

# THE LEARNING Principal®

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

## EFFICACY CAN OVERCOME CLASSROOM BARRIERS

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

*“Whether you think that you can or you can’t, you’re usually right.”*

— Henry Ford

**D**uncan Smith lives in a relatively affluent area a mile from the Atlantic in Ocean View, Del. But every day, Smith drives his three children — a pre-schooler, 2nd-grader, and 4th-grader — eight miles away to Frankford Elementary School, a historically African-American school where 82% of about 450 students receive free and reduced-price lunch, in a poor community where most families work in the poultry industry.

Smith brings his own children to Frankford because he now is principal, but more importantly, because nearly 100% percent of students here



are meeting state standards in reading and math. The school has received numerous awards, most notably the National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in 2003, National Distinguished Title I School in 2004, and The Education Trust’s “Dispelling the Myth Award” in 2005 for closing the achievement gap.

“The amount of love and dedication the teachers have here is unbelievable,” Smith said of the school, where just a decade ago student performance was far less than stellar. Frankford started

to change after Principal Sharon Brittingham took over in 1998 and began not only telling the teachers that all children can learn, but leading them to believe it.

The staff created a shared vision that states:

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**LIGIA NORIEGA**

Headmaster, Excel High School  
South Boston, Mass.

**Grades:** 9-12

**Enrollment:** 385 students

**Staff:** 28 teachers

Excel High School was founded in 2001 as one of three small high schools housed in the historic South Boston High School building now known as South Boston Education Complex (SBEC). Excel is ranked among the top 10 Boston Public Schools and *U.S. News & World Report* named it a Bronze Medal school in 2008. In 2007, Excel High School received the \$100,000 Thomas Payzant School On The Move Award for progress in closing the achievement gap.

**Quote I live by:**

Do not feel sorry for me; educate me.

# Q&A Leadership, learning communities change school culture

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

**Q. How would you describe your school?**

We have created a culture of collaboration, rigor, and high expectations. Students feel safe here. The climate is friendly, structured, and very organized. Students are dressed properly. In four years, we have improved test scores, attendance. Our discipline referrals were down to 17 total last year. And this is a traditional public school.

**Q. What has changed?**

When I came here, people were divided. Regular education, sheltered instruction, and special education teachers did not meet to plan lessons or to talk about instruction. I created common planning time for the departments. They have to get together once a week for 55 minutes to talk about curriculum alignment, assessments, students' progress, data, and accountability. In order to give equal access to every single student, we needed to be on the same page.

Excel High School is a thoroughly integrated school. The student body is 16.7% white, 28.1% Asian, 36.5% African American and 17.7% Latino. Further, 43% of the students speak a language other than English at home, 78% come from low-income homes, and 23% qualify for special education services.

**Q. How did you get teachers working together?**

They *wanted* to get to know each other and talk about the students. In the beginning, I set up agendas. Now I have created a joint decision-making team and developed teacher leaders for each of the academic departments. Teacher leaders meet with me once a month in an instructional leadership team to talk about academic issues, school culture, and environment. From there, we create an agenda that goes to all the departments for the department meetings, which are teacher-led conversations.

The first year, I was very aggressive. I went to the classrooms, looked at the teachers and how they taught. In some cases, they needed a lot of support. In others, they didn't want to take

advantage of the support, so I used the evaluation tool to help them. There was one goal: to do simple things well. The only thing I wanted to focus on was teaching.

Sometimes people get into the habit of saying, "I teach well," but when somebody else goes into the classroom to observe, that's not the case. I look at data to find out how instruction is going.

**Q. How did you narrow the achievement gap?**

Some classes were filled with repeaters — students who had failed the class the year before. We went back to culture, how we wanted students to see themselves. Repeater classes set up the teachers to have a rough year and the students not to feel successful. So we created new classes, such as law and order instead of repeating history. We created an after school credit recovery program for students who needed to make up required graduation classes. We pay teachers a stipend of \$1,500 for two days a week.

recovery program for students who needed to make up required graduation classes. We pay teachers a stipend of \$1,500 for two days a week.

**Q. Your own background includes private boarding school, international business, extensive travel, and teaching overseas. How do those experiences affect your leadership?**

I know what is out there in other countries, what is offered in France, Italy, Argentina. I know what worked for me and what did not work. I saw that in the schools where the majority of students did extremely well, there was a very clear structure of expectations, regulations, and academic offerings. Why not offer that here? I believe in modeling. If I ask people to do something, I have to be willing to do it first. Everything goes to respect.



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

## Road trip!

Think of professional development as a cross-country road trip. When determining the route, you pick cities along the way to stop, refuel, and get provisions. Each stop provides an opportunity to ensure you are still on course — that you haven't gotten waylaid during your trip. Formative evaluation of professional development serves the same purpose: to determine whether we are still on course as we progress from learning about a new set of strategies to actually implementing them in the classroom.

To prepare for the professional development journey, principals **need to design formative and summative evaluations of school-based professional development** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 79). Summative evaluations help us determine whether our intended results have been accomplished; formative evaluations are done “in process” and help us determine whether we need to change our activities or whether components of our plan need adjustment. For example, a school that created grade-level study teams discovered, through a survey, that teachers did not view the groups as benefiting their classroom practice. The principal and school improvement team used that information to clarify the groups' purpose, provide alternative materials and activities, and help the teams use new learning protocols. Formative evaluations help us **improve the quality of the program** by making adjustments or mid-course corrections.

A theory of change can help a principal identify the kinds of in-process information to collect (Killion, 2008). A theory of change identifies the major components of a professional development initiative, the sequence in which

those components will occur, and then delineates the underlying assumptions which ground the program planning and timeline. For example, a professional development plan calls for teachers to participate in a workshop about reading strategies and then meet each week to develop lessons employing the new strategies. A formative assessment might include using a rubric to determine which strategies are being used in the

lesson plans and whether they are being used appropriately. If the plans are appropriate, the principal can confidently move to the next step; if the plans are not appropriate, an instructional coach can provide more intensive support before proceeding to the next step.

Formative evaluation can also help us track how staff members are implementing new strategies. Using an innovation configuration as the basis for walk-throughs, a

principal can determine the quality of implementation of new curricular materials or instructional practices. This information is used to group educators with similar needs and provide more focused and purposeful coaching or technical assistance.

Formative evaluations can help the principal make sure that faculty members don't get lost during their professional learning journey and successfully arrive at their final destination.

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### NSDC STANDARD

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

# TEACHER BELIEFS

**Purpose:** To determine the level of self-efficacy among staff members.

**Time:** 30 minutes.

**Materials:** Survey.

**Directions:** Provide the survey to staff members. Allow results to remain anonymous since the purpose is to gather information about teachers' sense of efficacy as a group. Gather the surveys and compute the mean. To understand more about teachers' sense of specific areas, group questions as follows:

- *Efficacy in Student Engagement:* Items 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, 22
- *Efficacy in Instructional Strategies:* Items 7, 10, 11, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24
- *Efficacy in Classroom Management:* Items 3, 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21

## Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	Nothing	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?	Nothing	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	Nothing	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	Nothing	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	Nothing	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	Nothing	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	Nothing	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	Nothing	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?	Nothing	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	Nothing	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	Nothing	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal

**Source:** Megan Tschannen-Moran, College of William and Mary, and Anita Woolfolk Hoy, The Ohio State University.



12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
19. How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire lesson?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
21. How well can you respond to defiant students?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal
24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?  
 Nothing            Very little            Some            Quite a bit            A great deal

**For information on the construct validity of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale, see:** Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 783-805.

# Efficacy can overcome classroom barriers

*Continued from p. 1*

“We believe we can make a difference in the lives entrusted to us. We recognize, accept, and respect individual differences. We pledge our professional skills to educating all of our children so that they will excel in their life endeavors.”

Teresa Doyle, a 26-year veteran of the school, said teachers first “talked it,” then

**“People who regard themselves as highly efficacious act, think, and feel differently from those who perceive themselves as inefficacious. They produce their own future, rather than simply foretell it.”**

— Albert Bandura (1986, p. 395)

“walked it” until their belief in students’ potential became “an ingrained part of the school.” Frankford teachers’ belief in their ability to make a difference leads them to find ways to overcome issues of language acquisition, race, poverty, and other classroom hindrances that many teachers say are challenging them in the classroom. The recently released 2008 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* reported that:

- Teachers today were twice as likely as in 1992 to say language is a barrier to learning for at least one-fourth of students;
- An increasing number of teachers said poverty was a hindrance for at least one-fourth of students (49% up from 41% in 1992); and
- More teachers (43%, compared with 39% in 1988) felt the varied abilities of students in their classes hindered their ability to teach effectively.

Frankford may be a prime example of what educational psychologists term “collective self-efficacy.” Self-efficacy, a person’s belief that he or she is able to make a difference, leads teachers to “work harder, persist, and (not) blame the students,” according to Megan Tschannen-Moran, a leading researcher in the area of teacher self-efficacy and associate professor in Educational Policy, Planning and Leadership at the College of William and Mary.

“Self-efficacy is self-belief,” Tschannen-Moran said. “It affects teachers’ motivation to persist in the face of setbacks. ... It’s about how much effort I’m going to put in.” And, as Stanford University psychologist Albert Bandura, the father of the concept, stated, “If self-efficacy is lacking, people tend to behave ineffectually, even though they know what to do” (1986, p. 425).

Collective efficacy is defined as “the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students” (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000). And collective efficacy was found to be more important than socioeconomic status in explaining a school’s achievement level (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002). The box on p. 7 includes ways principals affect teachers’ sense of collective efficacy.

“What I think we could do better than we do is to listen to teachers,” Tschannen-Moran said. “If administrators were engaging with teachers and listening to teachers saying, ‘Here are the things that would help me to have greater success,’ if we could impact the culture of administration, that might make a difference.”

## NSDC’S BELIEF

Student learning increases when educators reflect on professional practice and student progress.

Two-thirds of teachers in the MetLife Survey said they feel their training has adequately prepared them for the classroom. Tschannen-Moran said teachers may even have an inflated sense of competence beyond what measures of their content knowledge would indicate. The research also shows that teachers’ sense of self-efficacy tends to begin high, but dips as they encounter the realities of the classroom in the first few years. Those who stay in teaching then settle in their minds the extent to which they believe they can make a difference, she said. Once teachers have set their perceptions, those beliefs are hard to shake without a change that provokes reassessment, Tschannen-Moran said, such as a change in school population, switch to a different grade level, or a move to another school.

For Frankford and many turnaround schools,

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## 4 sources of self-efficacy

Megan Tschannen-Moran said leaders can help improve teachers' sense of efficacy most importantly through professional learning that builds skills so they watch their students improve. From her work based on Bandura's research, she cited four sources of self-efficacy and how to affect them:

- **Verbal persuasion:** Pep talks where teachers are encouraged provide a short-term boost in sense of efficacy, said Tschannen-Moran. However, "their skills haven't changed and the world hasn't changed, and they confront the same reality" back in the classroom, she said, so persuasion is ineffective alone without skill-building. Encouragement by valued others who can provide specific feedback is helpful, she said, such as working with an instructional coach.
- **Vicarious experience:** Watching a skill being modeled well makes a difference. Tschannen-Moran said the closer the observer identifies with the model, the stronger the boost in self-efficacy. A young teacher, for example, benefits more from observing someone similar with greater skills than someone with 25 years of experience. Leaders can provide time for classroom observations with skilled teachers and find teachers to model who share similar traits with the teacher observing.
- **Physiological awareness:** A full case of nerves drives down efficacy, while moderate excitement has a positive influence. Providing supports to make people feel confident is important, Tschannen-Moran said, including verbal encouragement. Leaders can help teachers learn to be aware of their physiological state and to create conditions that help them to feel more comfortable.
- **Mastery experiences:** When teachers see changes in student learning outcomes, research shows self-efficacy increases. Nothing beats the joy of success, Tschannen-Moran said, and ongoing professional learning focused on skill building is the top source of efficacy.



Leaders can provide time for classroom observations with skilled teachers.

## RESOURCES

"Building Collective Efficacy: How Leaders Inspire Teachers to Achieve," by Dana Brinson and Lucy Steiner. *Learning Point Associates Issue Brief*, October 2007.

"Teacher Efficacy: What Is It and Does It Matter?" by Nancy Protheroe. *Principal*, May/June 2008.

"Believing and Achieving," by Craig D. Jerald. *Learning Point Associates Issue Brief*, January 2007.

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

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a failing grade on a state report card or disaggregated data showing stark differences in groups' achievement levels is the reality check that leads to teachers examining their own need to change.

Smith said that at Frankford, once teachers began experiencing success, it spread. The school continues to improve by relying on data in making instructional decisions. Every grade-level team works collaboratively in weekly meetings and they are developing common assessments that generate information for teachers to use to refine their instruction. And the culture of commitment carries on, even as new teachers come on board, Smith said.

"They know what they're doing is making a difference," he said. "If you focus on the growth of each child, the sky's the limit."

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## NSDC'S 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

### PRIORITY 1: AFFECTING THE POLICY CONTEXT

Understanding that good policy promotes good practice, NSDC will advance effective policies at the federal, state/provincial, and local levels.

### PRIORITY 2: DOCUMENTING THE EVIDENCE

Understanding that leaders will implement professional development that evidence indicates will produce the results they desire, NSDC will commission a study(ies) to examine the evidence regarding the impact of professional learning on student achievement, the relationship between NSDC's standards and the evidence, and areas requiring further exploration and research.

### PRIORITY 3: NARROWING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Understanding that effective professional learning is essential

for improving student learning in lower-performing schools, NSDC will launch a national movement to enlist schools, particularly those serving low-performing students, to embrace NSDC's purpose.

### PRIORITY 4: DEVELOPING SCHOOL LEADERS

Understanding that knowledge, skill, and will of school leaders are essential to improving professional learning and student achievement, NSDC will initiate and lead networks and programs focused on improving performance of school leaders.

### PRIORITY 5: ENGAGING THOUGHT LEADERS

Understanding that educators are influenced by individuals and organizations with whom they have ongoing and trusting relationships, NSDC will strategically engage individuals and organizations to advance NSDC's purpose.

*To find out more about how you can get involved, look on the web site at [www.nsdc.org](http://www.nsdc.org) and click on "how to get involved."*