

THE LEARNING System

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF DISTRICT LEADERS ENSURING SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

PRINCIPAL-COACHES TRANSFORM TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

Instructional leadership connects principals with the classroom

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

Amy Busby has taught for nearly a decade and worked with four separate administrators. But in her position now as kindergarten teacher at Midlakes Primary School in Phelps-Clifton Springs (N.Y.) Central School District, she has a different kind of relationship with the principal — one she described in collegial terms.

The principal understands Busby's students' needs, Busby said, works directly with her to prioritize learning goals and find ways to achieve them, and challenges her to help students achieve more.

The relationship between Principal Karen Cameron and Busby, as well as other teachers in the building, is different because Cameron is an instructional leader in a way that really defines



the overused term. For the past three years, Cameron has been the staff's literacy coach, working with small groups of teachers and one-on-one to improve their instruction.

"Because she's in and out of the rooms," Busby said, "I think she's really aware of what's going on."

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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.

Read Hayes Mizell's collected columns at www.nsd.org/news/authors/mizell.cfm.

Delve into NSDC's new definition of professional learning

NSDC's definition of professional learning will undoubtedly prompt many frequently asked questions. One way school system administrators can wrap their minds around the definition is to imagine what some of the questions might be — and appropriate answers. For example:

Does this new approach to professional learning mean there won't be any more workshops, institutes, conferences, etc?

Not necessarily. The definition clearly states that it is the school-based learning team's responsibility to establish its learning goals and then use "evidenced-based learning strategies" to achieve the goals. A team might conclude that the best way for it to meet its learning needs is for team members to participate in a summer institute, a weekend workshop, or a conference. However, "entities outside the school" must sponsor these venues, according to NSDC's definition. This includes, the definition states, "universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations."

Can a team work with a consultant?

Yes. A team's effort to meet its learning goals "may be facilitated and strengthened by external expertise and assistance," according to the definition. Again, *external* is the key word. A team can call on a broad array of external sources to provide expertise not present on the team itself.

How will a team pay for consultant services or the costs of participating in an institute?

The definition is silent on this point. School systems and schools will need to develop procedures for providing financial support to teams.

Can a team use its meetings to talk about discipline problems?

Not if you mean a rambling recitation of complaints. Remember that the purpose of the teams is for educators to learn what they need

to in order to become more effective in raising student achievement. In theory, this could mean that based on its analysis of data, a team concludes that some students miss a lot of class time because teachers make many disciplinary referrals to the assistant principal. A team might determine that its members need to improve their classroom management skills or learn positive intervention techniques. However, teams must keep in mind that the ultimate test is whether the professional learning is effective "in achieving identified [educator] learning goals," says the definition. Teams should not engage in learning teachers do not intend to apply and assess in classrooms.

What is the "continuous cycle of improvement" the definition requires of teams?

Very simply, it means that team learning, and the application and assessment of that learning, is not an event but an ongoing process. If a team is faithful to working through the cycle, the team keeps moving forward to continuous improvement.

Why does the definition call for each team to have a facilitator?

Most educators have little experience collaborating with their colleagues to determine their learning needs. They may be challenged by making decisions about the best way to meet those needs and how to assess the subsequent learning, its application in classrooms, and its effects on students. Add to that team members' different backgrounds, experiences, interests, priorities, and behaviors and team dynamics can be very complex. A good facilitator can help the team stay focused, mediate differences among team members, and keep the team on track toward achieving meaningful results.

These are only a few of the questions that might arise. The exercise of drafting and answering potential questions can be a useful step toward anticipating the realities of implementing NSDC's definition of professional development.



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003)

Does your organization really support professional development?

Most school improvement initiatives aim to enhance teachers' skills and knowledge so that teachers can improve the level of student learning. Improving teachers' skill requires that new instructional strategies and classroom practices be implemented fully and with high quality. NSDC's Context standards help us understand that the school district has great influence on whether professional development will fulfill its intended results.

Central office staff need to **evaluate staff development using a variety of data** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 133). One kind of formative evaluation data focuses on **organizational support**. Thomas Guskey considers organizational support to be the third level of outcome in program evaluation. He writes, "Many improvement efforts in education fail simply because they are unclear or misleading about the kind of organizational support required for change. As a result, educators end up trying to implement innovations that they do not fully understand in organizations that do not fully support their efforts" (Guskey, 2000, p. 149).

When evaluating an organization's support of an innovation, central office staff might assess the degree to which each of the following is made available to support implementation:

- **Materials and resources**, such as software, computers, reading level books, math manipulatives, and whatever is needed to fully implement a new program or use new strategies.
- **Access to colleagues** who are also using the innovation in order to plan or problem solve

implementation issues.

- **Time** to plan, collect necessary materials, or develop aligned assessments.
- **A knowledgeable administrator** or supervisor who supports the innovation; for example, principals need to be able to describe what new priority practices look like when implemented with high quality within the classroom.

NSDC STANDARD

Evaluation: Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact.

- **Student assessments that support the innovation.** An assessment that negates the use of new practices (or reinforces old practices) can quickly extinguish implementation.

- **Protection from intrusions**, such as new mandates, initiatives, and even opportunities from outside that might divert energy, time, and attention from implementation. Both central office and school administrations sometimes need to serve as gatekeepers because new programs might distract attention from primary goals.

cause new programs might distract attention from primary goals.

- **Openness to experimentation.** A trusting environment encourages the use of new practices and protects risk takers.
- **Recognition of success and progress** to reinforce the efforts of staff members who are moving forward. Recognition is needed during the change, not just after a final result.
- **Support at all levels of administration.** Staff members need to hear coherent and aligned support from all administrators about the importance and value of all initiatives.

Formative evaluation information helps central office ensure that professional development results in improved learning for teachers and for students.

REFERENCES

- Guskey, T. (2000).** *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003).** *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation Configurations*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

SCHOOL CLIMATE INDEX

Directions: The following are statements about your school. Please indicate the extent to which each occurs, from Never (1) to Very Frequently (5).

1=Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Often 5=Very frequently

1. Our school makes an effort to inform the community about our goals and achievements.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Our school is able to marshal community support when needed.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The interactions between faculty members are cooperative.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Teachers respect the professional competence of their colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The school sets high standards for academic performance.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Students respect others who get good grades.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The principal is friendly and approachable.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The principal puts suggestions made by the faculty into operation.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Parents and other community members are included on planning committees.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Community members are responsive to requests for participation.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Teachers help and support each other.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Teachers in this school exercise professional judgment.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Teachers are committed to helping students.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the school.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Students try hard to improve on previous work.	1	2	3	4	5
16. The principal explores all sides of topics and admits that other opinions exist.	1	2	3	4	5
17. The principal treats all faculty members as his or her equal.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Teachers accomplish their jobs with enthusiasm.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Teachers “go the extra mile” with their students.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Teachers provide strong social support for colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
21. The learning environment is orderly and serious.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Students seek extra work so they can get good grades.	1	2	3	4	5
23. The principal is willing to make changes.	1	2	3	4	5
24. The principal lets faculty know what is expected of them.	1	2	3	4	5
25. The principal maintains definite standards of performance.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Community members attend meetings to stay informed about our school.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Organized community groups (e.g., PTA, PTO) meet regularly to discuss school issues.	1	2	3	4	5
28. School people are responsive to the needs and concerns expressed by community members.	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring the School Climate Index

The SCI can be used at any school level. All surveys should remain anonymous and be voluntary. Inform those taking the survey that they may elect not to answer any question. Faculty, parent, and student surveys should be returned to someone other than the school principal. Student surveys should be administered outside of class because they may perceive that completing the survey is compulsory, even if they are told their participation is voluntary.

See the definitions below for the four subscales on the index: collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, academic press, and community engagement.

STEP 1

Calculate the average of all the responses to the survey for each item on the questionnaire. Assign two points for every “rarely” response, three points for every “sometimes” response, four points for every “often” response, and five points for every “very frequently” response. You can use a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel or calculate the means by hand.

STEP 2

Calculate the mean score for your school on each of the four subscales:

- Collegial leadership (questions 7, 8, 16, 17, 23, 24, 25)
- Teacher professionalism (questions 3, 4, 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20)
- Academic press: (questions 5, 6, 14, 15, 21, 22)
- Community engagement: (questions 1, 2, 9, 10, 26, 27, 28)

To calculate a standardized score by which to compare schools in a district, see <http://mxtsch.people.wm.edu/ResearchTools/ScoringtheSchoolClimateIndexandOCB.pdf>. In addition, surveys on trust factors are available at http://mxtsch.people.wm.edu/research_tools.php.

Elements of the School Climate Index defined

Collegial leadership: The principal is supportive and egalitarian. The principal is considerate, helpful, and genuinely concerned about teachers’ welfare yet also lets faculty know what is expected of them and maintains definite performance standards. The principal is open to exploring all sides of topics and willing to make changes. He or she accepts questions without appearing to snub teachers and admits that divergent opinions exist. The principal takes an interest in classroom issues that are important to teachers.

Teacher professionalism: Teachers show commitment to students and are engaged in their teaching. Teachers respect colleagues’ professional expertise. Professional interactions among teachers are open and cooperative. Teachers support and help one another. Teachers display warmth and friendliness.

Academic press: The school is driven by a quest for excellence. Teachers and administrators set a tone that is serious, orderly, and focused on academics. High but achievable goals are set for students, and students respond positively to the challenge of these goals. They work hard and respect their peers’ academic accomplishments.

Community engagement: The school fosters a constructive relationship with its community and can count on parental and community involvement and support. The school provides the community with information about its accomplishments.

Source: Megan Tschannen-Moran, associate professor, School of Education, College of William and Mary. Used with permission.

Principal-coaches transform teachers and schools

Principals
 “need to be
 as common
 a fixture
 in the
 classroom
 as the pencil
 sharpener,”
 says Supt. Mike
 Ford.

Continued from p. 1

That’s not always the case, according to the findings of the recent *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Past, Present and Future*. The study found a significant gap between principals and teachers in their perceptions of classroom issues. “Differences in teacher and principal perceptions also raise concerns,” the study states, “particularly regarding quality of professional development and time available for and devoted to classroom teaching and learning in their schools” (p. 63). While most principals rate their school’s discipline policies highly, fewer teachers do — the largest gap the study found (p. 114). In addition, according to the study, “Overall while most teachers report being well-prepared to deal with ... hindrances to student learning, they report a greater need for support than principals perceive” (p. 129).



The Phelps-Clifton Springs approach has addressed that gap. Having principals serve as literacy coaches “goes to the major concept of the principal as instructional leader,” said Superintendent Mike Ford. “Instruction has been their focus and their mission.”

Ford, former president of the NSDC board of trustees, said principals “need to be as common a fixture in the classroom as the pencil

sharpener.” And, he said, charging them with staff development is an obvious means to create change. “There were always (teachers) we knew could do better, but the choice was theirs,” he said. “We wanted there to be accountability.”

Ford said the district found its elementary students lagging behind others in the region in language arts, and that data prompted him to look for literacy coaches. He considered other staff, then realized the expertise resided with the two elementary school principals. Cameron, particularly, is an adjunct professor in reading at Nazareth College of Rochester teaching graduate level education classes on literacy. Rather than releasing her from her role as a building leader, he hired a dean of students for the two elementary buildings to free the principals’ time to work with their staffs. The aim was that the two have 50% of their time for coaching, a goal Ford admitted has not yet been realized even with the shift of disciplinary duties to the dean.

Cameron said she spends a half-day each month with grade-level teams, modeling and working with teachers to hone lessons and plan daily time for balanced literacy instruction. She observes teachers, then the group discusses issues in the next session. She also offers them professional reading, individual modeling, or in one case, a coaching conversation when a teacher videotaped herself.

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COLLEGIAL LEADERSHIP

“Collegial leadership is characterized by behavior of the principal that is supportive and egalitarian. The principal is considerate, helpful, and genuinely concerned about the welfare of teachers. At the same time, the principal lets faculty know what is expected of them and maintains definite standards of performance. The principal is open to exploring all sides of topics and willing to make changes. He or she accepts questions without appearing to snub teachers, and admits that divergent opinions exist. The principal takes an interest in classroom issues that are important to teachers.”

— Megan Tschannen-Moran, associate professor in Educational Policy, Planning and Leadership at the College of William and Mary

The entire MetLife Survey of the American Teacher series is available online at the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) web site: <http://eric.ed.gov>.

Instructional leaders get the scoop on teachers' hurdles

Megan Tschannen-Moran, associate professor in Educational Policy, Planning and Leadership at the College of William and Mary, said the role of the principal requires a new mental model of leadership.

"When leaders think it's their job to tell a teacher how to do their job, then it's not very important or efficient for the leader to spend time listening to what the teachers are saying about their needs or how they might like the principal to assist them," she said. "Some of our older models of leadership have not created much value or importance on the leader listening to the teacher."

She said research increasingly is showing that a collegial model of leadership in which principals set high expectations but work alongside teachers and understand classroom issues (see definition in box on p. 6) leads to a more effective organization.

"Instructional leadership is a really critical role for principals to take," Tschannen-Moran said. "That's the bottom line of their school functioning — the quality of instruction in their building."

Tschannen-Moran said collegial leadership is measurable (see tool, pp. 4-5) and is part of a positive school climate where staff and leaders have created trusting relationships. She said the leader has to be willing to be vulnerable; must demonstrate benevolence — the sense of mutual goodwill; must exhibit honesty and integrity, matching actions to words; has to be reliable; and must be competent and skilled.

She said leaders then, rather than having perfunctory conversations with teachers around regular evaluations and simply telling teachers what to do, can develop the necessary two-way communication to best guide improvements in instructional practice.

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A PHILOSOPHY OF LEADERSHIP

"It's more a belief, a philosophy of how you want to be a leader," Cameron said. "Sometimes it's difficult to get into classrooms. With a schedule (as a coach), you tend to make yourself do it more."

She said the term coach is "a word that just gets thrown out there. ... I've had to explore the topic to try to get an understanding of teachers themselves. Sometimes we get in the role as administrators and forget what it's like to be a teacher."

"Instructional leadership is the real key in being a principal now," Cameron continued. "Before, principals were supervisory or managerial. If you're more accustomed to managing or supervising, it's a big change in thinking. But if you don't do the instructional guidance, you're not able to give your teachers all that they need."

Busby said she sees her principal's role as that of a supporter. "Because she's in the teaching role, if she sees something, she'll work with you to fix it," Busby said. "It's not like you're in

trouble."

Ford said the principal-coaches "have transformed our buildings."

"We went from buildings where there were a lot of arts and crafts on display to print-rich environments," he said. Visitors to the buildings now, he said, see more books in the classrooms, students' writing on the walls, young children doing word studies, kindergartners writing out their own stories, and teachers talking about how to design lessons that improve reading and writing.

"Principals are in the classrooms more, and so the connection to teaching and learning has gotten stronger," Ford said. "The view of what a classroom ought to be has been bridged because our principals are sitting with our teachers in staff development every month and are in the classrooms regularly. I think they have a shared vision."

REFERENCE

MetLife. (2008, October). *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Past, Present and Future*. New York: Author. ■

NSDC'S BELIEF

Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.

Phelps-Clifton Springs Central School District

NEW YORK STATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ASSESSMENT

Grade 3 results

Levels 3 and 4 demonstrate proficiency

Year	Levels 3+4
2007-08	82%
2006-07	62%
2005-06	76%

Grade 4 results

Year	Levels 3+4
2007-08	76%
2006-07	76%
2005-06	70%

Grade 5 results

Year	Levels 3+4
2007-08	84%
2006-07	82%
2005-06	60%

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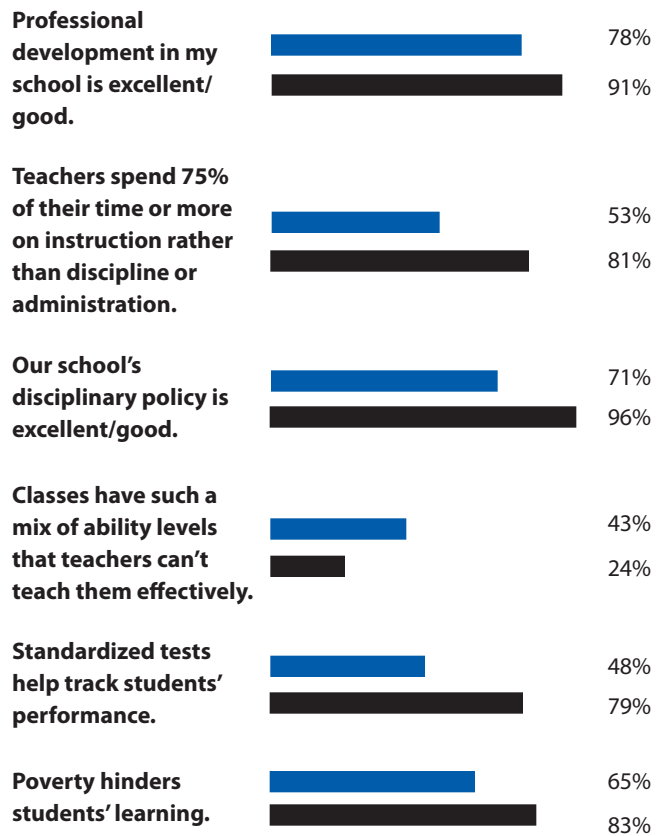
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THE PERCEPTION GAP

The *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Past, Present and Future* shows that teachers are more satisfied with the profession than ever in the 25-year history of the survey and their perceptions often match principals', but when teachers and principals disagree, it's on these points:



Teachers Principals