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Read NSDC's definition of professional learning and stay up-to-date on NSDC's advocacy work by frequent visits to [www.nsd.org/standfor/advocating.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standfor/advocating.cfm).

Read Hayes Mizell's collected columns at [www.nsd.org/news/authors/mizell.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/news/authors/mizell.cfm).

## Scheduling time for teacher learning is key for both educators and families

When most people speak of “the education system,” they are referring to the organized, publicly financed delivery of services designed to educate children. Increasingly, many people take a broader view. They mean not just administrators, teachers, buildings, and support services, but other entities that play important roles in the education process. Most important of these is families.

As school systems plan to implement NSDC's definition of professional learning, they should keep families in mind. Unfortunately, parents know little about professional learning. Most of what they know about “inservice” is limited to its effect on the school calendar. Either schools dismiss students after a half-day or they create a full pupil-free day so teachers can participate in professional development. When this totals only a few days, scheduled far in advance, working parents more or less agreeably arrange for their children's supervision during what would normally be school hours.

However, as schools seek to create more time for professional learning, many turn to beginning school later or dismissing students earlier one time or more each week. In some school systems, these approaches have sparked a strong backlash from parents. Parents complain that such an irregular weekly schedule makes it too difficult for working parents to provide adequate supervision for their children. In more than a few communities, professional development has paid the price as elected school boards have rejected proposals for late start or early dismissal.

NSDC's definition calls for professional learning that “occurs several times per week or the equivalent of three hours per week.” How will schools where time is already a very limited resource create additional time so learn-

ing teams can meet regularly throughout each week? NSDC provides a variety of possibilities in its book, *Finding Time for Professional Learning* (NSDC, 2008), a rich resource every school system and school administrator should have and study. The book provides case histories of how schools have increased time for professional development. It also includes helpful tools administrators can use to determine how they can adjust the school day schedule to create more time.

How school systems and schools schedule learning teams is important for both educators and families. Transitioning to professional learning congruent with NSDC's definition requires broad, strong support from families, as well as educators. The more that team learning can occur during the school day, thereby creating a school year calendar with no half- or full days for professional development and no late starts or early dismissals, the more support the new arrangement is likely to have from parents. Conversely, if school systems and schools fail to deal creatively with the issue of time for team learning, they may propose approaches that negatively affect families and could generate opposition to rather than support for professional learning based on NSDC's definition.

The new approach to professional learning also creates an opportunity to educate families about team learning's purpose and operations. Many will be interested to know that educators are meeting regularly to improve their instruction, with the aim of applying their learning directly to benefit families' children. Smart school systems will want to factor families into the professional development equation, winning their support by demonstrating that the new approach includes greater accountability for educators' learning and greater sensitivity to families' needs.