

# THE LEARNING Principal®

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

## A WISH COME TRUE

*Teacher Advancement Program scatters  
seeds of learning throughout school*

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

**A**fter 33 years in education and 11 years as principal, Nancy Rials was on the brink of retirement when she discovered a new approach to schooling that energized her and transformed her school.

She also put off retiring for a few more years.

Rials' search for a way to enhance opportunities for her teachers to improve their teaching skills led her to the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), a school reform model that focuses on improving the quality of teaching by attracting, retaining, developing, and motivating talented people to the profession. TAP provides a week-long summer institute to introduce educators to the program's beliefs and practices and, if necessary, can provide ongoing technical assistance to schools. The program encourages schools to provide time in the school day when teachers can learn and collaborate with each



other. The model also calls for positions for mentor teachers who guide novice teachers and master teachers who coach all teachers as they change their instructional practices. Under the TAP model, teachers also can earn performance-based bonuses determined by improvements in student achievement. (See Page 7 for more details.)

During a visit to a TAP school, "I sat in on a (grade-level) meeting and I was totally hooked. I knew that was what I wanted for my teachers," said Rials, principal of Forest Hill Elementary School in Rapides Parish (La.) School District.

What did Rials see that was so compelling? Teachers were collaborating around instructional issues relating to their students. Teachers were poring over student data and having a deep discussion about what the data meant. They discussed how to change their instruction based on what they were learning from the data analysis.

*Continued on p. 6*

### WHAT'S INSIDE

#### School Leadership

Meet Kenneth Williams, principal of The Learning Academy at E.J. Swint in Jonesboro, Ga.  
**PAGE 2**

#### Focus on NSDC's Standards

Habits built up over decades can't be changed overnight.  
**PAGE 3**

#### NSDC Tool

What a school leader needs to know about designs for powerful learning.  
**PAGES 4-5**



National Staff  
Development  
Council  
800-727-7288  
[www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org)



**KENNETH WILLIAMS**  
*Principal, The Learning Academy at E.J. Swint*

**District:** Clayton County Public Schools, Jonesboro, Ga.

**Grades:** Pre-K-5

**Enrollment:** 620 students

**Staff:** 85 staff members

Located about 30 minutes from Atlanta, Ga.

95% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch  
92% black, 3% Hispanic, 2% white, and 3% other  
Student mobility rate: 33%.

**QUOTE I LIVE BY:**

“There is no chance, no destiny, no fate, that will circumvent, hinder, or control the firm resolve of a determined soul.”

— *Ella Wheeler Wilcox*, poet

## Q&A Leadership can quickly turn around school culture

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

**Q: What issues did you face when you became this school’s principal two years ago?**

A: It had a lack of leadership. Students barely knew who the principal was. It was a really toxic culture when I arrived. It hadn’t made Adequate Yearly Progress three of the last five years. It was a Needs Improvement school (under NCLB) where parents get to choose not to come here.

**Q: What do you mean by “toxic culture”?**

A: It’s really more about the environment set up by leadership than it was about the individual teachers. Our teachers had no direction, low expectations, and no accountability. There were five people in charge here — and none of them had the title principal or assistant principal.

**Q: How did you turn around the culture?**

A: I believe I walk my talk in terms of expectations and connecting with children and connecting with teachers. I’ve gotten a lot more out of teachers this year because of the relationships I’ve built with them, the standards that I hold them to, and the leadership opportunities that I provide. Low expectations for learning begets poor planning, begets poor behavior. It’s a vicious cycle we really broke this year.

**Q: What were some of your first steps in a building that wasn’t accustomed to principal leadership?**

A: The first thing I did was impart my vision for the school and then I worked to align my actions to what I expected our school to become — from how I communicated with children to what I expected from teachers: “You’re going to have clear plans written on the board; you’re going to communicate what the lesson objective is to students; you’re going to summarize.” Over time, some began to see that, “Wow, if I have the three Rs — rigor, relevance, and relationships — the students’ behavior gets better.”

Teachers used to blame (poor behavior and performance) on the kids. I heard about “bad kids.” I don’t allow our staff to talk like that. What I modeled for adults is it all starts with connection coupled with high expectations for learning, but the connection has to happen first.

And a lot of it was problem solving, even to helping the parent community realize that they could come to me, that I’m approachable, that my door is open.

**Q: What have you learned?**

A: One of my biggest learnings was I could not do this whole thing myself. Part of our improvement this year was that more of our teachers took ownership of our environment and our culture.

**Q: How did you help teachers learn?**

A: We revamped our schedule to provide teachers more time and support for collaborative planning and examining student work. Our goal was consistent, collaborative planning time within the school day. We sought out professional learning outside our school that was aligned with our improvement goals. And we encouraged our staff members to lead their own professional learning sessions. That did a lot to instill confidence and the sense that a lot of the answers we need are here in the building. It really put us in touch with the kind of talent we have on staff, either new or that was here but untapped.

**Q: In what ways are you seeing improvement?**

A: We made AYP in 2006-07. It restored a level of teachers’ belief in themselves. Teachers are now talking about our vision and coming up with great ideas. And we’re confident about predicting improvement over the next several years because students are coming through who have had years of this type of learning environment. Of course, it starts with the teacher, with effective collaboration at the grade level, and with accountability.



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

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

## The implementation imperative

Typically ask principals about their most pressing challenges around professional development. More often than not, they comment on how difficult it is to attain classroom implementation of new practices. A little more probing reveals that many feel there should be *immediate* use of new practices — even though the professional development involved only a single session. These same principals are shocked to learn that most research indicates it can take two to three years before new classroom practices are used at a high level of quality (Joyce & Showers, 1995).

If the principal expects implementation of new practices, he/she needs to **provide long-term, in-depth, sustained staff development efforts** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 87). We cannot expect most adults to change habits built up over years or decades with only a limited amount of learning. The principal, therefore, **needs to ensure that staff development provides extensive support over a two- to three-year period**. This support includes a variety of professional learning experiences and job-embedded designs with a focus on helping teachers use new practices. A study group could be formed to learn about new reading comprehension practices followed by demonstration lessons. Next, these learning teams might jointly develop new reading lessons and units that incorporate the new practices.

**Celebrations of effort and progress** also are another aspect of long-term support. Having explicit measures and milestones to mark people's efforts and progress toward new practices is important to any change effort (Kanter, 2002). These progress checks provide information that recognize progress as well as identify barriers to change and allow for mid-course corrections.

The principal also **provides multiple classroom coaching experiences to assist with the implementation of new instructional practices**. Research conducted 30 years ago found that powerful classroom observation and feedback can be conducted by peers not just outside experts (Mohlman, 1983). Learning team members can conduct classroom observations and provide

### Design:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal.

feedback of those lessons especially when they share the same technical language and understanding of new practices. Peers need to have some skill in collecting data and providing non-evaluative feedback so that the line between feedback and formal evaluations is clear.

Implementation is more likely to occur when there is an explicit plan of action to support educators' use of new classroom practices and materials. Support needs to go beyond the typical one-year plan. The likelihood of professional development improving student learning can only occur when new classroom practices are used. A plan that supports implementation is one way to ensure that result.

### REFERENCES

- Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (1995).** *Student achievement through staff development*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Kanter, R. (2002).** Measures, milestones, and feedback. *Change toolkit*. [www.reinventingeducation.org](http://www.reinventingeducation.org)
- Mohlman, G. (1983).** Synthesis of research on staff development for effective teaching. *Educational Leadership*, 41(3), 65-72.
- Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003).** *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation configurations, Volume I*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.

# DESIGNS FOR POWERFUL LEARNING

**Invite the teachers in your school to tell you what professional learning strategies they have already experienced, which they would like to know more about, and which ones they are ready to try.**

	I have done this	I would like to know more about this learning strategy	I would like to try this learning strategy
1. Conduct action research			
2. Analyze teaching case			
3. Be observed by a colleague and receive feedback			
4. Plan lessons with a teaching colleague			
5. Consult an expert about a subject related to your instruction			
6. Examine data about the learning of your students			
7. Be coached by a peer or an expert			
8. Lead a book study			
9. Participate in a book study			
10. Visit another school			
11. Write assessments with a colleague			
12. Participate in a video-conference or conference calls with experts			
13. Do a classroom walkthrough			
14. Make a presentation at a conference			
15. Lead a schoolwide committee or project			

	I have done this	I would like to know more about this learning strategy	I would like to try this learning strategy
16. Participate in lesson study			
17. Map your curriculum			
18. Coach a colleague			
19. Be a mentor — or be mentored			
20. Join a professional network			
21. Use a tuning protocol to examine student work			
22. Develop a professional portfolio			
23. Videotape yourself teaching			
24. Write an article about your work			
25. Observe other teachers teaching			
26. Participate in a critical friends group			
27. Do a self-assessment			
28. Shadow a student, a teacher, or another professional in the field			
29. Keep a reflective log or journal			
30. Attend a national conference on education			

- To learn more about the strategies listed here, explore the resources available in the members-only area of NSDC's web site, [www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org).

- *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*, edited by Lois Brown Easton (NSDC 2004), also provides an excellent resource for exploring many of these strategies in more depth.

Copies of *Powerful Designs* can be ordered through the NSDC Online Bookstore, [store.nsd.org](http://store.nsd.org).

## Program scatters seeds of learning throughout school

*Continued from p. 1*

A master teacher, skilled both as a teacher and as a guide for other teachers, led the meeting of her peers. In short, Rials saw them learning together and planning together for changes that would improve student learning.

Before TAP, Rials said her teachers had access to plenty of professional development. “They attended workshops all the time. They

would come back motivated to try certain things. But that was it. Nobody followed up after the workshop to see who was doing what or what was working and what was not working,” she said.

At the same time, Forest Hill teachers needed new strategies to address the needs of a largely Hispanic student body composed of new immigrants. Students that qualify for free and reduced-price lunch make up 87% of the enrollment.

When Forest Hill embraced TAP, the time for professional development was re-configured and became more focused. Teachers at Rials’ school now have 45-minute grade-level meetings (known as cluster meetings) four days a week plus 45 minutes on most days for planning.

Students attend special classes — computer, physical education, library, or art — while their teachers are in cluster meetings. Teachers use their cluster meetings only for instructional work, such as looking at student

data together, collaborating to write lessons, mapping curriculum, and learning new instructional strategies.

Two master teachers lead the cluster meetings and function as instructional coaches during the remainder of their week, moving in and out of classrooms frequently, often team teaching or modeling lessons. One master teacher coaches the Pre-K-1 teachers; the other master teacher works with grades 2-4 teachers.

In addition, the school has six mentor teachers, one per grade level, to guide the work of new teachers. Those teachers continue to have teaching responsibilities but also have released time to work with novice teachers.

Moving from a workshop model of professional development to the cluster meetings was not universally accepted. “There was some hesitancy at first. I still have one or two teachers who do not embrace this wholeheartedly,” Rials said.

Although not all teachers are fully on board with TAP, the new approach to teacher learning has made a difference at Forest Hill. Since becoming a TAP school, students have moved from the mid-70% to coming within reach of 100% proficiency on statewide assessments in both reading and math. On Louisiana’s composite school performance score, Forest Hill has moved from 98.4 to 124.5. The school also earned Louisiana’s Title I Distinguished School of the Year Award in 2006-07.

Rials believes all of this has happened because of a change in how teachers learn and do their work. “[TAP] has changed our school enormously. It’s taken down the walls of the classroom and opened those classroom doors. There is so much collaboration going on in this building. Teachers try new strategies. There’s a huge difference in teaching capacity because of TAP,” Rials said.

### TAP AND NOVICE TEACHERS

Another area in which TAP has made a big difference is in the school’s ability to retain and improve novice teachers.

“I used to be reluctant to hire first-year

*Continued on p. 7*

### How much does TAP cost?

The Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) costs about \$400 to \$500 per student per year to administer. That money covers the cost of the added professional development (time for learning during the school day plus the master and mentor teachers) and the bonuses for performance-based pay.

Many TAP schools are Title I schools and many of those schools use their Title I funds to support TAP, said Gary Stark, senior vice president for program development, National Institute for Excellence in Teaching which administers TAP.

Since it began in 2000, TAP has largely “appealed to schools with high needs in terms of student needs and high needs in terms of teachers,” Stark said.

“More recently, we’re seeing progressive schools that are reaching out to TAP because they see the value of integrating professional development with teacher quality and because TAP provides a real practical structure for accountability,” he said.

For more information about TAP, visit [www.talentedteachers.org](http://www.talentedteachers.org).

## FOUR COMPONENTS OF THE TEACHER ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM

### Multiple career paths

TAP enables good teachers to move into a variety of teaching positions — career, mentor, and master teacher — depending upon their interests, abilities, and accomplishments. As they move up the ranks, their qualifications, roles, and responsibilities increase and thus, so does their compensation. This allows good teachers to advance without having to leave the classroom.

### Ongoing, applied professional growth

TAP restructures the school schedule to provide time during the school day for teachers to meet, learn, plan, mentor, and share with other teachers, so they can improve instruction and student achievement. Teachers use data to target areas of student need.

### Instructionally focused accountability

TAP employs a comprehensive evaluation system that rewards teachers for how well they teach their students. Teachers are accountable for meeting the TAP Teaching Skills, Knowledge and Responsibility Standards as well as for the academic growth of their students.

### Performance-based compensation

TAP compensates teachers according to their roles and responsibilities, their performance in the classroom, and the performance of their students. TAP also encourages districts to offer competitive salaries to those who teach in “hard-to-staff” subjects and schools.

Source: [www.talentedteachers.org](http://www.talentedteachers.org)

## WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY ABOUT TAP?

- “TAP teachers produce higher student achievement growth than similar teachers not in TAP schools” (p. 3).
- “More TAP schools outperformed similar non-TAP schools in producing an average year’s growth or more in both reading and math achievement” (p. 5).
- “Overall, we find that TAP teachers compared to non-TAP teachers experience higher quality professional development as well as more opportunities for collaboration and collegiality, and ways to improve their effectiveness in the classroom” (p. 7).

**Source:** *The Effectiveness of the Teacher Advancement Program Executive Summary* by Lewis Solomon, J. Todd White, Donna Cohen, and Deborah Woo. National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, April 2007. [www.talentedteachers.org](http://www.talentedteachers.org).

*Continued from p. 6*

teachers because you have to devote so much time to them,” Rials said. “I often felt like I was just throwing those first-year teachers to the wolves, especially at the beginning of the year when they’re just settling in. Now, I do not hesitate. They get so much support because of the master teachers.”

Rials is not alone in experiencing a better atmosphere for new teachers. In the Richardson Independent School District in suburban Dallas, Texas, the percentage of new teachers returning to a school for their second year of teaching has moved from around 35% to closer to 80% at the TAP schools, said Tonia Alexander, who coordinates RISD’s TAP program.

“One factor is the support that is provided for them. Teachers do not feel like they’re on their own. They feel like they have someone they can turn to, somebody who can help them,” said Alexander, principal of Thurgood Marshall Elementary School which is beginning its third year as a TAP school.

### CHANGING THE PRINCIPAL

TAP also influences principals to change how they work with teachers, Rials and Alexander said.

Alexander believes the principal’s role in a

TAP school is different from a traditional school. “TAP is a very collaborative environment. You are developing a lot of leaders and you have to let leaders lead. You’re not the only evaluator. You’re not the only one providing training. I see myself as a coach of the coaches,” Alexander said.

“A controlling principal would have a hard time with this. On the other hand, a principal who is too hands-off would also have trouble. More is expected. If the principal isn’t actively involved in the process, teachers will get that message,” she said.

Rials said her TAP experience has helped her realign her work. “I give a lot more time to the things that matter and that’s student learning,” Rials said. “All of the other is still there — the maintenance, the memo from central office, the paperwork that has to be expedited. But, because I realize that all of that takes away from my top priority, it has forced me to focus on that priority. Because I focus on it, teachers focus on it too.

“Curriculum has always been important to me but I’m asking deeper questions about curriculum when I talk with my teachers. I don’t ask ‘what are you doing’ but ‘what made you choose this, what are the results, where do you go from here,’” she said. ■

## ISSN 0276-928X

*The Learning Principal* is published eight times a year by the National Staff Development Council, 5995 Fairfield Road, #4, Oxford, OH 45056, for \$49 of each membership. Periodicals postage paid at Wheelersburg, Ohio and additional offices.

© Copyright, National Staff Development Council, 2007. All rights reserved.

### NSDC STAFF

#### Executive director

Stephanie Hirsh

#### Deputy executive director

Joellen Killion

#### Director of business services

Leslie Miller

#### Director of communications

Joan Richardson

#### Director of learning

Cathy Owens

#### Distinguished senior fellow

Hayes Mizell

#### Emeritus executive director

Dennis Sparks

#### Editor

Joan Richardson

#### Designer

Sue Chevalier

### BUSINESS OFFICE

5995 Fairfield Road, #4

Oxford OH 45056

513-523-6029

800-727-7288

Fax: 513-523-0638

NSDCoffice@nsdc.org

www.nsdc.org

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Sue McAdamis** (2008)

*President*

**Sydnee Dickson** (2008)

*President-elect*

**Karen Dyer** (2009)

*President-elect*

**Maria Goodloe-Johnson**

(2009)

**Charles Mason** (2010)

**James Roussin** (2009)

**Sue Showers** (2008)

**William Sommers** (2007)

*Past president*

### COPYING/REPRINT POLICY

Please see [www.nsdc.org/library/publications/permpolicy.cfm](http://www.nsdc.org/library/publications/permpolicy.cfm) for details and a form to submit a request.

### BACK COPIES

Articles from all NSDC publications are available at no additional charge to members in the members-only area of the NSDC web site. Nonmembers may purchase and download individual articles or entire publications for a fee.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to the National Staff Development Council, 5995 Fairfield Road, #4, Oxford, OH 45056.

## Legislation improves definition of professional learning

Congress has the opportunity to promote a significant improvement in teaching quality in American schools by supporting legislation that will strengthen the quality of educators' professional learning.

SB 1979 amends ESEA and improves the definition of professional development by saying that professional learning for educators:

- Engages teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff in ongoing professional development;
- Focuses on teams that engage in professional learning multiple times per week during the regular work day;
- Revolves around a continuous improvement cycle that uses data to (1) determine and define student, teacher, and school learning needs, (2) institute learning strategies to address learning needs, and (3) measure the effectiveness and impact of professional learning.

Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) introduced SB 1979 and Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Sen. Barack

Obama (D-Ill.) and Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) co-sponsored the legislation. The bill has been sent to the committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

SB 1979 also introduces a new evaluation component to ensure that federal dollars spent on professional development achieve the intended results. The bill calls for evaluating the impact of both induction and mentoring for new teachers and high-impact professional development for all teachers by examining the following indicators: teacher retention, student learning gains, teacher instructional practice, student graduation rates, parent, family and community involvement, student attendance rates, teacher satisfaction, and student behavior.

The amendment to ESEA links school improvement activities in Title I to the teacher development initiatives in Title II.

To learn what you can do to support this legislation, visit [www.nsdc.org/legislativeupdate.cfm](http://www.nsdc.org/legislativeupdate.cfm)

## NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Member Services

5995 Fairfield Road, #4

Oxford, OH 45056

Membership info: 800-727-7288

PERIODICALS  
POSTAGE  
PAID