

# THE LEARNING Principal®

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

## LEADING A BUILDING OF LEADERS

*National Board Certified Teachers raise the bar for all*

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

**B**illie Hicklin frankly admits that she's often stymied when she attends a conference and hears administrators describing the challenges they face with their

teaching staffs.

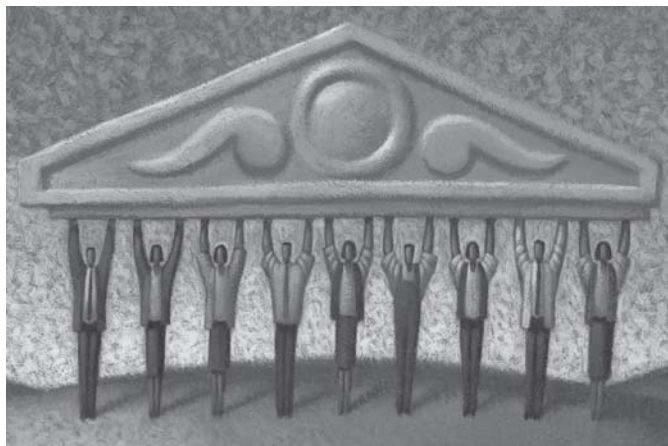
"They talk about issues that I just don't have to deal with. I've never dealt with an inferior teacher on my staff. I've never had to work to get a teacher up to speed. I really don't know what that's like," said Hicklin, principal of Parkway School in Boone, N.C.

How did Hicklin get to be so lucky? She works in a school that includes 16 National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) among her staff of 43.

Six other teachers were going through the certification process during the 2006-07 school year. If they are all successful, more than half of her teaching staff will hold the highly respected credential from the National Board for Profes-

sional Teaching Standards by this time next year.

"I work in a building that's filled with thoroughbreds. The standards in this building are so high. Teachers who have chosen not to go through National Board



certification still benefit from what they have learned. When you rub shoulders every day with people who have been through that process and who weave that experience into all of their

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Deborah Childs-Bowen is the director of the Institute for Teaching and Student Achievement and assistant professor in the School of Education at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

**Leaders miss an opportunity to touch the future if they fail to both honor the past and find perspectives for the future.**

See pp. 4-5 for ideas on how to celebrate your school's year.

## Look back and move forward

**E**nd-of-the-year transitions can be both celebratory and anxiety-provoking. Each school year provides us with valuable lessons learned. The key is being aware of these lessons and using these lessons as leverage to learn more. Leaders miss an opportunity to touch the future if they fail to both honor the past and find perspectives for the future.

While we know change is inevitable, accepting that we must change is still difficult. Change evokes anxiety and insecurity. For some, the mere suggestion of change is received as a personal indictment of what they have not done, regardless of how effective or successful they have been. This is when a leader's skillfulness and authenticity of his or her communications is essential.

A principal sets the tone for celebration and acknowledgements of successes. What are the legacies you want to embrace and fortify for future years? Consider these suggestions as you shape opportunities to celebrate and plan the future:

- Create awareness of successes.
- Use documented progress to validate the outcomes. What perspectives can you gain from the data: Number of students proficient in reading and math? Percentage gains from year to year? Attendance?
- Honor the successes and, most importantly, the people in multiple ways.
- Celebrate milestones and authentically recognize each educator for his or her contributions. Recognize even the naysayer, realizing their contribution to learning.
- Share lessons learned broadly.
- Agree on the outstanding challenges.
- Align program and practice. Look at budgets and reallocate resources to ensure greater success.

- Have each educator consider how learning can guide both program and individual development to meet the challenge.

Use the end of the year as an opportunity to convene the entire school community or segments of the community so you can set the foundation for future success. Take stock of what worked and what components ensured that success. Make this a positive experience as well as a gateway to necessary improvements for next year. Invite everyone to reflect on their growth during the past year and to set stretch goals for next year. Examine the organizational culture. Look at how your team might reinvent themselves to meet anticipated changes or needs. Make expectations clear and ensure that procedures and structures are present to support the changes, including school routines and working conditions, classroom routines, and learning environments.

The tradition of letting go of last year's events, activities, successes, and challenges is gone forever. The new tradition of accountability has left an indelible imprint on the actions and practices of educators. Even if No Child Left Behind does not survive over the next several decades, we are forever changed. Our minds have been changed. We know that what we do in one year has a tremendous bearing on what we will do the next year.

Because of NCLB, the end of the school year includes a new examination about whether we have met our accountability goals or whether we are on the "needs improvement" list. Regardless of where we land at the end of the year, we must preempt such external lists and recognize for ourselves the areas where we will change and those that we will embolden because we believe they are the things that make a teaching and learning environment successful for all.



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

## Deep content knowledge: A key to quality instruction

**M**ost principals I know will admit, in the privacy of their offices, that not all of their teachers are equally effective in moving students to high levels of performance. They cannot always describe why the teachers are different, but they know there are differences. Research into this area has unearthed some interesting yet not surprising findings: one of the biggest characteristics of quality teaching is deep content knowledge (Haycock, 1998). With the advent of rigorous student standards and No Child Left Behind, this finding is even more significant. In other words, you can't teach what you don't truly understand yourself.

In the best of all possible worlds, a college degree and certification would automatically equal deep content knowledge. Experience and research have found this assumption to be untrue. As a result, one of the critical leadership tasks for a principal is to **ensure that school-based staff development develops teachers' deep understanding** of the content that they teach (Roy & Hord, 2003). Developing deep content understanding seems to be even more critical at the secondary level where a relationship between teacher knowledge and student achievement in technical subjects has been established (Haycock, 1998). Principals need to **provide experiences that deepen understanding and meaning of new concepts/strategies and enable educators to problem solve and adapt new strategies to match classroom and student circumstances**. Accomplishing this outcome requires creating small learning teams who meet regularly to review learning/achievement data, plan lessons, examine student work, problem solve instructional issues, and discuss content standards.

### Learning:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students applies knowledge about human learning and change.

In addition, the principal **provides programs to address content knowledge and underlying concepts as well as the use of new curriculum materials, assessment practices, and instructional practices**. This staff development outcome includes not only gains in knowledge and skills but the implementation of new practices. An implementation goal requires a different kind of professional development: staff development that is job-embedded and close to the real world of teaching and learning. Again, this kind of staff

development is best accomplished through the use of knowledgeable and skillful colleagues who work together to improve their practice daily. Powerful staff development strategies include the use of protocols created by the Annenberg Foundation and the Coalition of Essential Schools ([www.lasw.org](http://www.lasw.org)). This group has identified over 14 protocols that help teams of

teachers explore student work, analyze teacher assignments, solve professional dilemmas, and investigate whole school issues and goals. The use of small learning teams and protocols allows principals to deepen content knowledge while providing a differentiated professional development program for teachers. Teachers' increased depth of understanding will produce more effective instruction and increased student achievement.

### REFERENCES

- Haycock, K. (1998, Summer). Good teaching matters: How well-qualified teachers can close the gap. *Thinking K-16*, Vol. 3 (2).
- Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003). *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation configurations, Volume I*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.

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NSDC's standards,  
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index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm)

# CELEBRATION

**C**elebration is an end-of-the-school-year theme at many schools. Schools cheer high school graduates and scholarship recipients. Schools have promotion ceremonies to honor children moving from one grade to the next. Musical and artistic awards abound at the end of the school year.

But few celebrations focus on what teachers have achieved on behalf of their students during the school year. In the rush of events at the end of the school year, taking time to acknowledge your staff's contributions provides a healthy way to wrap up a school year and set the stage for the next year.

## MAP YOUR SUCCESS

**Purpose:** Enable a staff to visually see how much work has been accomplished during the school year. Make this activity public and reduce the opportunity for any staff member to assert that the work has not been recognized or appreciated.

**Materials:** Roll of chart paper, colored markers, stickers.

**Time:** Two hours

### DIRECTIONS

1. Invite staff members to a special end-of-the-year meeting. Ask them to bring any materials with them that will help jog their memories of the work they have done this year.
2. Divide the staff into teams that make the most sense for your school. This could be grade-level teams plus another team with teachers of the "specials" or it could be teams built around content areas. Give each team a length of chart paper and colored markers.
3. Invite each team to create a timeline of their work for the year. Ask them to divide their timeline into nine vertical sections, one for each month of the school year. Ask them to include at least one piece of work for each month. Invite them to illustrate each item by drawing pictures or using stickers. *Time: 30-45 minutes*
4. Ask each team to designate one reporter for the group.
5. Post one team's timeline on a wall and invite that group's reporter to introduce the successes of the team to the entire staff.
6. When the second team is ready to report, place its timeline on the wall so that the Septembers of each timeline are aligned. Continue this pattern through all of the presentations. This will give the staff a visual overview of work that was done each month during the school year.
7. After everyone has presented, invite teachers to sum up the year's work. Encourage them to focus on their achievements. Applaud them for everything they have done during this school year.

### ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Divide the staff into nine vertical teams. Assign each team to one month of the school year. Invite each team to record everything done at all grade levels and content areas in the school during a single month. For this to be successful, teachers will need their planners, calendars, and/or other class notes to jog their memories about events during the beginning of the school year.

**"Learn the art of encouragement. We can't always be among the heroes ... Someone needs to sit on the curb and clap."**

— *Melissa Woods,*  
*Thoughts on a Quality*  
*Work Culture*

**"Celebrate what you want to see more of."**

— *Tom Peters*

**"Celebration is to the culture of a school what the movie is to the script, the concert is to the score, and the dance is to the values that are difficult to express in any other way."**

— *Terrence Deal*  
*and Allen Kennedy,*  
*Corporate Cultures*

“Celebrations weave our hearts and souls into a shared destiny. People come together to celebrate beginnings and endings, triumphs and tragedies.”

— Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal, *Leading with Soul: An Uncommon Journey of Spirit*

## TELL THEM THAT YOU LOVE THEM

**Purpose:** In this activity, every person present will be acknowledged for their contribution to the school’s work during the last school year. This activity recognizes that everyone has contributed something.

**Preparation:** Write the name of each person on the staff on a slip of paper. Fold the pieces of paper and put them in a large hat or other container. Provide enough chairs for everyone to sit down. Arrange chairs in a large circle so that everyone is able to see everyone else.

**Time:** Multiply the number of staff members times three minutes in order to determine how much time to set aside for this activity.

### DIRECTIONS

1. Explain the purpose of the activity, perhaps by saying something like: “We want to acknowledge the contributions that each of you have made to the school this year. Nobody knows better than your colleagues how each of you have personally improved our work here this year.”
2. Invite each staff member to select one name from the container without looking at the names.
3. When all names have been drawn, the principal (or a designated teacher leader) begins by commenting about the person whose name he or she has drawn. Other staff members may be encouraged to add their own comments about the contributions of this individual.
 

**Example:** *I really appreciated Julia’s willingness to step up and offer to help me create a newsletter for my classroom this year. I was confused about the best way to do this. She taught me a simple procedure and offered to answer questions anytime I was confused.*

*I really struggled with our new math curriculum. I learned so much from being able to talk through issues with Damian. Sometimes he was just as confused as I was but, by working together, we were able to figure out good solutions. Thanks for being such a great colleague this year!*
4. The principal allows time for others to offer their own comments about the individual.
5. Then, the person who has been acknowledged by the principal identifies the person whose name he or she has drawn and comments on his or her contributions.
6. The process continues until everyone in the room has been acknowledged.

### MAKING CELEBRATION WORK FOR YOUR SCHOOL

- **Recognize the behavior**, not the individual
- **Tell a story** that describes how the behavior affects the team, program, students, etc.
- **Create rewards** that will be valued by recipients.
- **Sincerity is crucial** to the success of any recognition program.
- **The more immediate**, the greater the perceived value.
- **Be selective.** Don’t hand out blanket awards. Don’t give awards just for the sake of giving awards.
- **Catch people** doing something right.
- **Recognize progress** as well as accomplishments.
- **Be thoughtful** in deciding where, when, and how to acknowledge someone. Respect individuals who would be embarrassed by public displays.
- **Have fun** connecting a tangible item to a behavior. For example, giving a plunger to someone who plunges into a new project or gummy worms to the person who always arrives first at early morning meetings.
- **Commemorate events** both great and small, extraordinary and routine, personal and professional. Celebrate the beginning and the end of the school year, birthdays, anniversaries, retirements, etc.
- **Celebrate failures.** Send a message that everyone can learn from a mistake.



## National Board Certified Teachers raise the bar for all

*Continued from p. 1*

conversations, the level of expertise just continues to rise,” Hicklin said.

Hicklin’s experience with a group of highly qualified teachers is exactly the kind of working situation that policy makers imagined when they supported the creation of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in 1987. And it’s one reason why several states have ramped up their financial support to enable more teachers to go through the lengthy and rigorous process of certification.

National Board certification does more than just recognize teachers for their knowledge and skills. Teachers spend 200 to 400 hours and up to three years seeking the certificate and frequently call it one of the best professional development experiences of their careers because of the depth of self-reflection included in the process.

Even as expectations for teaching have been ratcheted up by No Child Left Behind, many principals, especially in urban districts, still manage buildings in which they work with large numbers of inexperienced teachers, teachers who hold emergency certifications, and teachers who work outside their areas of expertise. But, in states that have made significant financial commitments to National Board certification, some principals face the opposite and enviable challenge of leading a substantial number of teacher leaders — and trying to stay ahead of them.

Managing a staff that includes a wealth of NBCTs can be a delicate balancing act, said Sheila Evans, principal of D.F. Walker Elementary School in Edenton, N.C. Evans’ staff of 30

teachers includes 10 NBCTs. Both Evans and her assistant principal also were recognized as NBCTs before becoming administrators.

“You have to be careful not to create a culture of elitism. Just because someone has not chosen to pursue National Board certification does not mean they’re not great teachers,” Evans said.

But she believes the presence of so many NBCTs has substantially impacted the culture in her building. “NBCTs are constantly reflecting on their practice. It’s just part of how they do their work. That impacts everyone who works with them,” she said.

Likewise, Hicklin said having many NBCTs influences the conversation in a school. “They are just so pervasive in this building. It’s amazing the level of conversations that we have about teaching and learning in teams, faculty meetings, and informal conversations. We are always talking about what good teaching looks like,” said Hicklin who was in the first group of teachers who earned National Board certification in 1995.

As a leader, Evans believes she’s responsible for nurturing leadership in all of her teachers. “Even though I honor my NBCTs and I expect them to do certain things, it’s not the NBCTs who need to learn to lead a school. I want

that culture of leadership to permeate throughout my entire staff. Not everyone is a leader and they should not be pushed into it but they should be stretched so they’re ready for it,” Evans said.

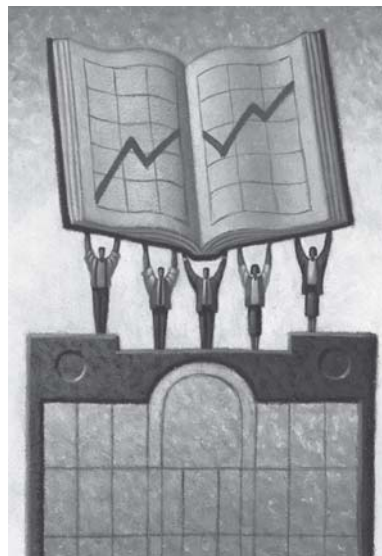
During her first year as principal, Evans created a professional learning team comprising some teachers who were already leaders and

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See the May 2007 issue of *The Learning System* to learn more about how states and districts support National Board certification.



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## National Board Certified Teachers raise the bar for all

*Continued from p. 6*

others who were “willing to try their hand at this learning team idea.”

Evans intended to introduce professional learning teams throughout the school during the next school year and she was preparing the group members to be facilitators for those teams. “I used my National Board experience, my administrative experience, my teaching experience. For a whole year, I worked with them as learning team,” she said.

Leadership in the group rotated and each meeting included time for that day’s leader to stop and reflect upon his or her work leading the group. *Did I lead the team well today? Did I include enough opportunities for everyone to participate? Could I have done more to encourage more collaboration?*

To Evans’ surprise and delight, her facilitators wanted to spread leadership even further when they began to lead learning teams. “I had expected the members of the original group to be the facilitators of the other groups throughout the entire year. But they used the same model I had used with them. What happened is that everyone in the school is a facilitator at one point or another, including the teaching assistants,” she said.

On the opposite side of the state in the Watauga School District, Hicklin said she has to do very little to encourage NBCTs to step up to leadership. “I don’t do a lot to manipulate them to get them into key positions. They end up there anyway in the natural process of creating committees or working on staff development or creating school improvement plans,” she said.

“Everyone in this school keeps growing because the teachers mentor each other and they encourage and collaborate with each other. We have a culture here that celebrates the achievements of teachers. I will take credit for creating that kind of atmosphere because I want as many teachers as possible to go through the NBCT process because I know the power of reflecting on one’s craft,” Hicklin said.

Hicklin said teachers in her building know that seeking National Board certification is not an expectation for them. “But they do know that it’s something that I hold as very important,” she said.

Evans and Hicklin agree that they face some unique leadership challenges because they have so many leaders in one building.

“You have to be very, very in tune with what their issues are. You have to be very in tune with the resources they need to address their issues,” Hicklin said.

Evans said, when a principal spreads leadership throughout a school, teachers will expect to reap the benefit of that by having a real voice in building decisions. “That’s hard for principals. They’ve got to be willing to let go of that dictatorship kind of thing. When you give teachers leadership opportunities, you have to be willing to go with the decisions they make. The danger is that they make some decisions that I don’t agree with. There are some things where I put my foot down and say that we have to do it this way but usually we try to reach a compromise. We’re all in the business of educating children and that keeps us focused on doing the right thing,” she said.

Both Evans and Hicklin believe their ability to govern their schools well has been enhanced because of their National Board experience.

“As a teacher, I had always had a good teaching experience. But I never had an administrator who had a depth of understanding about the craft of teaching. My knowing and their knowing that I know makes a big difference in how we do our work around here,” said Hicklin who was also recognized as her district’s Teacher of the Year before she sought National Board certification. “I try to lead with the knowledge of what they’re going through,” she said.

“If you’ve ever had an administrator who never achieved excellence as a teacher, you know that they can’t bluff their way through getting others to think that they know a lot about accomplished teaching. Excellent teachers know,” Hicklin said. ■

**“Everyone in this school keeps growing because all of the teachers mentor each other and they encourage and collaborate with each other. We have a culture here that celebrates the achievements of teachers. I will take credit for creating that kind of atmosphere because I want as many teachers as possible to go through that process.”**

*— Billie Hicklin,  
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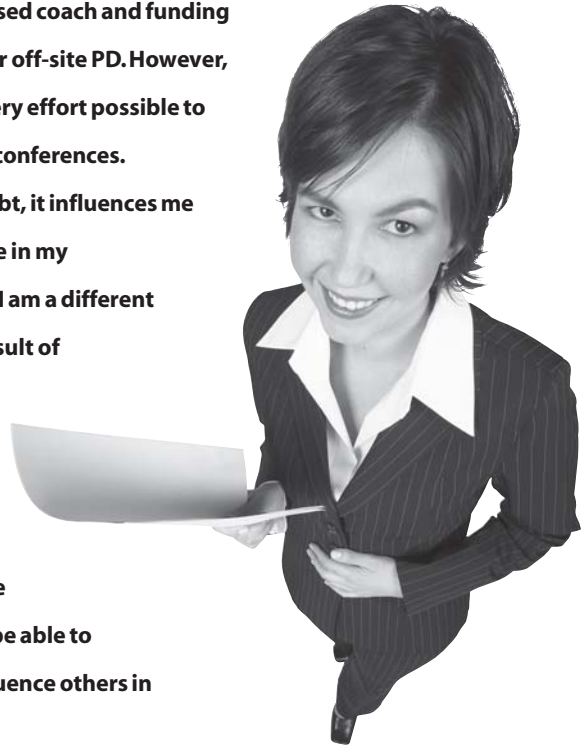
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