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Administrators' role is to shift some responsibilities to school teams

The National Staff Development Council's definition of professional learning is a significant shift in how K-12 educators learn. One facet of that transition is that it may simultaneously engender hope and fear in educators. They will be excited about having more control over creating and engaging in team learning experiences more relevant to their needs. They also may be apprehensive about assuming greater responsibility for using their learning to increase student achievement.

One group of educators may have even more personal concerns. A new system of professional learning based on NSDC's definition will require some central office administrators to assume new roles. This includes administrators whose current responsibilities include conceiving, planning, organizing, and even providing professional development. Under the NSDC definition, most of these functions will become the responsibility of school-based learning teams.

What will happen to the jobs of central office administrators who currently direct or coordinate professional development throughout their school districts? For these administrators, will there still be a useful role related to professional development? The short answer is, "Yes!"

Someone in the central office will have to lead the transition to the new system of professional learning. This is a day-to-day, hands-on role best carried out by a person thoroughly familiar with NSDC's definition and capable of developing a realistic plan to implement it. In many school systems, the most capable person will be the administrator now responsible for professional development. The administrator's new title might be coordinator of team learning.

One of the coordinator's major tasks will be to help principals learn the skills necessary to administer team learning in their schools. By organizing principals themselves into learning

teams, the coordinator will enable principals to experience firsthand what a learning team is and how it should function. With the coordinator's facilitation, the teams of principals should seek to develop specific knowledge and skills they will need to implement school-based learning teams. For example, NSDC's definition calls for the teams to meet "several times per week or the equivalent of three hours per week." In their teams, principals can engage in inquiry and discussion to learn how to create this time in their school schedules. The district-level coordinator should continue to convene the principal teams for at least a year so they can seek new learning in response to implementation issues that arise.

Also under NSDC's definition, school-based learning teams are "facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders." The district-level coordinator will need to collaborate with principals to develop criteria for identifying and recruiting these facilitators and delineating their functions. The task of ensuring that the facilitators are well-prepared will also be a major responsibility of the coordinator. Here, too, the coordinator may want to organize facilitator learning teams that meet regularly to seek the knowledge they need to perform effectively.

Developing a system of professional learning based on NSDC's definition will be a complex initiative requiring creativity, organization, and persistence. Its success will depend not only on engaged educators but also on leaders at all levels of education. Among the most important are district-level administrators who will spend each day helping their school-based colleagues make team learning a dynamic and useful means for improving teacher and student performance. There is no shortage of work to be done.