



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

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

#### REFERENCES

- Kanter, R.M.** (2002). Are we making it easy for people to accept this change? *Change tool kit*. [www.reinventingeducation.org](http://www.reinventingeducation.org).
- Roy, P. & Hord, S.** (2003). *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation configurations, Volume I*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.
- What Works Clearinghouse.** [www.whatworks.ed.gov](http://www.whatworks.ed.gov).

## Research can build optimism about change

I've seen thoughtful and dynamic central office staff spend grueling hours reading research, examining evidence of program impact, and identifying best practices that show great promise in addressing nagging school and district problems related to student learning. The research they have read and analyzed is extensive, thorough, and undeniable. After months of work, they select a new initiative because of its grounding in research.

But when they introduce this new initiative to principals, staff, and stakeholders, a hue and cry arises from these groups. These groups criticize the decision, argue the usefulness, and the question the validity of the choice. This often happens because the critics have not benefited from reading the same research, conducting the same analysis, and arguing the pros and cons of different approaches. They see only the results and have not developed their own rationale for the choice. One solution to this frequent dilemma is for central office staff to **provide experiences for teachers and administrators to learn to use educational research effectively** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 136). Central office staff need to build the capacity of all educators to use educational research effectively — especially in connection with identifying and implementing improvement efforts. The research provides the rationale for selecting new practices and procedures that are needed in order to promote high levels of learning for all students. When teacher and administrator involvement is skipped, improvement efforts can be viewed as random and capricious rather than reasoned and essential.

**Research-Based:** Staff development that improves the learning of all students prepares educators to apply research to decision making.

Teachers, administrators, school and district professional development committees, and school improvement committee members all need to develop the skills for collecting, analyzing, and evaluating appropriate research. Each of these groups is involved in making a variety of decisions involved in improvement efforts.

Helping educators use research for educational decisions has resulted in the development of many web-based, research clearinghouses. These clearinghouses help provide educators with information to make instructional choices guided by the best available scientific research. For example, the What Works Clearinghouse collects, screens, and identifies studies of educational interventions for programs such as

beginning reading, dropout prevention, elementary school math, and English language learners ([www.whatworks.ed.gov](http://www.whatworks.ed.gov)). These clearinghouses take much of the drudgery out of collecting research and allow staff to use research rather than search for it.

In an assessment about the quality of improvement efforts, Kanter suggests that there will be more commitment to improvement efforts when:

- Plans for change have been thoroughly discussed and reviewed by those who will be involved in the change process, and
- People are optimistic that this change will make things better for themselves and for the organization (2002).

I believe that these conditions can be attained by building teacher and administrator capacity to use research to make decisions concerning school and district improvement efforts.