



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

#### REFERENCES

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## Focus on the instructional core

Harvard's Richard Elmore has a reputation for speaking truth to power. He does not mince words when describing the essential ways to improve school performance: 1) increase teachers' knowledge and skills; 2) change the content; 3) alter the relationships of the student to the teacher and the content. When it comes to professional development, Elmore asserts (2002) that **the best professional learning occurs closest to home**, and that *the* leadership imperative is implementation of new practices.

Similarly, Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning's balanced leadership research found that a principal's knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment ranked high among 21 leadership responsibilities that correlate with student academic achievement. This leadership responsibility involves a hands-on approach to classroom practices and extensive knowledge about best practices in the field; it extends beyond platitudes about the importance of instruction. Principals need to actively develop their own background and expertise in the field of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the company of their colleagues (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, pp. 54-55).

Effective principals also need to **promote educators' deep understanding of content knowledge and make the use of research-based instructional strategies and a variety of classroom assessment a high priority in the school** (Roy & Hord, 2003, pp. 104-105). These objectives can be accomplished by **modeling the**

**use and importance of deep understanding of content knowledge and research-based instructional strategies at staff meetings, committee meetings, and schoolwide events.** Teachers will believe that instruction, content, and assessment

are important when the principal not only engages in substantive conversations about these issues, but also is willing to display that knowledge. The administrator can reinforce the importance of this knowledge during **classroom observations and conversations with faculty**. When the school leader takes time to focus on good classroom practices, she sends a message to faculty that this is an important issue for a school focused on student achievement.

In addition, the principal **provides time for educators to develop and use deep understanding of content knowledge, research-based instructional strategies, and a variety of classroom assessments.** The

principal also needs a strong knowledge of the change process. The gap between knowing and doing (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000) becomes as wide as the Grand Canyon when the new skills differ from familiar and comfortable habits. Educators can take between two and three years to develop these skills and use them at a high level of quality (Joyce & Showers, 1988). Acknowledging the needed timeframe, encouraging persistence and perseverance in mastering these new practices, and supporting continued use of new practices also falls under the principal's purview. The leadership imperative, according to Elmore (2002), is to invest in human skills and knowledge. Everything else is outside of the core.

#### NSDC STANDARD

##### Quality Teaching:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.