

THE LEARNING System

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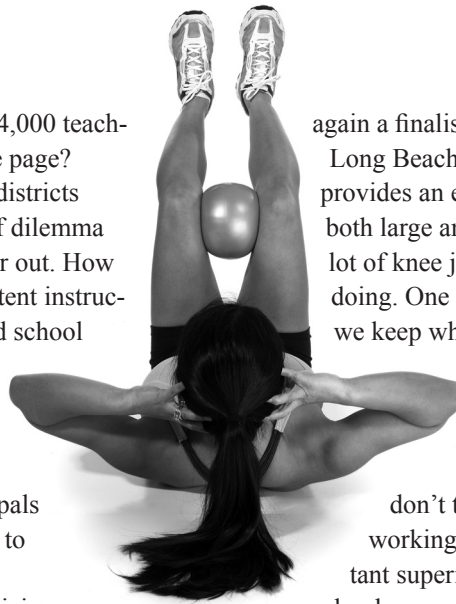
LONG BEACH DISTRICT STRENGTHENS ITS CORE

Deep focus on content standards aligns curriculum at all levels

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

How do you get 4,000 teachers on the same page? Large urban districts face that sort of dilemma year in and year out. How do those systems ensure consistent instruction from teacher to teacher and school to school? How do they manage consistent instruction when nearly 10% of their teachers are new each year? How do they ensure that principals know enough about instruction to support their teachers?

Those are the sort of organizing questions that drove change and led to sustained success in the Long Beach (Calif.) Unified School District, a 91,000-student district tucked into the southwestern corner of Los Angeles. The 2003 winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education, Long Beach has been a finalist three times, every year the district has been eligible for the award. This year's winner will be announced Oct. 14 and Long Beach is once



again a finalist.

Long Beach's sustained success provides an example to other districts, both large and small. "There is not a lot of knee jerk reaction in what we're doing. One of our signatures is that we keep what works. If a new thing

comes along, we attach it to what we know rather than just starting over.

We get better because we don't throw out something that's working," said Jill Baker, assistant superintendent for elementary schools.

What has worked for Long Beach has been an early and deep focus on core content standards. In 1995, before California had standards, Long Beach created its own content standards in core academic areas. The district soon also embraced a common approach to instruction, the Essential Elements of Effective Instruction (EEEI) developed by the late

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Clear definition will end confusion about professional learning

The greatest threat to the field of professional development is confusion. Different K-12 education leaders, working in different settings, hold dramatically different views about professional learning's purpose and how best to achieve it. Across the United States, the landscape of professional development is a jumbled mosaic of learning experiences. Though these experiences vary widely in quality and effectiveness, they all meet someone's definition of "professional development."

The National Staff Development Council believes this state of confusion should be unacceptable. When educators enter a professional development experience, they have a right to expect it will help them improve their practice and increase their students' achievement. Particularly in schools composed largely of low-performing students, educators have a right to professional learning that is a benefit rather than a burden.

NSDC is aggressively working to solve the confusion. It has recently developed and is advocating the adoption of a bold new definition of professional development. The definition begins: "The term 'professional development' means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement." This is a clear and long overdue description of professional learning's fundamental characteristics and purpose. It powerfully establishes the expectations all K-12 educators should have for their professional development.

However, the strength of the definition is that it goes on to describe professional learning's organization and practice. The definition breaks new ground in declaring, "professional development fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance." In other words, when educators learn through collaboration,

benefiting from each other's knowledge, insight, and experience, they are also more likely to take mutual responsibility for increasing the achievement of each other's students.

What, then, are the elements of this professional development? First, alignment with "rigorous state academic achievement standards" is essential. Second, the learning must occur in "teams of educators, including teachers, paraprofessionals and other instructional staff at the school." Third, each team must have a facilitator. Examples of persons qualified for this role are "well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders." Fourth, the professional learning "occurs primarily several times per week or the equivalent of three hours per week."

Under the definition, learning teams engage in a seven-part "continuous cycle of improvement." This cycle includes analyzing student performance data and using the data to establish educator learning goals. The definition is explicit in stating that "educators at the school level" must establish the goals. Other steps in the cycle of improvement are achieving the goals by using evidence-based learning strategies, and assessing the effectiveness of the professional development.

Certainly, NSDC's definition challenges most educators' mental models of professional development. Though the definition is rooted in research and experience, it is a significant departure from current practices of many school systems and schools. Translating the definition into practical implementation will require strong leadership and consistent support by educators and policy makers at all levels. In the months ahead, this column will explore how different role groups can provide the leadership necessary to end the confusion and develop professional learning that benefits all educators and all students.



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

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What evidence do you have?

A principal told me that a single conversation with his superintendent changed his focus and use of data in his school. During one of the superintendent's visits to his school, he asked two questions, "How's it going? What evidence do you have about your progress?" This single interaction signaled to the principal that collecting evidence of progress was considered an important, priority leadership task. This interaction also altered his requests for support from central office staff.

Central office staff need to **support administrator and teacher**

analysis and use of data (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 129). Most of the schools I work with don't have the staffing, background, or expertise to collect, format, and analyze a variety of data for monitoring progress toward school improvement/professional development goals. Central office, in most cases, should supply this support. Let me be clear: This does not mean that central office staff crunch the numbers, determine the weaknesses, and tell school staff what they should be doing — central office provides assistance and technical support to schools so that educators can understand the data and take part in determining next steps. Facilitating the use of data by school-based staff is necessary so that they build their own data-analysis skills for making instructional decisions and increase their commitment to school improvement and professional development initiatives.

Central office can support schools by responding to **requests for assistance from school staffs and administrators concerning analysis and data-driven decision making.** While many educators are becoming very sophisticated with

data analysis, even a cursory review of their undergraduate coursework would reveal a dearth of work in data collection and analysis. Central office needs to help school staff, who might be reluctant or unprepared, to learn about data and how to use it appropriately. This might include creating glossaries defining data terminology or providing protocols for data analysis such as those provided by Boudett, City, and Murnane (2006).

Central office staff may also need to **create charts and graphs of data in order to help school staff and administrators analyze data**

for decision making. Holcomb advises districts to transform data tables into more accessible formats, such as bar graphs, pie charts, line graphs, and pareto charts (1999, p. 50). How the numbers are displayed either helps educators make sense out of the data or creates a barrier to their use.

Finally, school staff and administrators might not even be aware of sources of data that can be used for instructional, school improvement, and professional development decision making in their school. Many central office staff are aware of data that are available through interim assessments, state or technical assistance agencies in their state or region. Central office staff should scan and **collect pertinent data for school staffs and administrators to use.** The best data to collect attend to the school's challenges connected to improvement/professional development goals and can be determined through interim ongoing conversations with school-based administration and faculty.

Schools will use data when the superintendent and central office affirm data's importance and facilitate their use at the school level.

Data-Driven: Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.

The Chorizo Test

BY NOLAN L. CABRERA AND GEORGE A. CABRERA

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Adapted with permission from "Counterbalance Assessment: The Chorizo Test," by Nolan L. Cabrera and George A. Cabrera, *Kappan*, May 2008, pp. 677-678.

Cultural bias is one of the long-standing limitations of standardized tests.

Because they are created by and for white middle-class populations, standardized tests typically reflect the dominant, white middle-class culture.

Many years ago, Adrian Dove, a black sociologist, created The Dove Counterbalance Intelligence Test as way to demonstrate the folly of evaluating black children with tests that reflect white middle-class values and language (1967).

It seemed fitting to us, 40 years after the creation of The Dove Counterbalance Intelligence Test (1967) and its short form, The Chitling Test (1968), to develop a new instrument, The Chorizo Test, to raise similar awareness about the nation's

new largest ethnic minority group, Hispanics. (Even the descriptor, Hispanic, is itself a biased, colonialist term used by the federal government as an identifier.)

According to the Census Bureau, in 2005 this group made up 14.5% of the U.S. population and were the fastest-growing ethnic group in the nation. In addition, 63.8% of U.S. Hispanics self-identified as Mexican/Chicano in government surveys.

The Chorizo Test was created to be used with students in teacher training programs to sensitize them to the pitfalls inherent in standardized pencil-and-paper tests, such as linguistic bias and cultural stereotyping. The test does not purport to avoid bias — or even to be fair. Instead, it is designed to be a counterbalance to the

widely used standardized group tests administered in our public schools.

We encourage educators to make copies of the test on Page 5 and to administer the test as part of a staff meeting. Administrators or staff developers who use the test should be prepared to engage in a reflective discussion with the test takers about what they have learned as a result of being asked to answer questions which are often far outside their realm of experience.

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Dove, A. (1968, July 15). Taking the chitling test. *Newsweek*, 72, 51-52.

The Chorizo Test

1. Aztlán is:

- A territory created by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
- A popular Mexican fast food chain
- The Mexican capital of the Republic of China
- The mythic native land of the Aztecs
- A resort on the Mexican Riviera

2. César Chávez is best known as:

- A fictional character in the Zorro movies
- The first Chicano representative to the U.S. Congress
- A writer known for his best seller, *Letters from the Fields*
- Lead guitarist for Santana
- A union leader who organized farm workers

3. Cinco de Mayo is:

- A celebration of the beginning of spring in Mexico
- A celebration of Mexican Independence Day
- A Mexican military victory over the French at Puebla
- A Mexican salad dressing
- A celebration of Mexican St. Patrick's Day

Continued on p. 5

Answer key

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 25. a | 22. e |
| 23. d | 20. a |
| 21. b | 17. e |
| 18. d | 14. b |
| 15. c | 11. e |
| 12. b | 8. b |
| 9. e | 5. d |
| 7. c | 3. c |
| 4. b | |
| 6. a | |

The Chorizo Test, *continued from p. 4*

4. Dolores Huerta is:

- A well-known newscaster on Telemundo
- The mother of the Chicano movement
- The most recognized Chicana in advertising
- A successful Latina business executive
- A popular telenovela star

5. A gabacho is a:

- Vegetable
- Cowboy
- Fruit
- White male
- Horse rider

6. "¡Huelga!" means:

- "Strike!"
- "Careful!"
- "Watch out!"
- "Halt!"
- "Stop!"

7. El Chupacabra is a:

- Decorated piñata
- Man's belt buckle
- Mythical devil
- Famous racehorse
- Movie hero

8. La Llorona:

- Lights the way for travelers
- Cries for her children whom she killed
- Is a sign of the four seasons
- Prays and cares for the safety of the family
- Stands for anger and revenge

9. La Raza means:

- The politics
- The public
- The family
- The nation
- The race

10. El Norte refers to:

- The North Pole
- Canada
- Alaska
- The United States
- Baja California

11. La Virgen de Guadalupe is the:

- Bridge between El Paso and Juárez
- Sign of a good autumn harvest
- Child who represents innocence
- Final stop before crossing into the U.S.
- Patron saint of Mexico

12. MEChA is a:

- Legal assistance group
- Student activist group
- Federal aid group
- Business support group
- Political immigration group

13. Menudo is:

- Breakfast of Champions
- Dark chocolate candy
- Music played at a wedding
- A form of self-defense
- An iron cooking skillet

14. An Americanized Mexican is known as a:

- Pachuco
- Pocho
- Tío
- Muchacho
- Primo

15. Which word is out of place here?

- Nopales
- Caldo
- Chancla
- Chalupa
- Chorizo

16. The word that does not fit is:

- Curandero
- Estúpido
- Tonto
- Pendejo
- Baboso

17. Quetzalcóatl is:

- The patron saint of the poor
- Clothing worn by peasants
- A small restaurant with home cooking
- The Mayan leader who fought Cortez
- An Aztec god

18. A Quinceañera is a:

- Place of worship for lost children
- Group of small family farms
- Festival of lights during January
- Fifteenth birthday celebration
- Strong herb used for healing

19. September 16th is:

- President's Day in Mexico
- The running of the bulls
- Mexican Independence Day
- Día de los Muertos
- Registration day for voting

20. "Sí se puede" means:

- "Yes, we can."
- "My house is your house."
- "I am somebody."
- "Keep hope alive."
- "Choose wisely."

21. The Battle of the Alamo was:

- A major victory for the Republic of Texas
- An attempt to rid Mexico of illegal Americans
- The beginning of the Mexican Revolution
- Fought by American Minutemen
- A defeat for Mexican General Santa Ana

22. What term does not fit with the rest?

- Vato
- Amigo
- Carnal
- Esé
- Patrón

23. La migra is:

- Spanish for "Minutemen"
- A group of undocumented workers
- A street gang from East Los Angeles
- The immigration enforcement patrol
- The most vocal Mexican political group

24. Río Bravo is:

- The Mexican Medal of Honor
- A rich Mexican landowner
- The same as Rio Grande
- A well-known Mexican cowboy movie
- A popular Mexican play performed outside

25. Nochebuena is another name for:

- Poinsettia
- "El Che"
- Corona beer
- Disneyland
- Night of the Kings

Long Beach district strengthens its core

To ensure consistency, the district created a three-year new teacher training program coordinated with the state's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA). Long Beach provides five days of focused instruction on standards and EEEI for new teachers before school starts, another seven days of intense professional development focused on their needs during the first year, and five to seven days during their second year.

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Madeline Hunter. Some of EEEI strategies are active participation, checking for understanding, task analysis, anticipatory set, and teaching to an objective. Until that happened, the district had no common language to talk about content or strategies.

Those efforts spawned other components that helped spread consistency throughout the district: pacing guides, common course assessments and studying the data that they provide, and instructional walk-throughs. A focus on improving the quality of middle schools led to significant changes at that level, and those changes later migrated into the elementary and high schools, creating a top-to-bottom alignment.

What pulled everything together in Long Beach was its focused program of professional development. Led by Christine Dominguez, deputy superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and professional development, the district's professional learning system begins with an unusual pre-service connection and maps upward into the professional development required to ensure that principals truly are instructional leaders of their staffs. At every level, coaches — known as curriculum leaders — provide support for teachers and principals, adding a human touch that helps develop relationships and create a culture of collaboration throughout the system.

NEW TEACHERS

When California's class size reduction (CSR) effort went into place in the mid 1990s, large urban districts like Long Beach were scrambling to hire teachers. In the early days of CSR, Long Beach had 500 to 600 new teachers a year, including many working on emergency credentials.

"Teachers working on emergency certificates were overwhelmed. They were teaching all day and taking classes at night. It was really, really not working for them," said Lisa Isbell Hager, assistant director of professional development.

To ensure consistency, the district created a two-year new teacher training program coordi-

nated with the state's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA). Long Beach provides five days of focused instruction on standards and EEEI for new teachers before school starts, another seven days of intense professional development focused on their needs during the first year, and five to seven days during their second year. In addition, using BTSA funds plus local funds, the district provides a coach for every two new teachers. Coaches meet individually with their mentees for about an hour each week. Every school also has a new teacher site coordinator to ensure a consistent message for all new teachers in a building.

As veteran teachers saw the benefits experienced by the new teachers, they began to demand the same for themselves. "We had a critical mass of new teachers who had common experiences that veterans wanted and sought out. They wanted to strengthen their core knowledge and they wanted to learn more about EEEI," Dominguez said. And, as new teachers moved out of the induction period, they continued to want the same support. "We can offer advanced professional development because all of our teachers share the same common understanding. It's elevated everything," Hager said. Long Beach took another significant step to ensure the quality of its new teachers when the district ramped up its relationship with local teacher education programs.

Most Long Beach curriculum leaders teach at California State University-Long Beach, adding their practitioner focus to the theory provided by the university professors. The presence of the Long Beach staff in the teacher education program encourages the university to think first of the district as a place for student teachers. That allows both student teachers and the district to test each other as well. "It's a seamless relationship," Dominguez said.

"When we hire them, they already know the Long Beach way," said history curriculum leader Linda Mehlbrech.

"Our new teachers are phenomenal. They

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Long Beach district strengthens its core

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are so highly trained, and they get the support they need when they arrive. People aren't leaving our system," Dominguez said.

More than 90% of the new teachers hired in Long Beach return for a second year, and 93% of those return for a third year.

"Teachers want to work in Long Beach and they tell us they want to work here because of the professional development," Hager said.

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENT

Along the way to improving professional development for teachers, Dominguez admits that Long Beach overlooked principals. "Our professional development for principals was sporadic and not as focused," Dominguez said.

"During the first Broad visit, they asked about leadership development. We felt foolish because it wasn't aligned or coordinated. We found that it was an area that we needed to focus on," Baker said.

Each of the three levels — elementary, middle, and high school — is guided by an assistant superintendent. A crucial part of each assistant superintendent's work is leadership development. "My job is to help them hone their own leadership skills," said Baker, who is the assistant superintendent for the 50 elementary schools. She estimates that she spends 40 to 50% of her time in schools working with principals.

A core piece of work for Long Beach principals is deepening their understanding of content and pedagogy for their level. The district's curriculum leaders separately teach principals whatever they are also providing for teachers during their professional development. "It took us three or four years to align all of that. But the principals really appreciate having a common language they can use when they talk with teachers. They feel much more equipped to walk into that classroom," Baker said.

In addition, all first-year principals have a coach. The new principals meet monthly with the curriculum leaders so they can focus on deepening their understanding of curriculum content

LONG BEACH UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Long Beach, Calif.

Enrollment: 88,000

Schools: 93

Teachers: 4,259

Racial/ethnic mix:

White: 17%

Black: 18%

Hispanic: 50%

Asian/Pacific Islander: 13%

Other: 2%

Free/reduced lunch: 68%

English as a second language: 24% (34 languages spoken)

Web site: www.lbusd.k12.ca.us

and pedagogy. The assistant superintendent or someone else from her staff also does a monthly walk-through with the new principal to aid them in learning how to do these nonevaluative observations.

The payback from this investment is clear. "As we've added more fidelity to the professional development, we get less push back from the teachers," Dominguez said.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR LONG BEACH?

Each time Long Beach is visited for a Broad award, Dominguez said she learns something new. The process, she said, is almost as good as the final award.

At the moment, she's focused on improving the way Long Beach evaluates its professional development and improving the preparation for the district's coaches.

Dominguez said she's also planning ahead for 2011 when California is anticipating a jump in the number of teachers retiring because of changes in the state's pension system. She wants to ensure that Long Beach is well-positioned with plenty of well-prepared young teachers to prevent a wholesale drain of talent when veteran teachers leave the profession. ■

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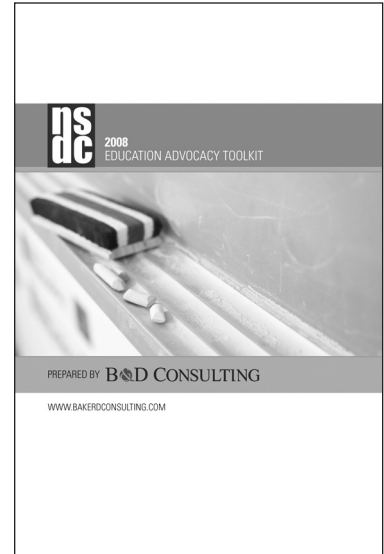
Members of NSDC are experts in effective professional learning.

More than ever, NSDC needs to tap into your expertise to improve the policy context for educators. NSDC members and other interested educators now have a free downloadable toolkit they can use to advocate for federal policies that support professional learning.

NSDC's legislative advocacy agenda is focused on improving elements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 that deal with professional development. If federal policy models, supports, and incentivizes good practice in professional learning, NSDC believes that an improved federal policy will have a ripple effect on improving state policy, local policy, collective bargaining agreements, and finally the day-to-day business of teaching.

NSDC's new Education Advocacy Toolkit answers questions about:

- Whom you should contact;



- What your message should be; and
- How you can most effectively deliver your message.

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