

# THE LEARNING System

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

## Bargaining time

Union contract spells out how and when professional learning will happen

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

**T**he times they are a-changin' in Carman-Ainsworth Community Schools in Flint, Mich.

Like most districts, Carman-Ainsworth used to provide a smorgasbord of professional development activities that teachers were encouraged, but not required, to join. There was little effort to align what teachers learned with what students needed. And little time was provided for teacher learning during the workday. Teachers largely learned what they wanted to learn and on their own time, subject primarily to state requirements for certification.

Now, Carman-Ainsworth is a district undergoing professional development reform. "We've had a cultural shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning," said teachers' union president Linda Wainio.

The district is still a work in progress but its story of change is instructive, especially because the teachers' union has been instrumental in shaping the new face of professional learning.

Overall, the district professional development has become more job-embedded, results-driven, and standards-based. Every Wednesday morning, every student in the 5,400-student district begins school an hour later so teachers can meet with colleagues, either in grade-level or subject-area learning teams. Teachers begin work 15 minutes earlier than usual on Wednesdays, creating

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**The Spring 2007 issue of JSD includes many examples of schools and districts that have found the time and are using it effectively for professional learning.**

## Send the message to all schools: Find time for learning every day

Let's face it. Many school system leaders are confounded by the last six words of NSDC's goal: *All teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work.* "Why is this necessary?" they ask. "How is it possible?"

In most school systems, staff development has been an occasional event. There was an assumption that teachers could rely on their pre-service education, supplemented now and then by a summer college course, and a few days of "in service" each school year.

In today's context of state standards, assessment, and accountability, not to mention the No Child Left Behind Act, these views are not only outmoded, but quaint. Public education has changed dramatically, but staff development has not kept pace. New circumstances have pushed most educators to the limits of their knowledge and skills, even if they are reluctant to admit it. They are ill-served by professional development that does not address their needs and cause them to become more successful in educating students. Professional learning can respond to this problem, but only if it is qualitatively and quantitatively greater than past efforts.

Time is a precious resource in schools and it seems there is never enough of it. Most school system leaders do not assume that teachers are entitled to team learning time and they do not create such time. That leads teachers and principals to believe they can't create the time they need to engage routinely in high-quality professional learning.

Thankfully, the NSDC web site ([www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org)) has a wealth of information about school systems that are moving towards professional learning as "part of their daily

work." Your query about how to make time for professional learning should begin with a ruthless assessment of how your school or system currently uses time. For example, middle-level schools that provide a daily common planning period may conclude that teacher teams could more productively use this time for team learning. Schools may also find that rather than creating a standard block of time for this purpose, they can better use scheduled meetings during the week. These might include faculty meetings, departmental meetings, and time provided by delayed starts or early dismissals. A school that takes full advantage of such opportunities for professional learning will be well on its way to developing a more energized and effective staff.

While some schools are taking significant steps in this direction, most are not. They may not feel that they have the system's permission and support to shake off the dust of traditional staff development and craft more effective modes of professional learning. In spite of the brief era of "school-based decision making," most principals and faculties continue to look to their school systems for major initiatives in policy and practice. Schools need to know that their school systems both expect them to engage in high-quality professional learning each day and will provide the technical assistance to do so. Without the leadership of school boards, superintendents, and central office administrators, most schools will assume that moving towards school-based professional learning entails unnecessary risk. Each school system is responsible for sending a very different, positive message, partnering with schools to develop practical approaches that will make high-quality professional learning part of educators' daily work.



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

## What evidence do you have?

I recently met a central office staff member who is responsible for research and evaluation. Principals and staff members affectionately nicknamed him the “data guy” because one of the tasks he had engaged in was going to each school within the district to help them build their skills in using data to improve student learning. He told me he knew that he could spend his time collecting and compiling data but that it would mean little unless school-level people used it when making instructional and professional development decisions.

This is a wonderful example of one of the underlying assumptions of NSDC's Standards for Staff Development: A primary role of central office staff is to support and provide technical assistance to schools. According to the Innovation Configuration maps for NSDC's standards (Roy & Hord, 2003), central office staff members (not just the director of staff development) should **provide opportunities for administrators and teachers to learn how to use data for instructional decision making.**

To accomplish this task, central office staff first needs **to provide opportunities for teachers and administrators to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to learn to analyze student data for instructional decision making.** This does not mean crunching the numbers and then telling teachers what they need to do or where they failed. It means facilitating school-based learning teams with collecting, displaying, and analyzing student data. For example, staff members need to learn

to summarize data by describing and reaching agreement about what the data indicate. Many staff move quickly to offering suggestions for improvement or next steps before there is common agreement about what the numbers indicate. Other skills and tools that staff members need to use data well are described in an issue of *Tools for Schools* (Richardson, 2000).

### Data-Driven:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.

Secondly, central office staff needs **to expect all staff to know how and to use data for instructional decision making.** A principal recently told me that her superintendent asks two questions whenever he visits the school: “How is it going? What evidence do you have?” These questions made a clear point that collecting and using data was an important

skill that she needed to develop. That single question from the superintendent reframed her work and her priorities. It also caused her to have similar conversations with her staff members.

Many central office staff members believe providing data to schools should be the extent of their responsibility; NSDC's standards call for central office staff to build the capacity of school-based staff to use data to make a variety of instructional decisions.

### REFERENCES

Richardson, J. (October/November, 2000). The numbers game: Measure progress by analyzing data. *Tools for Schools*.

Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003). *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation configurations*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.

Read more about NSDC's standards at [www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm).

**“I wish I could stand on a busy corner, hat in hand, and beg people to throw me all their wasted hours.”**

— Bernard Berenson



## STRATEGIES FOR FINDING TIME

Schools and districts that have carved out more time for professional learning have typically relied on one of the following strategies. Most of these strategies were initially identified in “The time dilemma in school restructuring,” by Gary Watts and Shari Castle, *Phi Delta Kappan* 75 (1), December 1993.

### Bank time

- Lengthen the regular school day. “Save” the extra minutes to create larger blocks of time when teachers can plan or learn together.
- Create regularly scheduled early dismissal/late start days.
- Shave minutes off the lunch period and “save” that time for teacher learning time.

### Buy time

- Hire more teachers, clerks, and support staff to create smaller classes and/or expand or add planning or learning times for teachers.
- Hire substitute teachers to fill in for regular classroom teachers to enable those teachers to plan or learn together.
- Add an extra teaching position in the school for a rotating substitute teacher who would regularly fill in for teachers in order to free them for planning or learning time.
- Create a substitute bank of “staff development substitute teachers” which regular classroom teachers can tap in order to participate in various forms of professional learning.

## Common time

- Use common planning time to enable teachers working with the same students, the same grade level, or the same subject to share information, collaborate on projects, or learn more about their shared interest.
- Organize “specials” into blocks of time to create common time for teachers with similar interests.
- Link planning periods to other non-instructional times, such as lunch periods, giving teachers the option to use their personal time for shared learning time.

## Free teachers from instructional time

- Enlist administrators to teach classes.
- Authorize teaching assistants and/or college interns to teach classes at regular intervals, always under the direction of a teacher.
- Team teachers so one teaches while the other plans or learns independently.
- Plan day-long, off-site field experiences for students in order to create a large block of time when teachers can learn.

## Add professional days to the school year

- Create multi-day summer learning institutes for teachers in order to ensure that they receive the necessary depth in areas of strategic importance for the district.
- Create a mid-year break for students and use those days for teacher learning.

## Use existing time more effectively

- Provide professional learning time during staff meetings. (For ideas on better ways to use staff meetings, see the Oct./Nov. 1999 *Tools for Schools*.)
- Spread time from multi-school planning days across the calendar to provide more frequent, shorter school-based learning opportunities.

### How much time do teachers need?

In a survey of 178 principals in urban high schools undertaking major change efforts, lack of time, energy, and money were identified as the key implementation problems. On average, teachers devoted 70 days of time to implementing a project, while “the more successful schools used 50 days a year of external assistance for training, coaching, and capacity building.”

**Source:** “Using time well: Schedules in Essential schools,” by Kathleen Cushman, *Horace* 12 (2), Nov. 1995.  
[www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces\\_res/15](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/15).



**“Don’t say you don’t have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michelangelo, Mother Teresa, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein.”**

— H. Jackson  
 Brown, Jr.



## Contract spells out time for professional learning

**At the bargaining table in 2004, using interest-based bargaining for the first time, the teachers' union and Carman-Ainsworth administration agreed that they shared an interest in high-quality professional development for all members of the staff.**

Learn about Carman-Ainsworth High School's experience with school-based learning teams in the May 2007 issue of *The Learning Principal*.

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a 75-minute block of learning time once a week. (Teachers still have 53 or 55 minutes a day for personal planning time.) The district now has about 100 school-based learning teams. In addition to those teams, principals also meet in their own districtwide learning team during their administrative meetings. All of this time is counted as professional development time.

The district's evaluation instrument focuses on a teacher's professional growth and teachers identify personal learning goals and the criteria that will measure their success in achieving those goals. The district also created positions for several instructional specialists and coaches who work with teachers in literacy and math.

The new approach to professional development was made possible in large part because the Carman-Ainsworth Education Association and the district shifted to an interest-based bargaining model rather than the traditional adversarial model as they bargained the 2004-07 contract.

### TEAM TIME

The district's 2000-03 contract was the first contract that provided time for teachers to meet as teams. That time was provided as five half days during the school year. "But there were no parameters or guidelines to really describe teaming. Teaming was whatever teachers interpreted that to be. Sometimes, they were simply sitting in the same room developing lessons independently and occasionally conversing with each other," said Dave Swierpel, director of professional development and community services and a graduate of the NSDC Academy.

That contract also stipulated that principals would have five hours of staff meetings during the school year. Again, few guidelines were in place to govern those meetings.

About that time, Swierpel and Paul Robinson, director of research and assessment, returned from their first NSDC Academy meeting filled with new ideas and a deeper understanding about quality professional development. They had a vision for professional development that

would be more closely tied to district initiatives, less event-driven, and more collaborative.

In the new NCLB era, principals were told that they would be accountable for improvements in their buildings. Swierpel and others questioned whether it was appropriate to "hold someone accountable when you only give them five hours a year to have face-to-face leadership with their entire staff."

At the same time, teachers were unhappy about a requirement to acquire 18 hours of professional development outside the school day, even though teachers had wide discretion about what they could study. "Those 18 hours could be in virtually anything. But that was a pain for them and it was a chore for the district to track all of that. We went building to building just trying to describe the process of counting hours. It was very challenging," Swierpel said.

At the bargaining table in 2004, using interest-based bargaining for the first time, the teachers' union and Carman-Ainsworth administration agreed that they shared an interest in high-quality professional development for all members of the staff. Swierpel brought to the table what he and Robinson had been learning about quality professional development. "We knew that it was based around real work and that it should be collaborative. It was clear that we could use all of that time and put it into something that was much more powerful than what we had," he said.

That led the bargaining team to examine the principal-led staff meetings and the 18 hours of required professional development as a package of time.

Teachers rejected the first tentative agreement that emerged from interest-based bargaining, partly because they didn't like the changes in the calendar but also partly out of reaction to the new style of bargaining, said union president Wainio. So the bargaining team went back to the table.

The bargainers next proposed 80-minute schoolwide staff meetings before or after school once a month which would be led by the principal

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# Contract spells out time for professional learning

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and were expected to focus on professional learning. Attendance was mandatory.

The new contract also made another significant change. For the first time, Carman-Ainsworth created a districtwide Professional Development Committee comprised of teachers and administrators. That committee oversees the district's professional development, ensuring that it is tied to NSDC's Standards for Staff Development and other key indicators of quality professional learning.

This time, teachers approved the contract.

## MIXED RESULTS, MORE CHANGE

The first year of schoolwide PD meetings got mixed results. Expecting teachers to be at their best after a long day of teaching was expecting too much. Meeting after school was also a hardship for teachers with young children. "The meetings became controversial because they raised questions like what happens if somebody misses it? What if a teacher is sick? Does she have to make up that time? If so, how does she do that? The whole record keeping was awful. It was more hassle than it was worth. But that was our best thinking at the time and we negotiated that into the contract. There were some pros to it but there were more cons than pros," Wainio said.

Both sides agreed to go back to the bargaining table even though there was still a year to run in the contract.

During those discussions, both sides agreed that creating a late start every Wednesday at every school would address several issues. Teachers would not be worn out by the time they started this important work. Teachers' childcare concerns would be reduced since teams would be meeting during the regular work day. External grant support was tapped to provide activities for elementary and middle school students, thus warding off a potential parent concern.

The new agreement went back to teachers for a vote since it involved a change in the calendar. Teachers liked the new option and approved the mid-year contract change.

## LATE STARTS

The district learned to do some things differently with late starts. Teams have explicit instructions to create team norms, look at student work, develop common assessments, and develop goals. Each team must fill out a learning log which is reviewed weekly by a building administrator. Principals and central office administrators do walk-throughs during team meetings and instructional time. At each districtwide administrative meeting, principals are expected to talk about what's occurring in their schools.

Although it's early in the process, school-based learning teams seem to be winning over teachers. A survey of teachers in January revealed that teachers value the opportunities they have to work closely with colleagues and believe their teams are effective, that talking with their colleagues is important, and that such interaction has a positive impact on student achievement.

This spring, Carman-Ainsworth is bargaining again, working on its next contract. "We really want to institutionalize how we build time into the school day for teacher learning. I don't want us to take a step back. I don't want to go back to events. I want to fuse it all together and solidify that this is the way we operate," Swierpel said.

Union president Wainio said one of the greatest challenges is communicating the big picture. "If our end in mind is professional learning focused on results, the improved learning of all students and the creation of high-quality relationships between adults and high-quality relationships between adults and students, we have to help people understand where we're going."

For her part, she wants the union to play a significant role in creating that future. But that's part of the struggle as well. "Collaboration is suspect in many circles. Some of our constituents would prefer that it stays us and them. We have to model that it really is for the benefit of everyone to work in a collaborative way," she said. ■

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