

## NSDC'S STANDARDS EASE THE SHIFT FROM ISOLATION TO COLLABORATION

As the science chair at a high-performing high school, Jesse is responsible for supervising and supporting 22 science teachers. He is a solid teacher, and his peers consider him a good leader. He is comfortable with the meetings he runs, where the group focuses on announcements, procedures, and materials. Recently, Jesse's principal told him that the school will be making a shift — they'll use meeting time for team learning. Jesse is not prepared for a shift to team time focused on the improvement of student learning. Considering his new challenges, Jesse wonders if he can be an effective leader. He is not knowledgeable about what is involved in leading adults in school improvement and his role in that effort. Let's look at how NSDC's Standards for Staff Development support a teacher like Jesse as he works to implement the Learning Communities standard: "Staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district."

Jesse's principal, Felicia, is working with a peer group in a learning community. She is eager to take the lessons she is learning back to her school, asking all chairs and department heads to use their meeting time to focus on improving student learning. Her principal group is studying *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations, Volume I* to learn how they can support adult learners working in teams to improve student learning (Roy & Hord, 2003). The principals meet regularly to share their successes and challenges, always coaching each other through the challenges that happen when schools are changing.

Principal support is key to the success of learning communities, as adults change from working in isolation to forming teams to solve student learning problems. The year before she asked her teachers to make this shift, Felicia met on a regular basis with her colleagues to plan for this change. Their intent was to practice and model what they want teams of adults at their schools to do. The principals

LEA ARNAU is president of the Georgia Staff Development Council and retired director of professional learning for Gwinnett County Public Schools. She teaches at the University of Georgia and is the coach of the NSDC Academy Class of 2009. You can contact her at [leaarnau@yahoo.com](mailto:leaarnau@yahoo.com).

began by sharing their expectations for their work together and developing norms to move them toward successful and efficient work time. Next, they reviewed student learning data for their schools, practicing the conversations that their chairs and heads will use when doing the same work with teachers. These school leaders know that they will be coaching the teacher leaders in implementing this work schoolwide, perhaps supported by a school-based staff developer or coach.

Once the principals established team norms and analyzed student learning data, they paired up to coach each other on developing action plans and goals aligned to their school improvement plans. The group revisits the goals over time. While most principals are comfortable writing school improvement plans, many teachers are not accustomed to writing and being held accountable for their own improvement goals based on student learning and school improvement plans. The principals recognize that their faculty members will need support in this aspect of teamwork.

Back at her school, Felicia met with the leaders who would be guiding this work within the learning teams. According to the *Innovation Configurations*, principals have five main outcomes regarding learning communities. They are to "prepare teachers for skillful collaboration, create an organizational structure that supports collegial learning, understand and implement an incentive system that ensures collaborative work, create and maintain a learning community to support teacher and student learning, and finally, participate with other administrators in one or more learning communities" (Roy & Hord, 2003, pp. 60-61).

Although Felicia expects the chairs or team leaders to guide the work, she wants all teachers to own the process and share in leadership responsibilities. Gathering feedback from her chairs, Felicia develops a training session on the purpose of learning communities, her expectations, and the collaboration skills she expects teachers to practice within the context of improving student learning. She shares her expectation that all teachers will "meet regularly with colleagues during the school day to plan instruction, align collaborative work with school improvement goals, and participate in learning teams, some of whose membership extends beyond the school" (Roy & Hord, 2003, pp. 14-15).

The teacher leaders who are guiding this work appreci-



Lea Arnau's columns on NSDC's standards are available at [www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org).

ate Felicia's public support and clear statement of her expectations. Furthermore, Felicia has told the staff that regular meeting time for this work will be built into the schedule. She tells her staff that she will monitor this work time to ensure that it meets her expectations (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 66 ).

By now, Jesse and the other teacher leaders are more confident about the work they are being asked to do. Felicia has asked them to tell her about the successes and challenges within their teams. She has told the faculty that successful teamwork resulting in improved student learning will be rewarded and shared throughout the school. Jesse tells his team that Felicia expects teachers to take risks, to build trust within the team, and to try innovative ideas that will improve student learning.

Jesse and his team begin where the principals began at their first meeting. They talk about the principal's expectations for their work, about how they best learn as adults, and about the practices that make team meetings effective. They create and agree upon a set of norms that will be revisited regularly and will guide their work. Just as with the principal group, the teachers' work will be driven by the school improvement plan and student data.

Jesse has asked each team member to assume a particular team role — recorder, timekeeper, facilitator. Though these roles may vary from team to team, all members are expected to be responsible for facilitating the learning sooner or later. The team discusses their concerns about changes they have been asked to implement, working as a team focused on improved stu-

dent learning instead of planning lessons and student assessments in isolation as had been their habit.

To ensure that her leaders are supported as they move their teams forward, Felicia has structured time for the chairs to come together and work around their own challenges. They have developed team norms and identified data to measure the effectiveness of their work. They share ideas and discuss successes and challenges. The work these leaders do within the school is a model for the learning communities they are guiding within their grade-level or subject-area teams. In addition, Felicia has charged this group of teacher leaders with restructuring the monthly faculty time she has traditionally led. She wants whole-faculty time to be devoted to learning, not focused on administrative matters as in the past. Various learning communities will share the work they are doing with the whole school, thus holding teams accountable to their peers for improved student learning.

Felicia and Jesse can look down the road and see that teams will move into developing lesson plans and common assessments. They will develop the trust needed to go to the next step of collaborative work — teachers observing each other in the classroom and openly discussing specific instructional practices so that all teachers will improve. The Learning Communities standard guides Felicia and Jesse in setting the context for effective adult learning that will ultimately improve student learning in the school.

#### REFERENCE

**Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003).** *Moving staff development standards into practice: Innovation Configurations, Vol. I.* Oxford, OH: NSDC. ■

**Felicia and Jesse can look down the road and see that teams will move into developing lesson plans and common assessments.**