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System leaders must know and develop others' knowledge of effective professional learning

I shouldn't be surprised, but I still am. Many central office staff members decry that when they ask schools to take on planning and designing their own professional learning, the schools simply schedule a workshop and hire a consultant. Wasn't the whole reason to move to school-based professional learning so that teachers could tap into collaborative, job-embedded learning and ongoing support and assistance?

When I ask teachers and principals to explain this phenomenon, I sometimes get exasperated, eye-rolling glares. Slowly and painfully, they explain that this *is* exactly the prevalent kind of professional development that they experience — especially when they add up all the classes or workshops provided by the curriculum, technology, assessment, special education, English language learner, school improvement, or vocational departments within the district (and, dare we say, from state departments of education, regional agencies, and universities). In fact, many staff members would like to work, plan, and learn with groups of their colleagues — they just never have defined those experiences as professional development.

NSDC's Standards for Staff Development are not merely the domain of the person who has professional development in his or her title. Any central office staff member who plans or provides professional development needs to understand and use the standards. Any district-sponsored professional learning will align with or contradict NSDC's definition of effective professional development.

Central office staff members need to **promote colleagues' knowledge of high-quality professional learning** by first ensuring that

each of their programs employs the same design standards, shares common definitions, and establishes clear expectations about how high-quality professional learning is accomplished — no matter what the content area or focus (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 119). This task alone could build

true collaborative relationships among central office staff rather than allowing the typical silos of responsibilities that pit one program against another to garner influence and resources.

Once central office staff have established a common set of principles for high-quality professional development, administrators can **evaluate all professional learning plans** provided by district-based curriculum, instruction, assessment, Title I, technology, and special

education departments **for alignment with staff development standards**. Evaluating learning plans would not only improve professional development throughout the district but also help teachers redefine professional learning.

Once central office staff agree on a common set of standards for effective professional development, they can also **assist in revising plans for professional learning** across the district, as well as at the school level. From my Pollyanna perspective, this joint planning, review, and revision of professional learning in all district programs is one of the district-based learning team's primary tasks. Just imagine the powerful message that such an effort would send to school staff!

REFERENCE

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

NSDC STANDARD

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

Read more about NSDC's standards at www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm.