



WHEN **POLICY** JOINS **PRACTICE**

TASK FORCE EXAMINES HOW STATES AND UNIONS ADDRESS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BY JOELLEN KILLION AND LINDA DAVIN

Policy influences practice. Policy has the capacity to strengthen practice by demanding accountability for both process and results through clear expectations as well as deliberate sanctions for failure to meet those expectations. Policies can also provide resources to meet expectations. In its 2007-2012 strategic plan, NSDC recognizes the role of federal, state, and local policy in contributing to and also creating barriers to effective professional development practice.

A recent example of the impact of policy in education is the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This federal policy requires state education agencies to guarantee effective education for all students and to ensure that no student group is exempt from meeting high standards of academic success.

As a result of this law, schools and

districts implemented significant changes in their education programs. In addition to establishing clear expectations for student learning, No Child Left Behind incorporated sanctions for districts that failed to meet standards of performance. Many schools and districts now are more effectively educating students who

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previously lacked opportunities to learn or who fell through the cracks. However, this advantage has not come without significant challenges for school systems and individual schools, especially related to additional testing for students and financial constraints.

Shortly after developing its first standards for staff development, NSDC encouraged local, state, and provincial education agencies to adopt the standards into policy. The assumption was that if NSDC's standards had the weight of policy behind them, they would be fully implemented and would more quickly improve professional development practices in all schools and districts. Since the inception of the standards, more than half the states have adopted or adapted the standards into policy; hundreds of individual school districts have followed suit.

EXCUSES

Policies that set expectations do not automatically transform practice. Policies must be accompanied by sanctions and support. While NSDC's standards set expectations for effective professional learning in states and schools, educators in the field continue to experience professional learning that falls below standard. The reasons for this vary. Sometimes resources are not available to implement the standards. Sometimes the policy lacks sanctions for failure to implement. Yet another reason that continues to creep up is the "they won't let us" syndrome. Unfortunately, this is evident for some educators and policy makers alike.

At NSDC, we discovered that many stakeholders in schools and districts felt that others were responsible for inadequate professional development, including principals, teachers, teacher unions, school boards, state policy makers, and federal policy makers.

"Over the years, three excuses

SAMPLE POLICY PATHWAY: CAREER PATHS FOR TEACHERS

One policy pathway that the task force studied was career paths for teachers. As a professional development pathway, this area addresses opportunities for teachers who want to advance their careers and demonstrate their commitment to the profession. The excerpt below is from the draft report *Advancing High-Quality Professional Learning Through Collective Bargaining and State Policy: An Initial Review and Recommendations to Support Student Learning* (in press). The excerpt demonstrates how both local collective bargaining and state policies address this important professional development area.

Many teachers seek, deserve, and benefit from leadership experiences in which they can contribute to the learning of other teachers, students, and the larger educational community. Teacher career paths are a powerful strategy for attracting and retaining educators and for capitalizing on the expertise of teachers. When teachers have opportunities to serve in roles that acknowledge their experience, expertise, and commitment to education, their colleagues and students benefit.

Serving in leadership roles (e.g. mentor, coach, school-based staff developer, department chair, grade-level team leader, facilitator of school or district task forces or committees), teachers can contribute their deep knowledge of and expert practice in teaching and learning to benefit the broader school community. Collective bargaining agreements and state policies can establish pathways for teachers to assume greater responsibility, authority, and recognition, and can ensure that teacher leaders have access to professional development designed to expand their leadership capacity.

These samples of state policy and collective bargaining language specify teacher career advancement and pathways that acknowledge and tap teacher expertise. They recognize the importance of teacher

professional development to prepare teachers for leadership roles, give teachers options for increasing the scope of their work and influence, and are designed to provide career opportunities for accomplished teachers. In particular, they stress the link between teacher professional development and student academic success and reinforce the importance of professional development for those serving in new leadership roles.

STATE EXAMPLE:

Ohio's Master Teacher Program Overview

(Ohio Department of Education, 2008)

Ohio Senate Bill 2 directed the Educator Standards Board (ESB) to define a master teacher in a manner that can be used uniformly by all districts and to adopt criteria to use in determining whether a person is a master teacher.

Under SB 2, school districts must report the number of master teachers they employ into the education management information system (EMIS) beginning in fall 2008. The Ohio Department of Education is required to include the number of master teachers employed by each district on the district's and building's local report cards.

A master teacher demonstrates excellence inside and outside of the

Continued on p. 18

Continued from p. 17

classroom through consistent leadership and focused collaboration to maximize student learning. A master teacher strives for distinguished teaching and continued professional growth as specified by the Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession:

1. Teachers understand student learning and development and respect the diversity of the students they teach.
2. Teachers know and understand the content area for which they have instructional responsibility.
3. Teachers understand and use varied assessments to inform instruction, evaluate, and ensure student learning.
4. Teachers plan and deliver effective instruction that advances the learning of each individual student.
5. Teachers create learning environments that promote high levels of learning and achievement for all students.
6. Teachers collaborate and communicate with students, parents, other educators, administrators, and the community to support student learning.
7. Teachers assume responsibility for professional growth, performance, and involvement as an individual and as a member of a learning community.

COMMENT: When states define teacher leadership and recognize teachers with significant leadership accomplishments, they promote teachers' commitment to education and student success. Career paths for leadership acknowledge excellence in

teaching and provide an incentive to keep the best teachers in schools. Ohio's master teacher program offers these benefits and recognizes teachers who meet standards for excellence. The state's policy encourages districts to follow suit.

LOCAL EXAMPLE:

Rochester City School District, New York's Career in Teaching Plan

(Rochester Teachers Association & Rochester City School District, 2004, p. 87)

The Rochester City School District and Teachers Association contract includes the following definition of teacher career levels.

1. CAREER LEVELS

- a. All full-time teachers active with the Rochester City School District shall participate in the Career in Teaching Plan. The Career in Teaching Plan shall include four career development levels:
 - Intern Teacher
 - Resident Teacher
 - Professional Teacher
 - Lead Teacher
- b. Newly hired teachers shall be assigned to Intern level or Resident level as a condition of hiring.
- c. School administrative staff will receive notification of the career level status of teachers prior to the beginning of school.
- d. A teacher's decision to advance from Professional level to Lead Teacher level will be voluntary. Placement in the Lead Teacher category shall be based on an open, competitive process. Rochester City's Career in

Teaching program is governed by a panel of 12 members with equal representation from the Teachers Association and from the school district. The panel makes recommendations about the management and operation of the Career in Teaching program.

COMMENT: The Rochester City School District uses collective bargaining language to define various career levels for teachers and to distinguish appropriate responsibilities for teachers at the top levels of the career continuum. This policy honors teachers' experiences, recognizes accomplishments, and provides a mechanism for selecting lead teachers.

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have been presented more frequently than others regarding what people perceive as barriers to achieving high-quality professional learning for every educator," acknowledges Stephanie Hirsh, NSDC's executive director.

"The first was, 'Our school board does not support it.' My response was to run for a school board to understand at a deeper level how to enlist school board support. A second was, 'Our collective bargaining agreements

won't allow it,' so I began conversations with my NEA and AFT colleagues. Through our conversations, we learned that we shared a desire to ensure that collective bargaining agreements support teacher profes-

sional learning. A third was, ‘State policy makes it more difficult,’ and yet our state agency representatives told us they wanted state policy to promote better professional learning as opposed to inhibiting it. Each conversation confirmed the commitment of our allies in our mutual desire to use their power to support effective professional learning. Each conversation increased a desire to address these ‘excuses’ through a collaborative effort by organizations that influence professional development policy and implementation.”

PARTNERS

In an effort to remove real and perceived obstacles to effective professional development, NSDC identified two key policy maker groups: union leaders and state department officials.

NSDC reached out to its national partners — National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, and the Council of Chief State School Officers — to examine areas that leverage effective professional learning at local and state levels. We also talked with key stakeholders in policy making at the district level, including school boards and local teachers associations that, through collective bargaining agreements or other policy vehicles, set expectations for professional learning.

Another significant set of partners is the state departments of education that establish both regulations and guidance for professional development. New Jersey Education Association President Joyce Powell demonstrated early commitment to ensure that teachers throughout New

Jersey experienced effective professional learning. She garnered the commitment of the National Education Association and spurred the launch of a national task force to study how state and local policies — especially collective bargaining language — serve as leverage for improving teacher professional development.

The American Federation of Teachers signed on immediately to support this task force because they, too, recognized that collective bargaining language both created opportunities and established expectations for effective professional learning. Also important to this initiative was the Council of Chief State School Officers, which works with state commissioners and superintendents of education across the country to establish both regulatory and administra-

tive guidelines related to professional development.

With a high level of commitment from these significant partners, the initiative, *Advancing High-Quality Professional Learning Through Collective Bargaining and State Policy*, began in November 2006.

TASK FORCE

The partner organizations selected six states to participate in this work: Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas. These states represent different policy landscapes. Some are collective bargaining states in which both teachers associations serve as bargaining agents (New Jersey and Ohio). Others are collective bargaining states with merged teachers associations (Minnesota and New York). Yet others

are not collective bargaining states (North Carolina and Texas). Selecting states with different state-level laws related to collective bargaining enriched the possibilities for the national study.

Each state was invited to send teams to participate in the national task

force, comprised of representatives from the state's teachers association, the state department of education, and a local school district. Team sizes ranged from six to 14 people.

In three meetings and with substantial activity between meetings, the teams accomplished the following tasks:

1. Identified 12 areas, called pathways, that exist in state policy and collective bargaining agreements that influence the quality of and opportunities for teacher professional development. See sample pathway on p. 17.
2. Located sample collective bargaining language and state policy language that demonstrate support

Thanks

The national teachers associations made significant financial contributions to bring their teams to Washington, D.C., to participate in the study. Each partner association hosted a meeting of the national task force. NEA contributed significant additional funds to support the printing of the initiative's report and for the services of a facilitator and a writer. NSDC extends its gratitude to all participants in this initiative.

for high-quality professional learning. The task force in each state worked collaboratively to submit sample language.

3. Shared sample policies and collective bargaining language as resources for effective professional development language for use by state departments of education, school districts, and local bargaining units.

The outcome of this work will be a national report, *Advancing High-Quality Professional Learning Through Collective Bargaining and State Policy: An Initial Review and Recommendations to Support Student Learning* (in press). The report is intended to guide policy makers in crafting contract language and state policies that support high quality professional learning.

PATHWAYS

Through their analysis of local and state policies, collective bargaining agreements, and local district memoranda of agreement, the task force identified 12 areas — pathways — through which professional development typically is addressed. Because professional learning is not generally covered in just one area within collec-

tive bargaining agreements, the task force found it useful to delineate these pathways, highlight beneficial policy language, and provide commentary for each of the following pathways:

- Standards-based professional development;
- Time dedicated to professional development;
- Budget that supports professional development;
- State policy/professional development for licensure/relicensure;
- Teacher decision making about professional development;
- Flexible designs for professional development;
- Professional learning communities;
- Support for National Board Certification;
- Mentoring/induction;
- Individual professional development plans;
- Career paths/teacher leadership; and
- Compensation/recognition for professional development.

The policies that states and local school districts set in each pathway area influence how each pathway can support professional learning. For example, districts that provide recognition for teachers participating in National Board Certification ensure that teachers engage in rigorous professional development through the National Board's assessment process. When districts and states facilitate cohorts of teachers to pursue National Board Certification and reward teachers who have met the certification standards, they are investing in teacher development.

BIG IDEAS

The initiative resulted in three critical insights about the relationship between policy and effective professional learning.

1. *Professional development is only as effective as the expectations set for it.*

The task force identified 12 pathways through which professional development typically is addressed.

Professional development is most valuable when states and local districts commit to it as an important tool for enhancing student learning. The most valued and effective support for student learning available is professional learning at the school level, focused on curriculum, with teachers collaborating in teams about teaching and learning daily to meet the needs of their students.

2. Negotiated contract provisions and policy language about professional development are *best considered within their unique contexts*. The initiative's report will provide sample state policies and collective bargaining language that merit consideration; yet, it is important to know how they would fit within the contexts of the state and local districts studying them.
2. *Professional development can be enhanced dramatically through state policy and collective bargaining agreements*. State policies and negotiated contracts provide a way to make improvements that are far-reaching, equitable, uniform, and long-lasting. Project participants recognized the potential of leveraging policy and contract language to advance learning opportunities for all educators.

CONCLUSION

For more teachers to receive the professional learning they need, policies and collective bargaining agreements must include substantive language about professional development. Changes in education require policies to support effective professional learning that result from collaboration among key stakeholders — teachers, principals, central office staff, school boards, teachers associations, and state

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This initiative is just the beginning of a comprehensive effort to advance effective professional learning through state policy and collective bargaining agreements. Much remains to be done. Every state and local bargaining agency should commit to reviewing its own

professional development language to determine if it aligns with the recommendations of the national task force. Sweeping reforms in state and local policies and collective bargaining are necessary to ensure that they promote effective professional development practices. Professional development policies and collective bargaining language for education staff other than teachers will require the same level of rigorous review and revision.

The national task force recommends the following actions for state and local school districts:

1. All states and districts should adopt and follow strong standards for professional development.
2. States and districts should develop easily understood, research-based, and graduated rating systems for professional development programs.
3. States and districts should provide adequate resources, including time and financial support, to ensure that every educator engages in effective professional learning.
4. All states and districts should immediately implement new or expanded professional learning for school leaders — including principals and teacher leaders — to help them facilitate and integrate high-quality professional development into the day-to-day work of teachers.
5. States and districts should require that effective professional learning be fully implemented to improve student achievement.
6. States and districts should work collaboratively to establish parameters or guidance for the role of teachers in all decisions related to professional development.

departments of education. When key stakeholders work collaboratively to improve student achievement and shape responsibility for effective professional learning, all students benefit.

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