		Good person but may fold under pressure		Very clear about the school's beliefs and its members' appropriate actions

#### **DOES ROUTINE THINGS ROUTINELY**

Pays attention to the operational details that make the place run. Budgets, calendars, registration, and other routine matters are accomplished in timely and organized ways.

1	2	3	4	5
Couldn't organize a dog fight if you provided the dogs		Deals with things before they are emergencies		Anticipates what to do now to be ready for the future

**TOLERATES AMBIGUITY**

Understands that consistency in every detail is not necessary (or even desirable). Knows that it is impossible to achieve absolute consistency and move forward.

1	2	3	4	5
It's black or white; you can't be a little bit pregnant		Believes that we will figure it out		Day is night and black is white as long as it matches the mission

**LEADS FROM THE FRONT** (*instead of pushing from the back*)

The leaders works with staff members to set an example. Has done or is willing to do what is asked of others. Bears the hardships and victories. Downplays prerequisites of position. Asks more than orders. Seeks advice and feedback.

1	2	3	4	5
Shouts orders from the rear		Stays in the pack but gets out in front if required		Goes over the top first and asks for help; builds esprit de corps

**CREATES HEROES**

Looks for matches between organizational and personal needs. Makes a genuine investment in people. Thinks win-win. Acknowledges heroic behavior in others and puts others' needs ahead of own needs.

1	2	3	4	5
Wants to be a star		Acknowledges the efforts of others; doesn't steal credit		Creates high self-esteem; recognizes others above self

**FALLS TOWARD THE BULLET**

Accepts responsibility (or blame) for the actions and results of the organization. Shields subordinates from unfair assault. Doesn't offer excuses. Puts needs of the organization ahead of self.

1	2	3	4	5
Blames others		Accepts generalized responsibility for the organization		Clearly accepts responsibility for self and organization

**RINGS THE BELL**

Promotes the values and successes of the organization and individuals privately and publicly. Develops promotion and communication inside and outside the organization. Works to develop a legend and lore of "what we're all about."

1	2	3	4	5
You don't call; you don't write		Does the required		Creates ceremonies and awards and offers thanks

**DOESN'T DO DUMB THINGS**

Avoids doing excessively stupid things, such as kicking a kid out of school for having a candy gun. Doesn't assign numbered parking spaces. Doesn't call boss names in public.

1	2	3	4	5
Impetuous dolt		Can get out of own way in well-lit room		Never steals more chain than he or she can swim with

**Source:** Reprinted with permission of the author, Jim Slosson (jslosson@aol.com).

# Georgia schools use online survey to evaluate

Continued from p. 1

schools to take the SAI but Preston said having it available electronically has made it so accessible that 1,400 of the state's 2,015 schools participated in the survey in its first year. SAI results also help answer NCLB questions about whether more teachers are experiencing high-quality professional development each year.

Preston ticked off the advantages of the electronic version: schools get reports back very quickly, everybody can look at the same data, nobody is suspicious that anyone has rigged the data, and it's much easier for big schools to use.

## GWINNETT COUNTY'S STORY

Since Georgia adopted the standards, Gwinnett County, the state's largest school district, has moved aggressively to ensure that every educator in the district is familiar with the standards and that all professional learning conforms to the ideals of the standards. "The NSDC goal is our goal," said Lea Arnau, Gwinnett's director of professional learning and also president of the Georgia Staff Development Council.

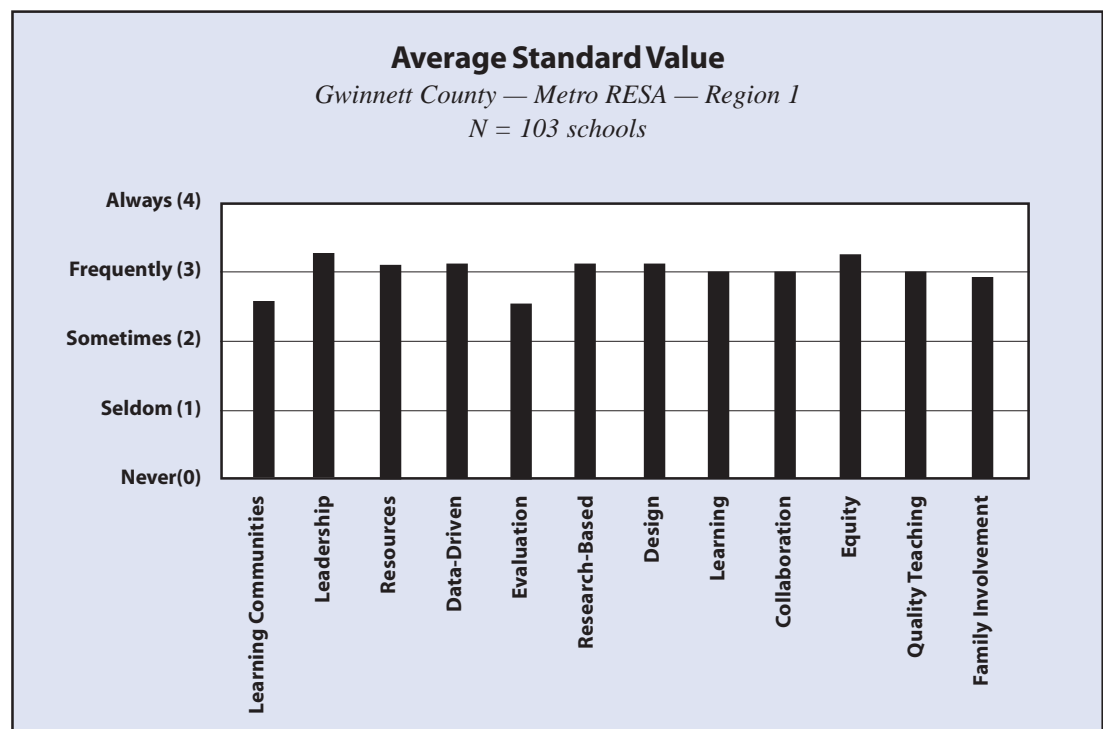
Each one of Gwinnett's 106 schools has a copy of the standards and a copy of *Moving the Standards into Practice: Innovation Configurations*, by Pat Roy and Shirley Hord (NSDC, 2003).

When NSDC introduced the SAI, Arnau began giving the paper-and-pencil versions to Gwinnett schools. "But I was only having one person at each school fill out the survey. That might have changed their beliefs about professional learning but it didn't change the way anyone else was thinking about it," she said.

The beauty of Georgia's investment in the online survey is that every teacher and principal in the state is able to take the survey at no cost to their district. Although the SAI is intended to help evaluate the state of professional learning, Arnau said responding to the survey is also a learning process. "Just reading through the questions on the SAI, teachers are going to gain an awareness of what the expectations are for high-quality professional learning. They may not necessarily use the same words but they will know the actions that are being described," Arnau said.

Continued on p.7

**The beauty of Georgia's investment in the online survey is that every teacher and principal in the state is able to take the survey at no cost to their district.**



Gwinnett's results on the SAI indicate that the district needs to do more work on the Learning Communities and Evaluation standards, according to Lea Arnau, the district's director of professional learning.



# professional learning programs

*Continued from p. 6*

In spring 2005 when the SAI was first available online, 6,278 of Gwinnett's 10,000 teachers responded to the 20-minute survey. Of the district's 106 schools, 103 recorded responses from at least 10 teachers. In fall 2005, another 1,480 teachers responded with another 29 schools recording responses from at least 10 teachers each.

Each principal sees a bar graph that reports the results for his school as well as the questions that go with each standard. If a principal sees that his school scored poorly on the Learning Communities standard, for example, he can review the questions to get a better understanding of why that score was so low.

At the system level, Arnau sees individual reports for all of the Gwinnett schools as well as a systemwide report. "It gives me a big picture and lets me know, for example, that we need to work on learning communities and evaluation throughout the district," she said.

When the surveys are complete, Arnau meets with every principal and assistant principal to show them their school's results and suggest how they might use the information. She also presents her findings to the district's Educational Leadership Team. Each team member works with about 18 schools on school improvement issues. Each member of the team receives a notebook with the SAI results for the schools with whom they work. Those team members are responsible for also having conversations with the principals in those schools regarding the results of the SAI.

In addition, Arnau has a Professional Learning Contact Person in each school. These liaisons participate in a two-day course with Arnau to learn how to enhance professional learning in their schools. They also provide a crucial information link between Arnau's office and each school.

"They are my professional learning choir. They are the people that I work with constantly, the ones that I am continuously training to understand the standards, the expectations, the NSDC goal," Arnau said.

The Professional Learning Contact Person disseminates information through the Professional Learning Advisory Committee at each

## HOW TO BUY THE SAI

The Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) is available in paper and online versions.

A print version of the inventory is sold in sets of 50 - 50 copies of the assessment inventory and 50 scoring sheets plus instructions for administering the inventory. It is intended to be entirely self-administered. Item #B244.

An online version that generates school-wide reports is also available. To make arrangements for this, contact the NSDC Business Office, (800) 727-7288, and ask for the Survey Administrator.

school. Each grade level and the clerical staff are represented on this committee.

"They all take different roads in terms of disseminating. I encourage them to focus on the standards where they are weakest," Arnau said.

Arnau said the SAI has given focus to her office's work. "It gives validation to the work that we do. It guides the work that we do. It puts something measurable about professional learning on the table. That's what everybody struggles with. So this tool has given professional learning great credibility.

"It's very helpful for our schools to be able to look at individual questions. They can see the results and say 'we thought we were more of a learning community because we meet as teams but we can see that we are not having the right kinds of meetings.' That's very powerful," Arnau said.

Preston said he's noticed one interesting dilemma as a result of his state's work with the standards: As teachers become more knowledgeable about the standards, they are more likely to rate their school lower on the SAI.

"The more they learn, the more realistically they rank themselves because their expectations have changed. We're predicting that there will be a downward curve for a couple of years or more as they learn more about the standards. When they start doing it and become confident that they're doing it well, we'll see those numbers go back up," he said. ■

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

▶ Stephanie Hirsh provides more background on the Standards Assessment Inventory in her standards column in the Spring 2006 issue of *JSD*.

▶ More information on the NSDC standards is available on the web site: [www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm).

▶ NSDC has published several books in support of the NSDC standards. See Page 8.

## resources / NSDC standards

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NSDC has published several books in support of the NSDC standards. All may be purchased at the NSDC Online Bookstore at <http://store.nsdcoffice.org>.

#### NSDC Standards for Staff Development, Revised, Item #B125

A guidebook to the NSDC standards, includes all 12 standards plus a rationale for each and an annotated bibliography. NSDC, 2001.

#### Moving the NSDC Staff Development Standards into Practice: Innovation Configurations, Volume I, Item #B221

The first volume includes ICs for Teacher, Principal, Superintendent, School Board Members, and Central Office Staff. NSDC, 2003.

#### Moving the NSDC Staff Development Standards into Practice: Innovation Configurations, Volume II, Items #T17-#T22

The second volume of ICs builds on the work that began with the first volume. Chapters in Volume II are presented on CD-ROMs. The chapters include: Director of Staff Development (Item #T17); External Assistance Provider (Item #T18); Institution of Higher Education (Item #T19); Professional Association (Item #T20); and State Education Agency (Item #T21). All five roles are available in a bundle (Item #T22), but each role also can be purchased separately. NSDC and SEDL, 2005.

#### Tools for Growing the NSDC Standards, Item #B129

Published as a supplement to the *JSD*, this book includes six tools that schools can use to familiarize a staff with the standards. NSDC, 2001.

#### E-learning for Educators: Implementing the Standards for Staff Development, Item # B155

Developed by a team of experts in technology, staff development, and distributed learning, the guide uses NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, Revised as the basis for examining technology mediated learning. NSDC, 2001.

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