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**NSDC believes
that remarkable
professional
learning begins
with ambitious
goals for students.**

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Begin with ambitious learning goals

Among the seismic changes beginning to occur in professional development, none is more profound than the focus on students. One of the National Staff Development Council's belief statements reflects this new priority: "Remarkable professional learning begins with ambitious goals for students."

Professional development does not occur in a vacuum. There is a reason for it, and adult needs most often determine that reason. It may be to "train" teachers in a new math curriculum selected by central office. Perhaps the professional development is to help educators understand a new policy or procedure or even a process to increase educators' awareness of cultural differences. If pressed, school system leaders would justify how such learning experiences relate to student achievement. Nevertheless, student needs are seldom the primary consideration for conceiving and organizing these types of professional development.

NSDC's belief statement represents a dramatic departure from most current practice because, in effect, it makes student achievement the driver for professional learning. In recent years, curriculum mapping and school reform leaders have often urged educators to "begin with the end in mind." That sound advice also applies to professional learning, but the "end" is not merely a well-organized meeting, a stimulating speaker, or even more effective pedagogy. The end is improved student learning and higher levels of student performance.

Therefore, before conceiving a professional learning experience, educators should determine what current student achievement indicates about what educators need to learn. Many educators are now engaged in analyzing and discussing disaggregated results of student assessments, and this learning can be transformative. On the other

hand, many test reports do not provide timely information or the fine-grained data teachers need to seek new learning or change their instruction. This is why such data analysis can be more productive if it occurs in learning teams that meet daily. Trusting relationships developed in these teams can lead a teacher to invite colleagues to observe and critique the teacher's instruction, thereby providing a new data source for identifying what the teacher needs to learn.

NSDC's belief statement goes further, however, by asserting that educators' "ambitious goals for students" should prompt "remarkable professional learning." This begins with educators collaborating with their students to set learning goals and then helping students understand how they can incrementally improve their performance to meet the goals. That is only one-third of the equation. Educators must then reflect on what new knowledge and skills they need to learn to increase their effectiveness in helping students meet their learning goals. Finally, educators must take the initiative to engage in learning experiences that will help them develop the necessary knowledge and skills.

But what does it take for professional learning to be "remarkable"? At a minimum, it means abandoning old models of professional development that over the years have fallen well short of improving the performance of educators and students. Beyond that, remarkable professional learning (a) is centered on meeting students' learning needs, (b) first uses the experience and expertise of colleagues, and secondarily that of consultants, (c) assesses its effectiveness based on improved performance of both educators and students, and (d) occurs daily. This list does not include all of the important considerations for effective professional learning, but it provides the framework for school systems and schools to begin transforming professional development as we have known it.