

# THE LEARNING System

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

## THE PLUGGED-IN SCHOOL

*Districts harness technology to attract  
and retain new teachers*

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

**I**magine that you are a 22-year-old about to enter the teaching profession. For four years, you've had broadband access 24/7 from your home and the coffee shop you frequent. You text your friends, "poke" people on Facebook, and post videos on YouTube. You register for classes online, take online courses and submit all of your papers via e-mail. You do your banking online, your shopping online, your research online. You

keep up with your favorite TV shows through a combination of your DVR at home and downloading free episodes online. You watch your programs with one eye while studying. All the while, the computer shows you an image of a friend who's five states away. Occasionally, you turn to the computer screen to see each other and laugh at the same situation on the screen.

Now, you're ready for your first job. You attend a virtual career



**Kansas is using a virtual career fair on Second Life to recruit teachers.**

fair online using the Second Life platform. You design your own avatar and talk with personnel directors from 12 participating school districts that have designed their own avatars. You work in a rural area and see your mentor face-to-face once a month but she encourages you to text messages to her cell phone anytime. When you do, she

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leadership  
throughout  
a school will  
sustain successful  
practices over  
time.**

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## Nurture leaders to sustain learning cultures

**T**here are countless stories in public education about the rise and fall of effective practices. Educators often refer wistfully to an era when a particularly useful practice flourished in a school. In spite of a school's investment in such a practice and its positive results, the practice may not endure. Most frequently, this occurs because educators responsible for the practice leave the school or quit giving it the attention necessary for quality implementation.

There is no guarantee this phenomenon will not repeat itself in the case of professional learning. When a school successfully implements daily, school-based team learning, it is probably due to the interest and effort of a small group of school leaders. Over time, however, these leaders may move on or there may be new education movements or imperatives that capture their attention. The National Staff Development Council recognizes this vulnerability in one of its belief statements: "*Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.*"

School systems and schools cannot organize effective professional learning without leaders. Who will these leaders be? School systems will naturally gravitate to principals, but most principals know little about professional development. What they do know is the result of their experiences with modes of professional development that have produced, at best, mixed results. School systems must consider this reality and compensate for it by increasing principals' understanding of and engagement with more effective means of learning. One approach is to organize principals into learning teams that function similarly to the learning teams the principals subsequently organize with educators in their schools. The purpose of the principal learning teams, which should meet frequently for at least a year, would be for the principals to educate

themselves about what constitutes effective professional learning, and provide them direct experience with how to organize, monitor, and assess it. (Principals will also benefit from joining NSDC and receiving its monthly newsletter, *The Learning Principal*.)

School systems must not make the mistake of assuming that overburdened principals will be able to single-handedly organize, monitor, and assess learning teams and achieve quality results. When principals organize educator learning teams in their schools, they will need assistance and school systems must take this reality into account. For principals of low-performing schools, school systems may want to provide an on-site learning team coach for at least two years. All educators will need support as they begin to work and learn together, and this is particularly true in schools where teachers lack positive experiences in engaging in candid, respectful dialogue with their peers.

In addition to leaders who are principals and coaches, there are also teacher leaders in every school. Over the long term, more than principals or coaches, they can provide the "*skillful leadership*" that "*sustainable learning cultures require.*" This will not happen, however, without school systems and principals nurturing the development of teacher leaders who become dedicated to sustaining a learning culture. Their leadership will be critical to renewing and reenergizing learning teams each school year, helping the teams build on experiences and lessons from previous years. Each year, these teacher leaders should also mentor new teachers in how to participate effectively on learning teams, and help them develop skills necessary to take leadership roles on the teams. If teacher leaders persist in carrying out these responsibilities, it will go a long way towards preventing the withering of learning teams than can occur because of teacher turnover.



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

## Job-embedded, collaborative principal learning

Does it seem that there has been an explosion of leadership development programs in the past few years? Federal and state departments of education, universities, and regional assistance centers are paying attention to the principal's important role in improving student learning. The content for that development work is becoming clearer as a result of a meta-analysis of leadership research. McREL's meta-analysis covered 35 years of work on school leadership and identified 21 leadership responsibilities as well as 66 leadership practices that have been shown to impact student learning (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Central office staff have a role in this work as well. Central office staff need to **provide professional learning experiences to enable principals to function as instructional leaders** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 118). But rather than arranging for an outside consultant to plow through research results that identify essential practices, central office staff can use job-embedded, collaborative strategies to build principal skills and knowledge. Central office staff begin by **creating facilitated learning teams for principals in which they problem solve and learn together**. In order for principals to understand and value learning teams within their own schools, they need first-hand experience of working within a learning team. Providing a facilitator will be important to help principals work cooperatively with each other because many school leaders feel that they are in competition with each other for recognition, resources, and respect. This perception of competition makes cooperation difficult and the sharing

of problems or challenges almost impossible.

Within the learning team, principals would be involved in **extensive, ongoing learning activities that include hands-on, problem-based, and multiple practice experiences**. In other words, principals need to learn about new strategies and then practice using those new strategies. This development work is best accomplished for principals — just as for teachers — when it is designed within the context of their daily work and based on real-life issues and challenges.

Using a problem-based learning approach, for example, might mean presenting a case study of a typical challenge facing principals. The group recommends actions based on research and best practice — not merely past experience.

Given the identification of 66 specific leadership skills, principals will also need **time to explore and practice those behaviors and strategies and receive feedback on the implementation of new skills**. An implementation im-

perative is clear for this work. Principal cannot just “know” about these leadership skills; they also need support to help them begin to change their daily leadership practices. Many development programs include principal coaches who provide constructive feedback to school leaders as they reconceptualize and enact their roles.

It is clear that principals matter when they focus on and use the *essential* responsibilities and practices identified in the leadership research. Effective professional development should support principals as they learn these new skills.

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

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

### REFERENCES

- Marzano, J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005).** *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD & McREL.
- Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003).** *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation Configurations, Vol.1*. Oxford, OH: NSDC & SEDL.

# NEW TECHNOLOGIES

## How tech-savvy is your staff?

Use this non-scientific survey to stimulate a conversation among district staff or within school buildings about their level of comfort with new technologies.

You may consider having your tech staff create the survey online using Zoomerang or Survey Monkey. That would give you the ability to calculate responses and identify various levels of use. That knowledge would assist you in developing professional development appropriate to the comfort level of your staff.

Parents represent another group that might be surveyed. You may discover new ways to communicate with parents once you learn their level of comfort with new technologies.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Indicate which of the following you own:

- Cell phone
- Desktop computer
- Laptop computer
- Personal digital assistant, such as a Blackberry
- MP3 player or iPod
- Digital camera
- Videocamera
- Webcam
- Electronic book reader
- Scanner
- DVD player
- Thumb drive

Did you learn to type on a typewriter or a computer keyboard?

- Typewriter     Computer keyboard

Where do you get your news?

- The web
- Morning newspaper
- Evening television broadcast
- I don't worry much about the news

Do you have an account on a social networking site, such as Facebook or MySpace?

- Yes     No

Have you ever created a web page?

- Yes     No

Have you ever created a wiki?

- Yes     No

Have you ever created an avatar or an online representation of yourself?

- Yes     No

Have you ever participated in an online discussion or a listserv?

- Yes     No

### PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Do you have an e-mail account?

- Yes     No

If yes, how often do you check your e-mail?

- Several times a day
- Once a day
- 3-5 days a week
- Once or twice a week
- Once or twice a month

Do you send text messages?

- Yes     No

If yes, how often do you send text messages?

- Several times a day
- Once a day
- 3-5 days a week
- Once or twice a week
- Once or twice a month

Have you ever posted a message on someone's electronic wall?

- Yes     No

Have you ever poked someone online?

- Yes     No

Have you ever googled somebody?

- Yes     No

How do you communicate with your parents?

- I call from a land line phone to another land line phone.
- I call from my cell phone to their land line phone.
- I call from my cell phone to their cell phone.
- I send text messages.
- I send e-mail.
- I post a message on their Facebook page.
- I write a letter.

**PERSONAL BUSINESS**

**When you want to record an appointment, do you use:**

- Paper calendar  
 Agenda book, like a Franklin Planner  
 PDA  
 Electronic calendar on my computer

**Do you visit an ATM machine regularly?**

- Yes       No

**When you are buying a gift for someone, are you more likely to:**

- Go to a store to buy the gift in person  
 Order a gift online and have it sent directly to the recipient

**Are you more likely to write a check to pay a bill or go online and transfer funds from your banking account to a vendor?**

- Write a check  
 Transfer funds electronically

**When was the last time you wrote a check?**

- Today  
 Last week  
 Last month  
 I only write checks a few times a year

**When you want to know how much money is in your checking account, do you**

- Visit the bank and ask a teller  
 Visit an ATM machine and ask for my account balance  
 Go online to check

**MOVIES AND VIDEOS**

**Have you ever posted or viewed a video on YouTube?**

- Yes       No

**Do you ever download and watch television programs or movies onto a computer, a cell phone, iPod, or PDA?**

- Yes       No

**MUSIC**

**When you were 16 years old and wanted to hear your favorite music, did you:**

- Turn on the radio  
 Put a record on the record player  
 Slip an eight-track or a tape into the tape player  
 Listen to a CD on your Walkman  
 Put on your headphones and listen to your MP3 player or iPod

**When you want to listen to music now, do you:**

- Turn on the radio  
 Put a record on the record player  
 Slip an eight-track or a tape into the tape player  
 Listen to a CD on your Walkman  
 Put on your headphones and listen to your MP3 player or iPod

**Have you ever listened to a podcast?**

- Yes       No

**COURSES AND RESEARCH**

**Have you ever attended a webinar?**

- Yes       No

**Have you ever run a webinar?**

- Yes       No

**How many courses did you take online during college?**

- 0      1      2      3      3+

**How many papers did you submit online during college**

- 0       Almost all of them  
 5-10       All of them

**Would you be more likely to check the Encyclopedia Britannica or Wikipedia when seeking information for a class assignment?**

- Encyclopedia Britannica  
 Wikipedia

**See Page 8 for additional questions that you could use to gauge your staff's comfort with new technologies.**

## RESOURCES

**[emss.nsta.org](http://emss.nsta.org)**

E-Mentoring for Student Success (eMSS) provides beginning teachers with online mentors, online discussion boards, access to subject-area experts.

**[www.newteachercenter.org](http://www.newteachercenter.org)**

The New Teacher Center works with new and veteran educators, researchers, and policy makers to support the development of strong induction models.

**[www.nctaf.org](http://www.nctaf.org)**

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future is dedicated to providing every child with competent, caring, qualified teachers.

**[www.projectteeach.ua.edu/](http://www.projectteeach.ua.edu/)**

Project TEEACH at the University of Alabama prepares special educators through a course of study that includes weekly classroom observations using webcams and bug-in-the-ear technology.

## Districts harness technology to attract, retain teachers

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responds within minutes. In addition, she arranges for you to join an e-mentoring program that connects you with both new and experienced teachers on your grade level and in your subject area.

You can post and access messages on discussion boards there whenever it's convenient for you to do so, either at school or at home. Your district provides teachers with a higher level of access to the Internet so you can download material for classroom use. You can also work with a teacher in the neighboring district on a wiki where you co-create standards-based lesson plans. When you find yourself in a challenging teaching situation, you can ask your mentor to observe you via a webcam and to coach you using bug-in-the-ear technology that allows you, but not your students, to hear her suggestions. You post grades online and offer to do online conferences with parents who find it difficult to get to school to see you during the day.

Is this a world you can offer new teachers?

Your new teachers are coming from a world in which they have been plugged in — all the time. And they want and expect the same opportunities when they move from their student world to their professional world.

"This generation does not want to be unplugged which is exactly what we're asking them to do when they walk into our schools," said Lynn Kepp, director of online professional development for the New Teacher Center in Santa Cruz, Calif.

While providing classroom computers and web access for students has become widely expected, few school districts are using the potential of technology as a way to attract new teachers or enhance their induction into the profession. "The real promise of technology is that we can increase our effectiveness in working with the new teachers who we're losing right and left," said Earle Knowlton, a professor of special education at the University of Kansas.

Kathleen Fulton, who has extensive experience as an educational technology consultant, sees great potential for using technology to make

a difference in the work lives of all teachers, including new teachers. "Since they're using technology in their real life, we have to find ways to allow them to use it in constructive ways in their professional life," said Fulton, director for reinventing schools for the 21st century for the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

While schools districts may be slow to jump on board, universities, regional education service agencies, and non-profit organizations are harnessing some of the new technologies as a way to both appeal to incoming teachers and to support them during their challenging first years in the profession.

### UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

Sam Jones (not his real name) seems to be ignoring the fidgety 3rd grader. He walks away from the student and seems uncertain about what to do. Soon, in a tiny earpiece, he hears calm instructions. "Move over towards David. Move behind him. OK, now kneel down and tell him very quietly what you expect him to do," says the voice.

Jones, a novice teacher with minimal special education training, listens carefully and casually approaches David. After a few minutes of being close to the student and talking with him quietly, David visibly settles down and begins to focus on the assignment. "Nicely done," says the voice.

The voice belongs to a professor at the University of Alabama, about 60 miles from Jones' classroom. Working with Skype (a voice-over-internet-protocol phone service), a wide-angle webcam, and "bug-in-the-ear" technology (BIE), professor Marcia Rock coaches 18 graduate students who are also fulltime teachers through such encounters — all while sitting in her office at the University of Alabama. She observes each student once a week for 30 minutes each.

"The technology allows them to have immediate feedback while they're teaching when they need it. It's far more effective and far more productive than traditional supervision or support.

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## Districts harness technology to attract, retain teachers

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They don't practice the errors and get feedback later," Rock said.

"I've done the traditional supervisory support model, and this is far more powerful. The teachers feel more supported. They're more willing to try new methods because they receive immediate guidance when and where they need it — during instruction in the classroom. They feel connected to the university and to me. And they trust that the coaching will help them improve their teaching," she said.

Earle Knowlton who works with a similar project at the University of Kansas sees special value in using BIE to support beginning teachers who have students with IEPs in regular education classes. "We have people here who have the knowledge and skills to be able to sit virtually in that classroom and work with that teacher to help that kid. For a young teacher, that can make a difference between staying and leaving," he said.

### E-MENTORING

Amy Troiano was teaching about climate change and global warming when a parent accused her of teaching political science instead of physical science. "That was a really hard situation for me as a new teacher," said Troiano, then in her second year teaching 7th- and 8th-grade science at Whittier Middle School in rural Poland, Maine.

Instead of toughing it out herself, Troiano turned to a support group in an e-mentoring program run by the New Teacher Center in Santa Cruz, Calif. The eMSS (e-Mentoring for Student Success) provides online mentoring for beginning science teachers by trained mentors who teach the same discipline.

"eMSS helped me find ways to focus more on the science and less on the political issues surrounding this topic. I got great ideas from other teachers who were teaching this topic in their classrooms on how to approach it in a way that deals with the standards and not the politics," she said.

Typical classroom dilemmas — such as

grading homework or communicating with parents — are posted on eMSS and new teachers and mentors are invited to respond at their own pace. In another area, beginning teachers are able to post questions. In addition, every new teacher has an online mentor, typically matched by grade level or content area, who can provide more one-on-one support.

"I could look at the discussion area and find topics where I was having a problem. Even if I didn't have time to post, I could go in and read. Most of the time, I got what I needed from reading about other people's dilemmas," she said.

Anytime she asked a question, she said she was "inundated with responses."

"It made an amazing difference for me. It didn't matter that I was in Maine, I'd hear about a teacher in Hawaii or California who was facing the same issues, the same struggles. It's very reassuring and comforting to know that I'm not the only one who's dealing with issues like how to get the kids to settle down and get started," Troiano said.

Lynn Kepp of the New Teacher Center admits that she was skeptical when she heard about the online mentoring. But she's been won over by watching teachers develop relationships with each other and with their mentors. "They have built these really great relationships that are more honest and open because of the anonymity of the online environment. They've said to us that they'd been afraid to ask certain questions of someone in their building or of their local mentor. They're not afraid to ask those questions online," Kepp said.

As powerful as online is for young teachers, Kepp does not dismiss the value of face-to-face support. "If their needs can be met by a human person next door, they will default to that every time" she said.

On that point, Kansas' Earle Knowlton agrees. "I never would say that any of this digital stuff should replace the warm body in the building who is a teacher's mentor but it makes a nice package when you put it all together," he said. ■

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MetLife began the Survey series in 1984 to bring the views and voices of those closest to the classroom to the attention of education leaders and the public.

To read more about any of the MetLife Teacher Surveys and the MetLife Foundation visit [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).

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## General attitudes about using new technologies

Circle the response that best describes you.

**I like being more available to others because of cell phones and other mobile devices.**

Strongly agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**When I hear about a new technology or a new electronic device, I want to try it right away.**

Strongly agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**When I get a new electronic device, someone else usually has to set it up or show me how to use it.**

Strongly agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**I am more productive because of the electronic devices that I use.**

Strongly agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**Using a variety of electronic devices improves my ability to do my job.**

Strongly agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**Using a variety of electronic devices improves my ability to learn more.**

Strongly agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**Using a variety of electronic devices improves my ability to keep in touch with friends and family.**

Strongly agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**Using a variety of electronic devices improves my ability to work with others.**

Strongly agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

*These questions were adapted from the Internet Typology Test developed by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, [www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org).*

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