

# 13 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS



By Joellen Killion

Consensus is building about what we know and don't know about effective professional development. In the past year, Linda Darling-Hammond and a team of researchers at Stanford's Educational Leadership Institute have led a national study supported by the National Staff Development Council, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, and the MetLife Foundation on the state of professional development in the United States compared to other high-performing countries.

The findings from this research are a call to action for teacher leaders to take an

active role in leading learning within their schools. Teacher leaders need to focus on learning that strengthens teaching and improves student learning.

What we learn from the first phase of the study, "Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the U.S.," is that teachers in higher-performing countries more routinely engage in professional collaboration about their teaching and student learning. We learn, too, that they engage in more professional development focused on curricular innovations, pedagogy, and assessment. For example, compared with the higher-performing, mostly European countries in the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), teachers in the U.S. are behind in the kinds of professional development available to them. Teachers in higher-performing countries report greater participation in meaningful learning compared with teachers in the U.S., especially in visiting other schools (52% to 20%), collaborative research or development on education-related topics

(72% to 41%), collaboration with other teachers on issues of

For a complete copy of the report, please see [www.nsd.org/state-proflearning.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/state-proflearning.cfm).

## What's inside

### NSDC tools

Use the landmark study. Pages 4, 5

### Voice of a teacher leader

Bill Ferriter calls for leaders to come down from the mountaintop. Page 6

### Focus on NSDC's standards

Joellen Killion explains that leadership is broad. Page 7

### Lessons from a coach

Respect is first with Romeo Cochrane. Page 9



### Research brief

Leadership through collaboration yields results. Page 10



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**NSDC Tools on pp. 4 and 5 apply the landmark study.**

instruction (81% to 63%), and on university courses and degree programs (67% to 34%).

Only 20% of teachers in the U.S. agreed, the study reports, that there is a “great deal of cooperative effort among staff members” and that they “make a conscious effort to coordinate the content of courses with that of other teachers.”

Only 50% of teachers rated their professional development as useful. In addition, teachers in the U.S. report having very little influence over the content of their inservice professional development and over school policies and other decisions related to hiring, evaluation, and budget. These findings stand in sharp contrast to what occurs for teachers in other nations.

Other nations with higher student performance on international examinations such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) invest more time and resources in teacher development than the U.S. does. For example, the research found that in many high-performing countries, teachers spend as much as half their work time planning with each other, honing lessons, and developing curriculum. Meanwhile, U.S. teachers spend as much as 80% of their work time instructing students. While schools in the U.S. may not find it possible to create a schedule immediately that values teacher collaboration as much as the schedules in Finland and Singapore, for example, where teachers have blocks of time each day to collaborate about their lessons, thoughtful educators will consider a number of implications for teachers in U.S. schools that merit immediate consideration.

### **The green-eyed monster**

The professional culture in many schools is shaped around principles of isolation, competition, and professional jealousy. Inherently, when teachers work alone in their classrooms, they more easily function independently rather than interdependently. What collaboration occurs is obscured within the culture of egalitarianism. As schools and school systems have begun to realize that novice teachers benefit from the guidance of

a master or mentor teacher, that belief that teachers are all equally effective is slowly breaking down. The use of instructional coaches is beginning to open the doors of all teachers who are ready to acknowledge that they can learn new strategies. Complex demands for improving student achievement have forced teachers to consult

with one another about how to reach and teach all students, regardless of their past performance, background, or capabilities.

To fuel these early efforts to open professional practice, educators must first confront one of the hidden challenges embedded within a school’s culture — professional jealousy. The most successful teachers resist being recognized for their abilities because they do not want to be held up as examples and distin-

guished from their peers. Yet it is only when teachers begin to use their strengths to support not only their own students, but also each other’s, that schools can reach all students. Imagine the teacher who is able to unlock the secrets of reading for intermediate-grade male students, but keeps those strategies quiet, fearing that peers might resent the subsequent recognition or call to instruct others that success might bring. This fear of colleagues’ reactions to individual successes is the hidden anchor that holds back many schools.

### **Teacher collaborative professional learning**

As professionals, teachers must continue to grow and learn. And how better to deal with the daily challenges of teaching than in collegial teams in which teachers share both their triumphs and difficulties? Teachers working in the same school with the same students and the same curriculum may better understand how to support one another than do external assistance providers. While external assistance providers may help bring new knowledge and practices into the school that move teachers beyond their comfort zone, a daily dose from peers of understanding, empathy, encouragement, reflection, analysis, and support is needed to build teachers’ confidence and persistence. Only by sharing what works across classrooms, studying, and reflecting on

NSDC’s web site ([www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org)) provides additional information and resources for high-quality professional learning.

**The professional culture in many schools is shaped around principles of isolation, competition, and professional jealousy.**

practices together will teachers strengthen their practices.

That need for collaboration in order to affect student achievement is what the Stanford team discovered about teachers in higher-performing countries. Teachers in other countries work together to plan instruction and to refine their practices — and they do so frequently. If this high degree of teacher collaboration is one of the attributes of teacher professional development in higher-achieving countries, the U.S. must find ways to increase teacher collaboration.

Teacher leaders can begin this process without waiting another day.

**Reach and teach**

Teachers can begin to work together to solve the most complex problems they face by immediately reaching out to peers for ideas and support and by teaching peers what they know that works. Using their collective wisdom and the limited amount of existing collaboration time, teachers can pool their expertise and address problems they are willing to publicly put on the table.

Two complexities within this suggestion are turning the limited shared time available to teachers into productive collaboration and reaching out

to colleagues for assistance and support rather than “going it alone.”

Teacher leaders can help build the bridges across classrooms and invent structures and schedules that will promote more collaboration so that every student has the benefit of every teacher’s wisdom.

And individuals can start by asking colleagues a simple question, such as, “Tell me your best secret for engaging 8th graders in writing a persuasive essay.” Requests like these typically don’t fall on deaf ears. Teachers often are eager to

share what they know, but hesitate to talk about their successes for fear colleagues will judge them. If more teachers asked for information from one another or invited others to talk about what is or isn’t working, teachers in general would spread their good practices throughout the school, across districts, and beyond.

Reaching out to peers and teaching colleagues about what works to improve student achievement in a class can transform a school from a place where teachers feel overwhelmed by the amount of work they have to a place where they feel supported, engaged, and responsible and one where all students have an improved chance for success. ♦

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**Professional Learning for School Leaders**  
Edited by Valerie von Frank

A compilation of articles from a decade’s worth of NSDC’s newsletters and JSD that will aid school leaders in honing their instructional leadership skills. This comprehensive collection is organized so that school leaders can explore key topics and learn from real examples. Interspersed tools will help leaders take action. A resource list provides additional opportunities for even further in-depth learning. NSDC, 2008  
B395, \$25.60 members, \$32.00 nonmembers, 225 pp.

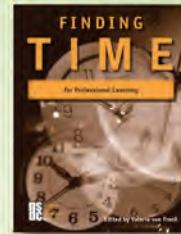
**NSDC’s purpose:** Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.



**Creating a Culture of Professional Learning**  
Edited by Valerie von Frank

This compilation of articles from NSDC’s newsletters and JSD is a comprehensive resource on creating a positive school culture. The collection includes descriptions of healthy cultures and specific information about how district and school leaders can take actions to create more positive environments, beginning with the audits provided and additional practical tools. A resource list provides additional, up-to-date references for even more information. NSDC, 2008  
B382, \$25.60 members, \$32.00 nonmembers, 284 pp.

\*Discount is only available to NSDC members and not available online.



**Finding Time for Professional Learning**  
Edited by Valerie von Frank

A compilation of articles and tools about time published in NSDC’s newsletters and JSD in the last decade. Includes suggestions about how to use the articles to guide the discussion about time in your school and district. NSDC, 2007  
B379, \$25.60 members, \$32.00 nonmembers, 183 pp.



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Engage the school's leadership team in a discussion of the reading.

WHAT A SCHOOL LEADER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT ...

# DEFINING EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

**Purpose:** To promote deeper understanding and next action thinking among the school leadership team and/or teacher leaders about the study, "Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the U.S. and Abroad," the recently released first phase of "Multiyear Study of the State of Professional Learning in the U.S."

**Time:** Approximately 1 hour to 1½ hours to read the study; 1 to 2 hours for discussion.

**Materials:** Chart paper, markers, copies of the study (available at [www.nsd.org/stateproflearning.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/stateproflearning.cfm)).

1. Read the study and record your thoughts in the four squares in preparation for a longer conversation with colleagues:

**IDEAS THAT WERE NEW FOR ME**

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**COMMENTS THAT AFFIRM MY ACTIONS**

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**QUESTIONS I WANT TO ASK THE AUTHOR**

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**ACTIONS I WILL TAKE NEXT**

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2. Engage the school's leadership team in a discussion of the reading by first sharing what each person put in each quadrant of the grid and then discussing these questions:
  - What implications does this study suggest for professional development in our school?
  - What are several strategies we can implement to strengthen our school's professional development?
  - What would be our first actions to make that happen?

**Leaders can develop better understanding about research on professional learning.**

# DO *or* DISREGARD

**Purpose:** To promote deeper understanding and next action thinking among teacher leaders or the school leadership team about research on professional learning. Teachers may use “Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the U.S. and Abroad,” the recently released first phase of “Multiyear Study of the State of Professional Learning in the U.S.”

**Time:** Approximately 1 hour to read; 1 hour for discussion.

**Materials:** Chart paper, markers, copies of the study (available at [www.nsd.org/stateproflearning.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/stateproflearning.cfm)).

1. Divide the report into sections and ask each individual in the group to read one section. As participants read, each fills in this table:

DO NOW	PLAN FOR	DISREGARD
What things do we need to do now? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	What things have long-range implications that we need to plan for? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	What ideas are not applicable to us? Why? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

2. Each person reports out to the group.
3. A recorder can capture ideas for the group to discuss.
4. Prioritize among ideas in each category and decide as a group on next steps.





Bill Ferriter is a 6th-grade social studies and language arts teacher at Salem Middle School, Apex, N.C.

## Mountaintop cheers fall flat

A few weeks back, I was copresenting on the challenges of developing professional learning communities. My copresenter started by having participants draw visual metaphors representing their journey toward becoming learning communities.

Tapping into the artistic core that defines most teachers, she touched a nerve. Teams crafted powerful images: sinking ships with panicked teachers grabbing lifeboats hung on the wall papers next to images of lost mountain climbers struggling up impossible peaks. There were ladders riddled by broken rungs, crumbling brick walls, lunches in isolated containers, and football teams facing imposing rows of linebackers.

Talk about disconcerting!

The most interesting thread running through each image was that every group had drawn some sort of “school leader” — principal, instructional coach, superintendent — at the top of their obstacles. Each of the removed figures was cheering the teams through challenges. “You can do it. Just don’t give up!” the figures shouted from distant perches, far from the action.

At first, I laughed at the obvious jabs that teams were taking at leaders who they felt were removed from reality. But the longer I reflect, the more I wonder about the uncomfortable truth in these slightly cynical drawings.

You see, as a classroom teacher in a professional learning community, my work has changed drastically in the past few years. In addition to the traditional grading and planning responsibilities that I’ve always had, I now meet twice a week with colleagues to identify essential objectives, to target struggling learners, and to analyze the results of common assessments. Together, we design systems for collecting data, for regrouping children in need of differentiated instruction, and

for documenting the impact of our work.

And, to be honest, we receive very little practical support from educational professionals working beyond the classroom. No one provides us with templates that we can follow when creating warehouses of learning data or instructional practices. We receive little training in effective strategies for monitoring progress or for spotting learning trends across classes.

Instead, we’re buried in clichés. We’re reminded time and again that, “Together, everyone achieves more” and “Nothing can hold back a determined group of likeminded individuals.” Our impending sainthood is the subject line of dozens of e-mails, and inspirational mouse pads decorate every desk.

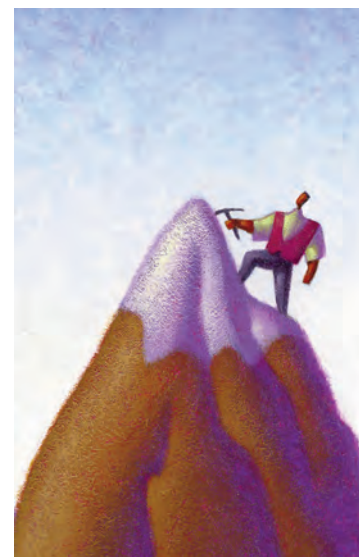
Can you tell that I’m looking for something more?

Accomplished leaders of learning communities roll up their sleeves and sweat a bit to make their buildings work. Principals survey teams at the beginning of every year, identifying needs and publicly marshalling resources to drive change.

Instructional resource teachers create differentiated lessons that teams can easily tailor. Assistant principals cover classes, freeing teachers to work with struggling students; guidance counselors deliver tutoring sessions; and media specialists arrange extension lessons for gifted students.

Commitment levels are high in buildings where this kind of assistance occurs because classroom teachers see concrete evidence that others are willing to invest time and determined effort to guarantee that every child succeeds. No one cheers from the mountaintop, because all are working their way to the summit together.

What does the leadership look like in your learning community? ♦



**Join the conversation with Bill by visiting [www.nsd.org/learningblog/](http://www.nsd.org/learningblog/) and offering your opinion. Bill posts his provocative ideas frequently — be sure to return often.**

# Many hands improve leadership

**W**ithout leadership, systems flounder. Genuine leadership is not about a particular person in a particular role. Rather, leadership is the process of influencing others to be their very best, to work in concert to accomplish goals to improve the system, and to ensure all members of the organization are appreciated for their efforts. Influence such as this occurs when individuals leverage their beliefs and behaviors to support others to accomplish goals to advance the organization.

However, a common myth about leadership, particularly within schools, is that only one person can be the leader — the principal. It is true that principals are legally responsible for their schools, the staff, and students. Yet it takes leadership in the hands of many rather than an elite few to ensure that the school will continue to meet the needs of its students and community.

When leadership reaches beyond the main office of a school, deep and sustained change can occur. Leaders can act more quickly to identify and address problems. They motivate, engage, challenge, and appreciate others' efforts. Leaders keep energy and effort focused on clear goals and provide markers for assessing progress. Leaders build a culture within which people commit to examining their own practice and to refining it. Leaders hold others accountable and responsible.

Schools with strong leadership, not just strong leaders, are places within which individuals work independently and interdependently to achieve defined

goals and advocate for one another. Within such schools, a high degree of trust exists because leaders' actions align with their words. Integrity and trustworthiness are hallmarks of leaders who are able to influence others.

Schools have both formal and informal leaders, as well as visible and invisible leaders. Formal leaders are those who have titles such as principal, assistant principal, and department chair. Informal leaders are members without titles or formal authority whose actions guide others. Visible leaders are those who take a stance publicly for a cause, an action, or a goal.

It is the invisible leaders whose actions serve as models for others that can sometimes be the most compelling influencers within a school. It is the teacher who interrupts the conversation in which teachers are complaining about students' lack of motivation with the question, "What would teaching look like if students were motivated?" It is the teacher who sees a struggling student and takes 10 minutes to talk with the student after school or at lunch. It is the teacher who provides some encouragement to a colleague at the end of a challenging day or week.

Some worry that an organization with too many leaders will be in chaos. Yet when those leaders share a common vision for student success, have clear goals and indicators of progress, and take time to reflect on where they are and how to adjust or refine their work, the organization is



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## LEADERSHIP

Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement.

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better equipped to achieve its goals. It is, after all, the leaders who worry about results, who commit endless effort, and who have clarity about how to achieve the defined results.

What if every adult within a school were a leader? What would be the consequences and advantages? The advantages would far outweigh consequences. Energy would be high, people committed, and results would be increasing exponentially. People would take initiative. Issues would be addressed before they became problems. Staff members would encourage one another. High degrees of trust would exist. Within that kind of environment, people would be more comfortable experimenting with alternative practices to find those that work best.

The potential consequence is chaos, and that potential is significant if staff do not share a vision and goals. In schools, leaders ensure that those within a community have opportunities to contribute to developing the vision and goals for the school. When teachers within the school have an active and purposeful role in the process used to create the vision that specifies what the school strives to become and the goals that identify measurable markers toward that vision, they assume collective responsibility for realizing the vision and achieving the goals.

Teacher leadership is particularly important to schools' success. However, if teacher leadership continues old paradigms of leadership by placing leadership in the hands of a few, it will do little to change the culture within schools. York-Barr and Duke (2004), in a comprehensive review of the literature on teacher leadership, posit that teacher leadership is "the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other mem-

bers of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increasing student learning and achievement" (pp. 287-288). In their literature review, they identify four benefits of teacher leadership, particularly when those leadership efforts are focused more intentionally on the classroom rather than the organizational level. Benefits include increased teacher participation, increased and shared expertise about teaching and learning, greater opportunity for accomplished teachers to receive recognition and undertake additional professional challenges, and increased student learning.

Teacher leadership influences teachers' sense of professionalism, including their empowerment, commitment, and view of their work as a profession rather than a job, say Killion & Harrison (2006). "In addition, teacher leadership influences the school's culture, including the degree to which teachers engage in collegial professional learning and have a strong sense of internal accountability" (pp.17-18).

Leadership matters. Schools filled with leaders who have developed a shared vision and goals have greater potential for exponential change and sustained improvement than schools led by a single leader.

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**Killion, J. & Harrison, C. (2006).** *Taking the lead: New roles for teachers and school-based coaches.* Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

**York-Barr, J. & Duke, K. (2004).** What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research, 74*(3), 255-316. ◆

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# The relationship starts with respect

## Q How do you foster collegiality in a school?

People will remember how you make them feel. This is a feeling profession. It is about human relationships. You have to be authentic. Make people know that you're real. And you have to make people know that you value them, not by what you say, but by what you do. Give people a voice. Teachers are very intelligent, but over the years, the culture of education has devalued that, and they've been treated as if they're just little minions: Whatever administration says, they do.

By giving teachers voice and trust, it's amazing what can happen. People take on responsibility. As a coach, you have to work closely with the administration. Teachers have to trust and know that you're not going to go back to the administration and say things that are detrimental to

them. And the administration has to work with you in giving the teachers a voice and respecting what they say.

I learned early on that you can't tell people what to do, I don't care how big and strong or how much money you might think you have. Real leadership comes from relationships, not from ordering people around. That approach gets things done superficially.

The reason I work with people is because I respect them. When you treat people with respect and trust people, they will go above and beyond. If you boss me around, I'll do my job, which means I'll go by the union rules and I'll come in at 8:30 and leave at 3:30. I'll document that I've done my job, but I don't have to do anything. However, if you treat me with respect, then I will go to the next level and we will get things done.

Building relationships and being authentic is invaluable. ♦

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# Adults collaborate, students gain

By **Carla Thomas McClure**

**T**eacher collaboration is often mentioned in journals and reports on school improvement. Yet when a team of three researchers combed the research literature, they found few studies that empirically tested the relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement. So the team designed a study of its own. The results, as well as findings included in a U.S. Department of Education practice guide on school turnarounds, strengthen the case for teacher leadership through collaboration.

## Teacher collaboration and student achievement

To examine the relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement, researchers Yvonne Goddard, Roger Goddard, and Megan Taschannen-Moran (2007) designed a naturalistic study. A naturalistic study involves no intervention, treatment, or randomization. Instead, the researchers used surveys to measure naturally occurring differences in teachers' levels of collaboration and test scores to measure student achievement.

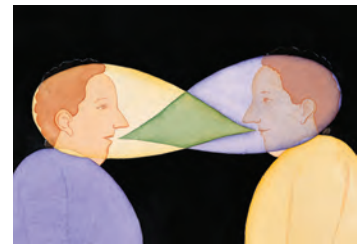
The study was conducted in a large urban school district in the Midwest. The researchers surveyed 452 teachers in 47 elementary schools to determine to what extent teachers worked collectively to influence decisions in three areas: school improvement, curriculum and instruction, and professional development. The researchers examined student achievement by examining achievement scores in reading and math for 2,536 4th graders. To determine the relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement, they analyzed these data using sophisticated statistical methods. This approach allowed researchers to control for the effects of school

context (e.g., school size, socioeconomic status, and proportion of minority students) and student characteristics such as race, gender, free and reduced-price lunch status, and prior achievement.

The research team found teacher collaboration for school improvement purposes to be positively related to differences among schools in both mathematics and reading. "These results are important," they state, because "most prior research on teacher collaboration has considered results for the teachers involved, rather than student-level outcomes" (Goddard, Goddard, & Taschannen-Moran, 2007, p. 891). The team says further studies are needed to help educators understand the effects of various collaborative practices.

## School improvement

A 2008 practice guide from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) provides additional support for collaboration. In the guide, *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools* (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides>), teacher collaboration on instructional improvement is cited as a frequently observed approach in 35 chronically low-performing schools that "beat the odds" to achieve dramatic turnarounds — substantial gains in student achievement within three years. Teacher collaboration took many forms in the case studies IES examined. In some schools, teams of teachers reviewed student work against standards and used their findings to set targets for instructional improvement. In other schools, teachers shared planning time, learned about using data to guide instructional decision making, and were supported by a coach or lead teacher. Some teachers planned their own professional development



## EDVANTIA™

Carla Thomas McClure is a staff writer at Edvantia ([www.edvantia.org](http://www.edvantia.org)), a nonprofit research and development organization that works with federal, state, and local education agencies to improve student achievement.

(Herman et al., 2008).

The director of the statewide school coaching program in Tennessee, Steven Moats, says that if school leaders want to tap into the potential power of teacher collaboration and allow teachers to work together to lead change, then school leaders must do more than provide verbal support for the idea. To be effective, teacher teams need the time and resources to work together (e.g., accommodations in scheduling, access to student data, professional development) — a point supported by the IES practice guide.

### Teacher benefits

According to Goddard and colleagues, past research has reported a variety of positive outcomes for teachers who collaborate with one another. Potential benefits include improved efficacy, higher levels of trust, and more positive attitudes about teaching. Researcher Ken Futernick (2007), for example, concluded from his survey of 2,000 teachers in California that teachers felt greater personal satisfaction when they established strong collegial relationships,

were involved in decision making, and believed in their own efficacy.

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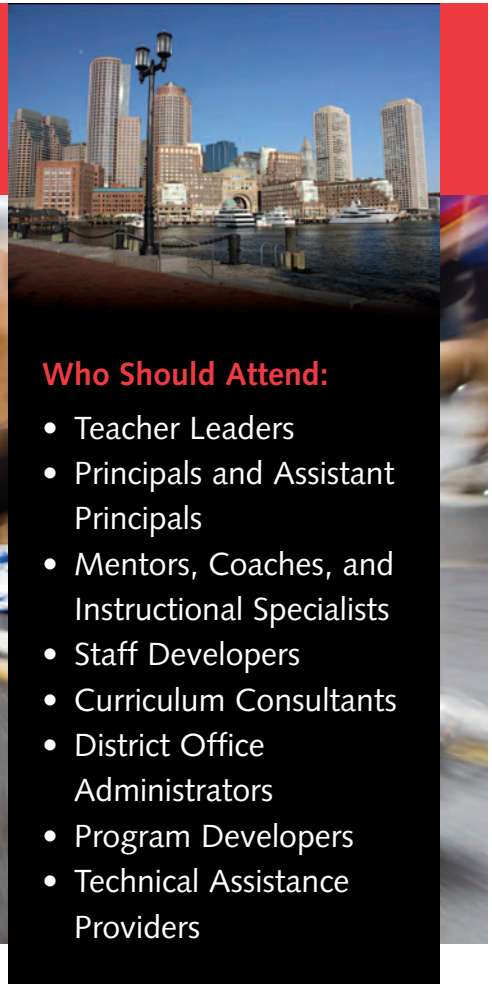
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