THE LEARNING
Principal ®

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

Principals cultivate support to nurture new teachers

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

The new teacher is having a meltdown. During her first week in an urban middle school, she had felt confident teaching Honors Algebra to the freshmen in her classroom. But by the end of the second week of school, the situation had shifted dramatically. Her three sections of math were reduced to two and the number of students in her class jumped from 23 to 34.

Suddenly, her classroom was noisy and students inattentive. She discovered that many students were not prepared to be in Honors Algebra ("How do you divide four into 78?" asks one student.) The new teacher had run out of ideas by the third class period.

The teacher is tearful and apologetic. She wants very badly to teach math and to do it well. The principal and the district's math coach express confidence in her skills and pledge their support.

But, by Monday morning, the beginning teacher is gone.

What went wrong? "We failed her," said a district administrator. "She knows her math. She wants to do the job. She should not have to teach in those conditions. It was our responsibility to help her be successful."

Not all departures of new teachers are quite so dramatic as this, a real situation in an urban classroom earlier this year. But the impact of any new teacher's exit from a building can spell just as great a loss, whether it comes after two weeks, two semesters, or two years.

Their reasons for leaving can range from a profound mismatch between their perception of teaching and the reality of the classroom to feel-

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NSDC's purpose: Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.

STEFANIE HOLZMAN

Principal, Roosevelt Elementary School

District: Long Beach (Calif.) Unified School District

Grades: K-5

Enrollment: 1,046 students

Staff: 60 teachers

One of six schools to receive the 2006 National Change Award from Fordham University. All students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, 85% are English language learners, and 99% are minority. Under California's Academic Performance Index, Roosevelt earned 182 points between 2001 and 2007, 149 points more than the minimum targets set by the state.

Q&A High expectations lead to high learning

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

Q: How long have you been at Roosevelt?

I began the day before school started in 2000. When I came here, the expectations were very low. There were teachers who would say, "I'm here to save these children." I said, "This is not a religious institution. If you want to save them, go on a mission. We're here to educate our students." I lost a lot of teachers in the first two years because they didn't see what I could see. These are the *greatest* kids, the *greatest* kids.

Q: What changed then in the staff's approach to teaching and learning?

I don't ask them to believe. I ask them to do. I will say to the teachers, "I expect you to …" and then I follow up.

We train every teacher in good instruction, including Madeline Hunter and active participation, so students are engaged in learning. Then we ask teachers to monitor students' learning in the middle of the lesson. If students are not getting it, stop and reteach.

Also, I asked them to collect data on every child by name every month. We began to analyze the data. First, it was just the facts, the numbers. The second step was, what patterns do you notice. The last step was, what are your next steps? That was a really big change.

To get that change in the culture, we had to start collaborating. For a long time at this school we've had a shortened Thursday, with students dismissed at 1 p.m. for grade-level teams to meet. The first year, I said, "Give me a pie chart of what you talked about at your grade-level meeting." They realized they were talking about parking lot issues, not important issues like student data, how to teach better, how to reach

> **QUOTE I LIVE BY:**
> "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work."
> — *Daniel Hudson Burnham*

students at risk. Now, grade-level meetings are focused on the needs of students.

We have good instruction going on now, we have data collection, and we have collaboration.

Q: That's a big culture shift.

It took me about three years to get a team that understood where we were going. The first year I lost 14 teachers. The next year, I lost 14 teachers. I documented out teachers who couldn't teach. I did what I needed to do.

I think the shift began when we started talking about the window and the mirror. The window is when we look outside and say, "*Those* kids… *Those* parents…" We cannot control the language level of students. We cannot control the fact that parents only have a 2nd-grade education and speak Spanish. We cannot control that some of the parents can't help their students with resources. All we control is what we see in the mirror. And who do you see in the mirror? *You*.

Q: What did the professional learning look like that helped you make this change?

We made charts of the data and the teachers wrote on sticky notes why they got that result. Then we took the sticky notes and categorized them into mirror statements and window statements. In the beginning, it was all window statements. And I said, "*What* can you *do* about that?"

It was conversations, and not all comfortable conversations.

Q: What advice do you have for other schools?

If we can do it at Roosevelt, anybody can do it.

It's lonely at the top

We often ask whether colleges have done a sufficient job of preparing teachers for the classroom. A similar question needs to be asked of principals, namely, did your collegiate training prepare you to be an instructional leader? Based on the incredulous expressions and laughter that I hear whenever I pose that question, it seems that most certificate programs still focus primarily on the management tasks of the school leader rather than the critical leadership skills that make the principal essential to high levels of student learning. McREL has conducted a meta-analysis of 35 years of school leadership research and identified 21 leadership responsibilities as well as 66 leadership practices that have been shown to impact student learning (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). We are more clear than ever about how the principal can improve student learning.

As a result, the principal needs to **participate in professional learning to become a more effective instructional leader** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 67). But, this development work needs to be designed using job-embedded, collegial experiences similar to the learning that NSDC recommends for instructional staff. First, the principal would **participate in facilitated learning teams that problem solve and learn together**. Principals confide in me that their job is a lonely one. They have few colleagues available to them to talk with and fewer yet in whom they have established the trust necessary to reveal challenges and solve nagging problems. Participating in a facilitated learning team can build professional relationships while assist-ing principals to learn and apply new strategies while working with colleagues who understand their situations and circumstances.

The learning team should be designed so that principals **participate in extensive, ongoing learning activities that include hands-on, problem-based, and multiple practice opportunities**. One of the primary objectives of this development work is not merely to help principals *learn* about new strategies but also create opportunities for them to feel comfortable enough to **implement** new leadership practices during their workday. Using active, real-life, job-embedded strategies with principals will help accomplish that objective.

Finally, principals need to commit to **allocating time to explore and practice specific behaviors and strategies and receive feedback on the implementation of new skills**. One of the conclusions of the McREL meta-analysis is that *principals do matter*! This research means that there are leadership actions that shape and focus a school so that high levels of student learning result. In order to get those results, principals need to learn to use those essential skills. A leadership coach can provide constructive feedback on new behaviors. But once trust has been established among principals, they can be a powerful source of feedback to their colleagues as well. The benefits of participating in collegial learning teams are enormous — improved student learning, increased job satisfaction, and stronger collegial relationships will result.

> **Leadership**: Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement.

Learn more about NSDC's standards: www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm

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

REFERENCES
Marzano, J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD & McREL.

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DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT BETWEEN A MENTOR AND A PRINCIPAL

By answering these questions, a principal and a mentor can develop a set of agreements that can guide the mentor's work. Being clear about the parameters and expectations for the mentor's work also helps a principal explain how the mentor will support new teachers.

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND BOUNDARIES

Agree on the roles mentors will fill within the school, other responsibilities the mentor will have, such as teacher duties, etc., and what mentors will not do.

Mentor
- What expectations do you have of me and my work?
- What are my responsibilities as a member of this staff?
- What are the boundaries of my work?
- What is outside the boundaries of my work?
- How do you feel about me ... e.g. serving on a district committee, facilitating a school committee, etc.

Principal
- What do you expect of me?
- What do we think teachers expect of you?
- What does the district expect of you?
- What are the defined responsibilities of your role as a mentor?
- How much flexibility do we have to adjust your work to meet the needs of our students and staff?

CLIENTS

Identify teachers who will work with the mentor.

Mentor
- Which teachers will I work with?
- How will we determine which teachers to work with?

Principal
- Which teachers have the greatest needs in our school?
- Which teachers have expressed interest in receiving your support?

SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Specify the support and resources the mentor can expect.

Mentor
- Here is how you can support me in my role as a mentor ...
- What resources are available for me? Technology? Space? Money for professional publications or development?

Principal
- What support do you want from me?
- What resources do you need to feel comfortable?
- Here's how you will share in the school's resources for professional development . . .

EXPECTED RESULTS

Identify the expected results of the mentor's work.

Mentor
- What results do you expect over the next year, two years, and three years?
- What are the school improvement goals?

Principal
- What procedural goals are appropriate for your work in this school?
- Here are our improvement goals ...

TIMELINES

Setting timelines for achieving goals gives the mentor and the principal the ability to measure progress toward their goals so that they can make mid-course adjustments.

Mentor
- When do you want this finished?
- What are the short- and long-term timelines for my work?

Principal
- When will you be able to meet with all departments?
- How often will you meet with each new teacher?

COMMUNICATION

Decide when to communicate, how often to communicate, and the purpose of your communication.

Mentor
- When shall we meet to discuss my work plan? How often shall we meet to discuss my work?

Principal
- When shall we meet to discuss how you plan your work to serve teachers?

PROCESSES

Identify the processes the mentor will use for various tasks, such as providing services to teachers, deciding priorities, how often to work with teachers, how teachers access mentoring services, how to document their work, how to report their accomplishments, etc.

Mentor
- What process do we want to establish to help teachers access my assistance?
- What is the best way for me to spend the majority of my time?
- How will I log my work? What evidence do you want?

Principal
- What process do you think will help teachers access your services easily and conveniently?
- How will you demonstrate how you spend your time?

CONFIDENTIALITY

Be explicit about what is confidential and how to alert each other about confidentiality concerns.

Mentor
- What information do you expect me to provide about my work with beginning teachers?
- What agreements will allow teachers to feel comfortable interacting with me, sharing their strengths and weaknesses, and being willing to take risks to change their instructional practices?
- What's the best way for me to tell you when I feel you are asking for information that is outside our agreement area?

Principal
- What agreements will allow teachers to feel comfortable interacting with me, sharing their strengths and weaknesses, and being willing to take risks to change their instructional practices?
- How will we monitor our agreements about confidentiality?

The Mentoring chapter in *Taking the Lead* provides substantial guidance for teachers who play a mentoring role. Numerous resources are also listed.

Principals cultivate support to nurture new teachers

ing a lack of respect from peers and parents.

According to recent MetLife Surveys of the American Teacher, most new teachers say their relationships with other teachers (57%) and their principal (53%) are very satisfying (2005, p. 26, 28). But teachers who are most likely to leave the profession in the next five years are those who are less satisfied than others with their school relationships. Teachers who are likely to leave the profession are less likely to strongly agree that their principal creates an environment which helps them be an effective teacher (40% vs. 63%) (2005, p. 29). According to the 2006 MetLife survey, teachers who expect to leave are more likely than others to have principals who do not ask for their suggestions (29% vs. 15%), do not show appreciation for their work (21% vs. 11%), and do not treat them with respect (15% vs. 6%).

At a time where there is so much focus on the issue of teachers leaving the profession, what can principals do to improve the likelihood that teachers will stay in the profession?

"The little things count. There is not a magic bullet, not one single thing that they can do that will make the difference. It's the accumulation of little things that matter," said Cynthia Carver, assistant professor of teacher education, Michigan State University.

Recognizing that beginning teachers are still learning is crucial, she said. "It sounds so simple but it's a fundamentally different way to think about beginning teachers. When principals recognize that they are learning to teach at the same time that they are teaching, that changes the way principals think about what beginning teachers need," she said.

"New teachers know that going into teaching is going to be hard. If they know that people are paying attention to them, valuing their presence, and recognizing that they're still learning, then they're likely to be tolerant of the bumps and challenges. We lose teachers when these bumps and challenges happen and nobody seems to care," Carver said.

Betsy Warren, outreach coordinator for

school leadership development at the New Teacher Center in Santa Cruz, Calif., refers to the "care and feeding" of new teachers. "These people are developing educators. They are not going to be the most polished teachers that a principal sees. But, as an instructional leader, the principal is the person who's expected to help them get better. Principals need to recognize that new teachers need more supervision than a successful veteran teacher," she said.

THE PRINCIPAL AND THE MENTOR

As the principal plans how to best support beginning teachers, she must also contemplate how to develop an effective three-way relationship that includes the principal, the new teacher, and the new teacher's mentor.

"Principals really have a hard time providing one-to-one support for new teachers. It's easier in a small, well-functioning elementary school but it's more difficult in larger schools and schools where a lot of crises take priority on the principal's time. So the mentor becomes a very important person in the life of the beginning teacher," Carver said.

In the ideal situation, a new teacher's mentor would be another colleague in the building who has released time to devote to the mentoring relationship. But mentors are often assigned from district offices and even from some universities and regional educational centers. When this is the case, they may visit the new teacher in person only once a week or once a month. "When that's the situation, the principal needs to make an effort to meet the mentor. That's a basic," Warren said.

Because mentors so often are selected and managed by someone at the district level, Carver said principals often don't have a good understanding about the work of the mentor and often don't appreciate the training that mentors have received for this role.

"Increasingly, the mentoring that's going on today is often very different from the mentoring that the principals experienced when they were teachers," Carver said.

Districts will want to ensure that principals

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▶ See Pages 4 and 5 for an example of how principals and mentors can reach agreements about their relationship.

Little things that make a big difference

THE BASICS

- Walk new teachers through the building, introducing them to their colleagues and to the facility. Consider having a special event in your building, perhaps a lunch on the first duty day, to introduce new and returning teachers to each other.
- Have a conversation with beginning teachers about your expectations for instruction and student learning. Describe the evaluation process and provide a timeline.
- Ensure that the beginning teacher's assignment matches his or her ability. Don't give the beginning teacher the most difficult students.
- Limit extra duties for any new teacher.

THE CULTURE

- Share your school's culture with new teachers by talking about the school's history, traditions, and values.
- Provide a mentor for every new teacher. If your district or state does not support a mentoring program, recruit from among veteran teachers to provide this important service.
- Ensure that every beginning teacher is part of at least one site-based team. This helps create an expectation of collaboration and collegiality.

THE PRINCIPAL'S RELATIONSHIP

- Meet with the mentor and each new teacher to reach agreement on how you will work together and share information during the year.
- Do brief walk-throughs in the beginning teacher's classroom at least once a week during the first semester.
- Invite beginning teachers to join you for breakfast or lunch once a month. Encourage them to support each other.
- Schedule regular meetings with new teachers to ensure that they get the information they need about such issues as parent-teacher conferences and testing periods.
- Celebrate the accomplishments of new teachers with other staff, with parents.

know about the scope of the mentor's training and their expectations for how mentors will support new teachers.

In addition, an early conversation between the principal and the mentor is crucial. The principal and the mentor should discuss this relationship at the beginning of each school year and negotiate which responsibilities each will handle in regards to the new teacher. Of particular concern is the confidentiality of conversations between the new teacher and the mentor and the confidentiality of the mentor's observations of the new teacher's classroom.

"They need to reach an agreement about what is confidential and what is not and a conceptual understanding about what they will communicate to each other and how they will do that," Warren said.

Carver agrees. "Beginning teachers are going to be fearful of sharing anything with a mentor if they know the mentor is going to run and tell the principal," she said.

"Whatever they agree to, it has to be very transparent. That will help build the trust that the beginning teacher has in the mentor and in the principal," Carver said.

SYSTEM SUPPORT

As important as principal support is for new teachers, system support is equally significant, Warren said. "The whole system really needs to have a coherent approach to supporting new teachers," she said.

For example, collective bargaining agreements which are negotiated at the district level can have language that prohibits beginning teachers from certain more challenging assignments, such as teaching combined grades. The district could make a commitment to provide every new teacher with a certain level of furniture, materials, and technology rather than place that burden on principals.

Most of all, Carver and Warren agree that new teachers will benefit when their principals recognize that the enthusiasm and fresh ideas they bring will benefit everyone. "Their energy, their commitment can be a real shot in the arm for a grade-level team or an entire school. We can all use that," Warren said. ∎

NSDC seeks candidates for Board of Trustees

The NSDC Board of Trustees is seeking candidates for three open positions on the board. Members leaving the board this year are Sydnee Dickson of Utah, past president Sue McAdamis of Missouri, and Sue Showers of Ohio.

To qualify, a candidate must have been an NSDC member for at least two years, have attended at least one NSDC annual conference, be employed in the field of education, and may not have served on the board during the past two years. Special consideration will be given to candidates employed by K-12 school districts.

Board members:
- Must attend and participate in meetings of the Board of Trustees;
- Review and approve the annual budget;
- Select the executive director and assess his or her performance;
- Represent NSDC at the request of the president and perform other duties as requested by the president;
- Act in accordance with the norms of the Board of Trustees;
- Mentor new Board of Trustees members;
- Represent the diverse membership and perspectives of the Council;
- Ensure diverse membership and leadership in the Council;
- Recruit, identify, and develop Board of Trustees nominees;
- Promote membership and Council services; and
- Demonstrate individual commitment by providing leadership for the organization through such duties as presenting, writing, mentoring, making financial contributions, and facilitating.

The election will occur in September and new board members will join the board at the conclusion of NSDC's 2008 Annual Conference in December.

Members interested in nominating themselves or other NSDC members for the board should notify Sue McAdamis (mcadamis-sue@rockwood.k12.mo.us) no later than April 30.

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