

WHETHER BUILDING A KITCHEN OR BUILDING A LEARNING TEAM, COLLABORATION IS KEY

My son recently remodeled his kitchen and asked me to help him work his way through the process. This was no small task — he wanted to modernize the original kitchen in his 1940s condominium. He and I talked about what each element would look like when we were done. We found pictures of the cabinets, countertops, flooring, and appliances that would come together to create his dream kitchen at a price he could afford. He had a high set of standards for the work.

We took stock of what could stay and what would need to be replaced, tools we had on hand and those that needed to be purchased or borrowed, talents we had between us and those that we needed to hire out for completion. These baseline data helped us to set the priorities for the work we needed to do to achieve his vision of the perfect kitchen. Of course, the work took longer than we would have liked, but the end result is exactly what he had envisioned, a successfully remodeled and functional kitchen, built within the parameters we had outlined. Starting with the end in mind and working through the hundreds of details tied to this large project compelled us to have many regular collaborative conversations. We were focused on the task, and we constantly analyzed what worked successfully and what still needed to be tackled.

Crafting a vision of what the finished project would look like as well as the resources required — dollars and hours of work — set us up for success.

ASSEMBLE THE RIGHT TOOLS

Schools find themselves in similar positions as they move into the spring season of testing in schools, evaluating strengths and opportunities for improvement, checking to see that the right tools and personnel are available for moving students toward success, and moving ever closer to their visions.

As schools look at year-end data for students and plan for teacher learning, begin with the end in mind. Consider your vision: What is your ideal for teachers working together to improve their instruction so that student learn-

ing improves? Are teachers meeting together and learning in teams? Do they begin by reviewing student data to determine the learning needs of the adults in the building? As you consider what you are doing with your professional learning, consider the IC maps for the Collaboration standard, especially the desired outcomes for teachers and principals (Roy & Hord, 2003, pp. 41-43, pp. 93-97) as you frame your vision.

As leaders in your schools, you carry the responsibility of ensuring that summer staff development is not isolated, stand-alone, or randomly determined learning. One of the challenges of traditional summer staff development is ensuring that the learning makes its way back to teacher practice in the classroom in the fall when schools begin again. Does your vision include teachers just learning or teachers learning and then changing their behaviors so that students learn more effectively?

Summer learning for teachers should be driven by student learning needs. According to Dot Schoeller, principal of Simonton Elementary in Gwinnett County, Ga., summer staff development requires teachers to participate in the staff development itself as well as practicing newly learned strategies and skills in ongoing summer school classes under the watchful eye of an instructional coach so that the teachers' new learning can immediately be put into practice. Teachers at Simonton learn together, analyze data in teams, develop powerful lessons, and implement their adult learning into their practices with the support of coaching, thus ensuring that students benefit from the skills teachers have gained.

Schoeller's teachers are working on the Collaboration standard outcomes at the same time they work to increase student learning in a variety of targeted areas. According to Roy and Hord, educators meeting the Collaboration standard should "participate in a school culture that is characterized by collegiality and shared responsibility; develop knowledge about effective group process; collaborate successfully with colleagues; use effective conflict management skills with colleagues; use technology to support collegial interactions" (pp. 42-43).

BEGIN WITH A SHARED VISION

What does a school look like when its culture is "characterized by collegiality and shared responsibility" (p. 42)? As with the kitchen remodel, shared responsibility and col-



Lea Arnau's columns on NSDC's standards are available at www.nsd.org.

LEA ARNAU is past president of the Georgia Staff Development Council and retired director of professional learning for Gwinnett County Public Schools. She teaches at the University of Georgia and is the coach of the NSDC Academy Class of 2009. You can contact her at leaarnau@yahoo.com.

legality toward a common goal of increased student learning begin with a shared vision. What is your vision for learning in your school? How do you see adults working together in teams, learning together, and valuing each other's ideas? The work of the principal in supporting the Collaboration standard includes "building a school culture that is characterized by trust" and "by collective responsibility for student learning" (p. 95). Principals set the tone for adult learning that permeates the school. Creating a successful school culture begins with high expectations by the principal for adult and student learning and shared trust between and among staff members, all focused on their work of improved student learning.

The principals' responsibilities include "assisting teachers in learning how to work successfully with colleagues" and "modeling the use of effective collaboration skills when working with faculty" (p. 95). Teachers who have traditionally had team, grade-level or department meetings have been working together in the same physical spaces for years, but the old work in the same room is no longer the best we can do for our students. As schools move toward collaboration and communities of learners, the leaders of these teams are challenged by their new roles. It falls to the leaders of schools to develop these former managers into instructional leaders of adult learners. Often grade or content team leaders are uncomfortable with this transition in their roles and prefer to continue managing the business of the group rather than become instructional leaders. Some schools choose to have two leaders, each with the strengths for their part of the work. Regardless, the principal sets the expectation that adult learning in teams, based around student learning needs, is the business of the learning teams in the schools.

The instructional leader and other members of the team will "use effective conflict management skills with colleagues" (p. 43) supported by the principal who "assists team members in learning effective conflict management skills" (p. 96) and "uses effective conflict management skills with staff and colleagues" (p. 96). The principal, in her transparent practice, models consistently for teachers as she negotiates challenging situations and handles conflicts with

swift resolution. Teacher leaders, with her support, learn these strategies as do team members. Protocols for structuring the work and accountability of teams strengthen the work of teams, while making their practices visible to the principal and other members of the school staff.

Finally, principals "encourage and provide technology to support collegial interactions" (p. 97) while teachers are encouraged to "use technology to support collegial interactions" (p. 43). When they are spread across school buildings, teachers will benefit from the use of technology to support collaboration. Collaboration continues via technology when teachers have access to online learning and conversations, webinars and content chat rooms. Often, those who hesitate to participate in conversations within a group are more involved when technology is the medium, allowing everyone an equal voice in the conversation. Principals, modeling this use of technology, extend teachers an opportunity to collaborate in a way that my son's generation considers both intuitive and effective.

COLLABORATION GUIDES THE WORK WE DO

As I think about my son's kitchen remodel and NSDC's Collaboration standard, I recognize that my goal was to create a working culture between the two of us that would enable us to have a shared vision of what that kitchen would look like upon completion. I had a goal that we would share the responsibility for seeing the project through to completion, and that I would be able to teach him to navigate the challenges of working with subcontractors, managing conflict, and using technology. In essence, I was his coach, much as Principal Schoeller is the coach of the teacher leaders and teachers in her school. As we think about team learning and take staff development from random and isolated adult learning to focused learning and practiced implementation of new skills, the Collaboration standard guides and reinforces the work we do in schools.

REFERENCE

Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003). *Moving NSDC's standards into practice: Innovation Configurations, Volume I*. Oxford, OH: NSDC. ■