Vol. 4, No. 2
October 2008

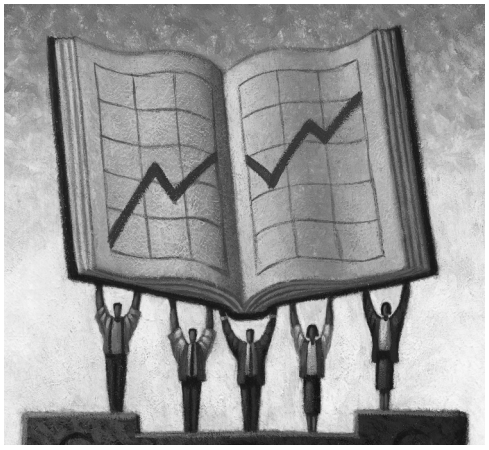
THE LEARNING System

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

DATA TEAMS HELP DISTRICT CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

BY NANCY LOVE AND DAVID TIMBS

Highway 91 from Damascus to Mountain City, Tenn., the quickest route from the Tri-City airport, twists and turns to follow the meanderings of the Laurel Creek. Ahead is a striking view of the ridges of Pond Mountain. At the easternmost point in Tennessee, early risers are treated to the first peek of the sun rising over the horizon. The signage along the way—one hand-painted "Taxidermy," another spray-painted on the side of a rundown barn exhorting passers-by to vote for a local sheriff candidate—advertise the rural character of this sparsely populated, vividly green countryside. Tucked in this largely undiscovered and isolated part of Tennessee is Johnson County, where locals have lived and raised their children for generations. And nestled in the mountains of Johnson County is a school system that has much to teach the wider world about educating children.



For the last few years, effective and collaborative uses of data have catapulted the Johnson County Schools from a struggling system to one producing higher and higher student achievement levels. The county has 73% of its students on free-and-reduced lunch; it also has 92% of students in grades 3 through 8 proficient in mathematics and 82% proficient in science. They have virtually wiped out gaps between students living in poverty and others, and between students with disabilities and regular education students, and they have scored straight A's in improvement, based on Tennessee's Value-Added Assessment System results. One of the smallest and most remote schools in the county, Shady Val-

Continued on p. 6

WHAT'S INSIDE

National Staff Development Council
800-727-7288
www.nsdc.org

Hayes Mizell is NSDC's Distinguished Senior Fellow

School board leadership is critical to put new definition into practice

For most school boards, educators' professional learning is "under the radar." Unless it emerges as an issue related to a school system's budget, calendar, or teacher contract decisions, professional development gets little attention. Boards seldom probe the effectiveness of their school systems' professional learning or demand evidence of its positive impact on educators' and students' performance levels.

Yet school board leadership is critical to transforming the National Staff Development Council's new definition of professional development into daily practice.

School administrators and teachers take their cues from school boards. If boards do not understand the definition and use it to establish new expectations for professional learning, educators will not do so. Even though the definition can be a powerful lever to improve student achievement, it is not self-implementing. School boards must take the lead in raising it to the top tier of their school systems' action agenda.

Of course, school boards cannot consider the local implications of NSDC's definition if they do not know about it. Because professional development is a low-visibility, low-status activity in many school systems, NSDC's definition may not rise to the level of a board's attention. Someone will have to take the initiative to alert the board to the opportunities the definition presents. This is a logical role for NSDC members, because they are their school systems' most knowledgeable and experienced professional learning experts. They can advocate as a group by requesting to make a presentation at a school board meeting, or a two-person team of NSDC members can brief an individual school board member in a private meeting.

The next step is for the school board to fulfill its primary role of providing policy direction for the school system. A board can begin by using the NSDC definition as a benchmark for critically reviewing the board's extant professional development policy. This should be a deliberate and deep process organized around answering four questions:

- What changes in the district policy are necessary to align it with the NSDC definition?
- What is a realistic timeline for developing and adopting a new policy?
- What timeline should the board expect for the school system's and schools' rollout and implementation of the policy?
- How should the board organize itself to provide continuing, effective oversight of the new policy's implementation and results?

As they develop policy, boards will want to consult with district and school administrators, as well as teachers, about the "how" of policy implementation. These educators are often wise about the realities of district and school operations — how things actually work as opposed to how they are *supposed* to work. School boards that fail to tap this experience will place effective policy implementation at risk.

On the other hand, school boards should resist pressures to dilute the NSDC definition in ways that jeopardize its potential impact. Implementing a professional development policy based on the definition requires new organization, new practices, and new behaviors. Many educators cling to that which is familiar and predictable, even if it is ineffective. It will be difficult for them to imagine how professional development can be different from what they know. In the beginning, they may resist the new approaches to professional learning that a school board's policy requires. This is why it is important for school boards to be thoughtful about professional learning, but also visionary and confident about the policies they develop.

Read NSDC's definition of professional learning and stay up-to-date on NSDC's advocacy work by frequent visits to www.nsdc.org/connect/legislativeupdate.cfm

Read Hayes Mizell's collected columns at www.nsdc.org/library/authors/mizell.cfm

Navigate the fluctuating undercurrents of change

Why would I intentionally ask teachers about their concerns? I hear enough of them as it is! I overheard a district administrator make this comment recently as I worked with central office staff in Arkansas. The statement summed up what many others think when first exposed to the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) developed by a team of researchers at Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Hall & Hord, 2005). But the concerns this administrator was used to are **not** the same kind focused on in CBAM.

CBAM resulted from exploring how teachers responded when new innovations were introduced and defines concerns as each individual's feelings and perceptions about the use of an innovation. In their study and research, Hord and Hall found patterns of concerns and identified strategies to address the needs expressed, resolve issues inherent in each stage, and support educators in taking the next step in implementing new classroom strategies.

Learning: Staff development that improves the learning of all students applies knowledge about human learning and change.

Hord and Hall describe seven stages of concern. The first three stages focus on *self* concerns — describing how the new practice impacts the individual. The second category of concerns focuses on managing new classroom processes or procedures — on the how-to's, as well as efficiency and productivity. The last set of concerns focuses on the impact or results for students and colleagues.

Many teachers, when asked about using a specific instructional practice such as differentiated instruction or about participating in learning teams, comment that there is not enough time to accomplish everything that the new practice requires. Using CBAM as a lens, this comment would be classified as a *management* concern. Management focuses on the processes and procedures involved in implementing an innovation. Educators' primary concern at this stage is time demands.

CBAM also lists possible interventions to resolve the major issues inherent in each stage. For example, interventions for the management stage include:

- Clarify the steps and components of the innovation. Information from an innovation configuration will be helpful here to describe steps and components.
- Provide answers that address the small, specific "how-to" issues that cause management concerns.
- Demonstrate exact and practical solutions to the logistical problems that contribute to concerns.
- Help teachers sequence specific activities and set timelines for accomplishing these activities.
- Attend to the immediate demands of the innovation, not what could be in the future. (Hord, Rutherford, Huling, & Hall, 2006, p. 45).

CBAM is a tool that central office staff can **use to identify teacher feelings and concerns as one of several factors when designing professional learning experiences** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 145). Learning to use CBAM helps central office staff learn to constructively **solicit teacher and administrator feelings and concerns about implementing new practices and learn to design staff development to address and resolve those concerns**. Resolving implementation issues supports teachers in their use of new practices. A single professional development event, no matter how well designed and executed, is not sufficient to cause a majority of staff to change their daily practices immediately or effectively. Change takes time; CBAM can help central office staff navigate the fluctuating undercurrents of change and support educators in using new practices.

FOCUS ON
NSDC'S STANDARDS

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

REFERENCES

Hall, G. & Hord, S. (2005). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Hord, S., Rutherford, W., Huling, L., & Hall, G. (2006). *Taking charge of change.* Austin, TX: SEDL.

Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003). *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation configurations*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

NSDC **TOOL**

WHAT A DISTRICT LEADER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT ...

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

Comments to the facilitator: Use this chart to assemble information about state, district, and school priorities. By putting standards and assessment data on the same sheet, team members will be able to visually see the expectations and the school's relationship to those expectations.

Preparation: Assemble the necessary information regarding each element on the chart. Transfer this chart onto large sheets of chart paper and post in the meeting room.

Directions: Distribute the information among members of your school team. Have a team member read aloud the information as he or she locates that information in the documents provided. Write the information in the appropriate space on the chart.

After completing the chart, look across the subjects to see if the results and school priorities reflect student needs.

	READING	WRITING	MATH	SCIENCE	SOCIAL STUDIES
Targeted state content standards					
District results on state assessment					
District priorities					
Results on district-only assessments					
School priorities					
Results on school-only assessments					

Professional development plan

NSDC **TOOL**

Directions: Focus on a single subject area and write an action plan that will guide the staff in meeting the school's goal.

Preparation: Transfer this to chart paper that can be posted on the wall of the meeting room. Make enough smaller copies of the chart to give to each team member participating in the meeting.

Standard/goal: _____

Data

What do the data show regarding student achievement?

What do the data suggest about areas of focus for improving teacher content and skills?

Background

What have we done previously to address this issue?

What are we currently doing to address this issue?

What other factors should we consider?

Professional development

What do we want teachers to know and be able to do in order to ensure that we achieve this goal?

What is the best way for teachers to learn this?

When will teachers do this?

Who will be responsible for doing this?

What resources (time, money) need to be redirected to enable teachers to do this?

How will we monitor whether changes are occurring in the classroom? How will we monitor whether changes are impacting student achievement?

When will we pause and examine these results?

JOHNSON COUNTY SCORECARD

2003-06

- The percentage proficient and advanced in mathematics increased from 77% to 92% over three years for all students.
- Students with low socioeconomic status increased their math performance from 72% to 89% proficient.
- Students with disabilities increased proficiency from 36% in 2004 to 73% in 2005, sustaining that level in 2006.
- Reading performance improved from 2004 to 2006 across the board.
- The percentage of students with disabilities who achieved proficiency rose from 54% proficient in 2004 to 70% in 2006.
- Science results also improved, with the largest gains for students with disabilities.

At work with the Laurel Elementary School data team

School has been in session less than a month, and already the Laurel Elementary School data team is at work to design interventions to prevent failure and help all their students be successful. While most teachers and students are in their classrooms, members of the Laurel data team are in the library grabbing their precious common planning time to examine individual students' progress on their Tennessee Value-Added Assessment results over the last three years. They are huddled around a large screen on which is projected one student's progress in mathematics.

"What happened in 4th grade?" the data team chair asks. "He went down by 10%."

"That was a really tough year for him. His parents separated, and his grandma died. I know he can do better," responds another data team member.

"How did he do in his other subjects?" asks the supervisor of instruction, who often drops in on data team meetings. "Have you looked to see if this drop is isolated or shows a trend across the board? If you make some connections among the four subjects, you could possibly set some very doable goals for him. It looks like it might just take a few more questions answered correctly to get him moving back in the right direction."

"What can we do for this child?" one team member asks. "Do you think he is a candidate for the tutoring group?" The group provides extra help for students who have already achieved proficiency to improve their performance even further. The school has mobilized a group of tutors, including retired teachers, their mathematics, science, and literacy consultants, and specialists. There is also a group for students who have not yet achieved proficiency.

"Yes, I think so," agrees another member of the data team, who then offers another suggestion. "We could get some help from the mathematics consultant around instructional strategies that might work for him."

Continued from p. 1

ley Elementary, where the whole faculty acts as a data team, succeeded in getting every single one of its 38 students, including 13 students with disabilities, proficient in mathematics in 2006.

Data teams have acted as the catalyst to a veritable explosion of data use throughout Johnson County.

Each school in Johnson County put together a data team. In the elementary schools, the data teams include the principal, grade-level representatives, and special education teachers. Teams range in size from four to seven. In the middle school, the data team includes the principal and representatives from each content area and specialists. The high school data team includes the principal, the chair of each department, and special educators. Each data team has a chairperson who takes responsibility for preparing and displaying data and convening and facilitating meetings.

Both teachers and administrators have embraced data teams with enthusiasm.

Margaret Wallace, principal of Roan Creek Elementary School, elaborates:

"Initially, I thought I knew all I needed to know about data. I tended to take the total responsibility for data analysis on my shoulders. I didn't want my teachers to have additional responsibilities that would add to their workload. I found out through the data team approach how beneficial it was to expose teachers to analyzing data. It made my job easier. I don't have to do all the work. Instead, we share the responsibility for analyzing the data."

Four years after being launched, data teams are alive and well in all of the schools.

WHAT DO DATA TEAMS DO?

The Laurel Elementary School vignette in the box on page 6, showing the data team engaged in targeting assistance to an individual student based on data analysis, provides a glimpse of just one of many activities that data teams engage in. While each data team operates slightly differently based on the school context, some typical functions of data teams in Johnson

Continued on p. 7

Data teams help district close achievement gap

Continued from p. 6

County are to:

- Analyze data, take action, and monitor results;
- Engage the entire faculty in using data;
- Prepare data analyses and displays for use in data, cluster, and department meetings; and
- Identify and share best practices.

Analyze data, take action, and monitor results. This improvement cycle — analyze data, take action, and monitor results — is the meat and potatoes of the data team's work. Team members regularly analyze a variety of types of data, including state assessments, attendance data, and discipline referrals, using tools and processes learned through the Using Data Process, such as creating data walls to display their data and engaging in a structured process of data-driven dialogue. At the elementary and middle school level, they drill down into Tennessee state assessment data, disaggregated by student populations and by content standard. At the high school level, graduation rates, the state's Gateway Test results, ACT scores, and college and post-secondary training rates are on the table and walls at data team meetings. Finally, data teams engage in deep and frequent analysis of common benchmark assessments.

In response to all of these data, data teams take action, such as:

- Initiating schoolwide programs and practices, such as refining the alignment of curriculum, standards, and assessments or tutoring programs;
- Improving their teaching;
- Providing feedback and setting goals with individual students;
- Targeting assistance to individual students.

Finally, team members use many of the data sources described above to monitor their progress: weekly or monthly with classroom assessment results, three times a year when benchmark assessment results come out, and annually when they receive their state test results. Each summer when these results are released, the supervisor of instruction convenes all data team members for a Data Day, where members examine the new data and prepare to take the data back to their schools for further analysis.

Engage the entire faculty in using data. Faculty meetings are the primary venue for this. At Roan Creek Elementary School, for example, the faculty meets monthly. One month, faculty members might look at common benchmark assessment data; another month, they examine discipline referrals. Every month, they look at attendance data because improving attendance is a schoolwide goal. The faculty brainstorms ideas. The data team or the administrators follow up on implementation of new ideas. Data team members also bring data to weekly cluster meetings in the elementary school and department meetings and engage these groups in using data as a regular part of their work.

Prepare data analyses and displays for use in data, cluster, and department teams. Often the data team chair will play this role. When the data team at Roan Creek Elementary became aware of a gender gap between boys and girls, with girls outperforming boys in both reading and mathematics, the data team chair began tracking gender gap data for the team. The team chair also gathered data about boys' participation in extracurricular activities compared to girls', as team members wondered if that participation might be a factor in the girls' higher achievement. After finding that the data showed a positive correlation between extracurricular activity and academic achievement, the team took steps to increase extracurricular participation, and boys' academic performance improved.

Identify and share best practices. When teachers share their data in data teams, something magical happens. Successful practices that were once hidden behind the classroom doors are shared. Everyone gets access to them. When data are shared in a team in a safe environment such as that created in Johnson County, they provoke conversations like this: "How did you teach nonroutine problem-solving? Your kids nailed those items." "I got the kids using a graphic organizer that matched the criteria for success. That really helped." Pretty soon everyone on the data team is using that graphic organizer, and more and more students are benefiting from one teacher's success. ■

NANCY LOVE is director of program development at Research for Better Teaching. She previously served as principal investigator and director of the Using Data Project at TERC, an education research and development organization.

DAVID TIMBS, director of instruction for Johnson County Schools, has led that district's successful implementation of the Using Data Process, a TERC process that helps districts learn to use the data they collect for school improvement.

Excerpted from "A District Uses Data to Improve Results: Johnson County, Tennessee" in *Using Data to Improve Learning for All: A Collaborative Inquiry Approach*, by Nancy Love (Corwin Press, 2008). Used with permission.

ISSN 1937-6863
The Learning System is published eight times a year by the National Staff Development Council, 504 S. Locust St., Oxford, OH 45056, for $49 of each membership. Periodicals postage paid at Wheelersburg, Ohio, and additional offices.

© Copyright, National Staff Development Council, 2008. All rights reserved.

NSDC STAFF
Executive director
Stephanie Hirsh

Deputy executive director
Joellen Killion

Director of business services
Leslie Miller

Distinguished senior fellow
Hayes Mizell

Scholar laureate
Shirley Hord

Emeritus executive director
Dennis Sparks

Editor
Valerie von Frank

Designer
Sue Chevalier

BUSINESS OFFICE
504 S. Locust St.
Oxford OH 45056
513-523-6029
800-727-7288
Fax: 513-523-0638
NSDCoffice@nsdc.org
www.nsdc.org

BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Karen Dyer (2009)
President
Ingrid Carney (2009)
Sydnee Dickson (2008)
Cheryl Love (2010)
Charles Mason (2010)
President-elect
Sue McAdamis (2008)
Past president
James Roussin (2009)
Sue Showers (2008)
Ed Wittchen (2010)

COPYING/REPRINT POLICY
Please see www.nsdc.org/library/publications/permpolicy.cfm for details and a form to submit a request.

BACK COPIES
Articles from all NSDC publications are available at no additional charge to members in the members-only area of the NSDC web site. Nonmembers may purchase and download individual articles or entire publications for a fee.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the National Staff Development Council, 504 S. Locust St., Oxford, OH 45056.

Connect with online communities

Join one of NSDC's online professional learning communities and get the best thinking of your member colleagues from across the country and around the world.

Teacher leaders can interact with other teachers, school-based coaches, instructional specialists, and all those concerned with professional learning at the school level to share ideas, questions, expertise, and resources. For example, one discussion is focused on professional development plans for instructional lead teachers.

The principal community is designed particularly for those who work as leaders at the building level — principals, assistant principals, and administrators concerned with professional learning. Discussion and interaction recently has included a focus on assessing school culture.

In the system leader community, administrators have focused on rural school staff development concepts and sought to make connections among district-level staff developers.

To join in, log on to www.nsdc.org, sign in with your membership number and password, then click on the button for "Go to new staff development communities" and connect with your colleagues.

Another learning community allows NSDC members to network with colleagues about powerful designs for professional learning. Community members are invited to share stories about their use of designs, ask questions, list resources, and discuss challenges.

NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
Member Services
504 S. Locust St.
Oxford, OH 45056
Membership info: 800-727-7288

PERIODICALS
POSTAGE
PAID