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**NSDC's purpose statement is the field of professional development's most explicit expression to date that educators' learning must improve student performance.**

**Read more about NSDC's purpose statement at: [www.nsd.org/purpose.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/purpose.cfm)**

## New purpose not for the timid

There are many words to describe the National Staff Development Council, but “timid” is not one of them. NSDC’s bold statement of purpose – *“Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves”* – forces the organization to think and act in new ways. The greater challenge is for the statement to have a similar effect on school systems.

The last six words of the purpose – *“every day so every student achieves”* – are a prescription laden with implications for how and why school systems organize professional development. Frequency of learning is a central issue. There is a research consensus that when students stop participating in learning experiences, such as during summer vacation, their knowledge and skills erode. The same is true for educators. When their learning is intermittent and fragmented, their performance suffers.

If school systems want educators they employ to perform at the peak of their potential, how much professional learning is necessary? The answer depends on many variables, such as the needs and motivation of educators, the complexity of the subject content, and the quality of the learning experiences. However, educators who engage in high-quality learning several times or more each week report the greatest positive impact on their classroom performance.

All school systems should begin now to shift to modes of professional development that have more profound classroom effects. Their first step would be to make a policy commitment that “every day” schools will provide some protected time for professional learning. Many school administrators will then need central office assistance to determine the most effective means for providing that time. The daily time schools schedule for team learning will vary in length, but school

leaders must take responsibility for ensuring that focus, organization, and effective facilitation are integral to each learning experience.

The last four words of the NSDC purpose – *“so every student achieves”* – will strike some school system leaders as unnecessary. They may argue that surely student achievement is, or should be, the focus of all professional development. Unfortunately, the unproductive practices of many school systems belie that assumption. NSDC’s purpose statement is the field of professional development’s most explicit expression to date that educators’ learning must improve student performance.

Making this connection will require a sea change in how school board members, superintendents, and central office staff think about professional development. They should regard student achievement as the anchor of professional learning, preventing it from drifting towards the shoals of feel-good experiences and little or no classroom application. But student achievement can only serve this purpose if school systems become much more serious about collecting evidence that delineates the links between what educators learn and what students learn. This, in turn, presents a learning challenge for school systems because most currently lack the expertise to understand whether and how their educators’ professional development contributes to student achievement. School systems will need help, and they should not hesitate to demand it from their professional education associations or local institutions of higher education.

The National Staff Development Council is embracing its new purpose even though challenges and unknowns lie ahead. Alone, however, it cannot improve the performance of a single student. That will require school systems bold enough to commit to NSDC’s challenge and wise enough to collaborate with others towards that end.