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HOW TO GET IN TOUCH

JSD is published six times a year to promote improvement in the quality of professional learning as a means to improve student learning in K-12 schools. Contributions from members and non-members of NSDC are welcome.

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editor's note/ TRACY CROW

LEARNING SCHOOLS BRING NSDC'S DEFINITION TO LIFE

Peter Senge writes that learning organizations are places "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (2006, p. 3).

In this issue of *JSD*, you'll read about learning schools. In these schools and systems, core elements of NSDC's definition of professional learning come to life. As you read through the issue, starting with Stephanie Hirsh's introduction to the definition (p. 10), you'll see the connection between the concept of a learning organization and the high-quality professional development we hope to see in all schools and districts.

At St. Johnsbury School in Vermont (p. 40), teachers used formative assessments and they saw their roles shift; they formed learning communities and benefited from the support this structure gave them. Not only are new patterns of thinking nurtured in this environment, but those teachers are continually learning how to learn together. In Kentucky, the leaders of an initiative to raise the reading levels of struggling high schoolers outlined the results they wanted to see first. They expanded their capacity based on the results they wanted (p. 32).

Looking back at Senge's explanation of a learning organization to the word "aspiration" — that's a word you won't see in NSDC's definition. The word has a loftier, more esoteric sound to it than what you'd put in federal legislation. Aspiration doesn't feel sufficiently results-oriented or standards-based.

Yet aspiration underlies all the work we do in professional learning — it's the force that drives us. Senge details what it means: "There are two fundamental sources of energy that can motivate organizations: fear and aspiration. The power of fear underlies negative visions. The power of aspiration drives positive visions. Fear can produce extraordinary changes in short periods, but aspiration endures as a continuing source of learning and growth" (2006, p. 209).

You're hearing aspiration when educators speak of risk, of trust, of trying again. We see the role of aspiration when educators demand more accountability measures, not fewer, and when they engage in reflective dialogue to push themselves harder. As Hirsh explains, "The new definition of professional development is a moral imperative" — one that can address the inequities that deny some students opportunities for academic success (p. 11). Aspiration is a part of each learning school. Look for it in every article in this issue.

***JSD* goes bimonthly:** We're pleased to announce that *JSD* will come to you six times per year, beginning with the next issue. We know that members will benefit from expanded opportunities to read and write for NSDC. See the inside back cover for upcoming themes and consider submitting an article for publication.

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Deep learning engages senses, moves heart, NSDC Academy finds

"What are you learning about learning?" This theme echoed throughout NSDC Academy 2010's learning teams as they met for the third time at the 2009 Summer Conference in Boston this year. The NSDC Academy is an extended 2½-year, problem-based, inquiry-driven learning experience designed to immerse school and district leaders in authentic collaborative learning so they not only develop as leaders of professional learning, but also understand and appreciate the deep structure of this form of professional learning.

Conversations centered on the realization that transferring knowledge and developing skills are only two elementary levels of learning. Learning that lasts and impacts students occurs when educators transform how they think about and act on what they know. This form of learning is rarely embedded in more traditional professional development. Deep or transformative learning changes perspectives, creates new assumptions, engages all the senses, and moves a learner in the head, heart, and hand.

As members of the class of 2010 entered their third session, they continued to adapt to a new way of thinking about professional learning. They engaged more readily in unguarded dialogue that allowed them to suspend judgment. They shared teachable points of view with one another for insight, input, and inquiry. They learned to investigate ideas and information, refine their leadership skills, interact with colleagues, and invent strategies and tactics to use within the context of their own work.

NSDC Academy's class of 2011 is just beginning to develop its potential as leaders in professional learning. With each class, leaders of professional learning are emerging who will shape policy and practice in schools and districts throughout the world.

> **CONSIDER JOINING THE CLASS OF 2012**
>
> Applications for the next NSDC Academy cohort are due Feb. 1, 2010. Find more information at **www.nsdc.org/ opportunities/academy.cfm.**

FROM **www.nsdc.org/learningBlog/**

"No one will take professional learning seriously until the educators responsible for it assert themselves to demonstrate its **value**, its **power**, and its **results**, and insist their peers do so as well."

— *Hayes Mizell*

on board / CHARLES MASON

HAS EXCELLENCE BECOME A LOCAL OPTION?

When No Child Left Behind was enacted, its supporters argued that it would address "the soft bigotry of low expectations." Is it possible that NCLB has actually solidified the inequity that results from wide variations in how excellence is defined? And, if that is the case, what role can effective professional learning play in ensuring that schools have high expectations for all students?

Consider three schools.

• **School A** has a large percentage of students who are not succeeding on the state's accountability exams. Facing severe penalties, school leaders narrow their focus to getting enough students over the line on relatively low-level literacy and math standards in order to avoid sanctions. As a result, teachers are pressured to narrow their focus as well, with the resulting message being that high expectations for their students are simply not valued or measured.

• **School B** has a number of students who are not succeeding on the state's accountability exams, but there is reason to believe that the school can address that fairly easily. Nevertheless, the school accepts the premise that once it has "made AYP," the school will be successful, so it also narrows its focus to those students and those tests.

• **School C** also has a number of students who are not succeeding on the state's accountability exams, and the school is committed to doing what's necessary for them to succeed. But the school and the community do not accept the premise that avoiding state sanctions constitutes excellence. Instead, they work together to set high standards in all subject areas, not just literacy and math. The school and community focus on the knowledge, skills, and attributes that their students will need to be successful in the world. Professional learning in this school stimulates collaboration on standards, instructional best practices, and meaningful assessments. Instruction is effective, challenging, and engaging. Students experience success in a variety of ways and develop a love for learning and the ability to learn independently of teacher direction.

Suppose now all three schools are successful in reaching AYP and avoiding sanctions. Have the students in these three schools been provided an equitable education? Of course not. So I ask: In your state and in your school system, has excellence become a local option that is available in some schools and not others? Has the quality of professional learning available in these schools helped determine which schools have high expectations and which do not?

NSDC is committed to its purpose of creating schools "where every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves." How are your school and school system defining student achievement? Right now, the school and system levels are where these critical decisions are being made. I hope that discussion is under way in your world. If not, I encourage you to start it. And while you're at it, take advantage of this opportunity to lead others to an understanding that there is no road to school improvement that does not require effective professional learning. If we are truly determined to fight the soft bigotry of low expectations, we must create schools where professionals collaborate to set and reach high expectations for all students. ◼

Charles Mason is president of the National Staff Development Council.

IFN CONTRIBUTION HONORS LYNNE CHIDLEY'S SPIRIT

"Steve, are you and Pat going to run this morning?" Lynne asked. It was summer 1982, and we were in St. Louis developing a session for NSDC's Annual Conference in December.

Patricia Zigarmi, Susan Loucks-Horsley, Lynne Chidley, and I were just beginning to formulate ideas for our session. Lynne was there against the advice of her doctors. She was determined to not give in to her cancer. Recently elected as a trustee on the NSDC board, she wanted to continue her life normally. After her first two years on the board, she was elected president in 1984 and led the Council for a brief time until shortly before her death. She unselfishly gave of herself in order to lead NSDC to engage all educators in effective professional learning.

It was 75 degrees, and the morning humidity was stifling by the time we were ready to run. St. Louis has hills!

"Steve, is Lynne still a little behind us?" Pat wondered.

"I don't know, Pat. Maybe we should double back and check on her," I answered.

We found her about a mile back, hunched over, breathing laboriously, with a big smile on her face. When we asked what was so funny, she said, "Me. I'm funny. You'd think I thought I was 18 years old. Boy, am I out of shape." Not a word about the real cause.
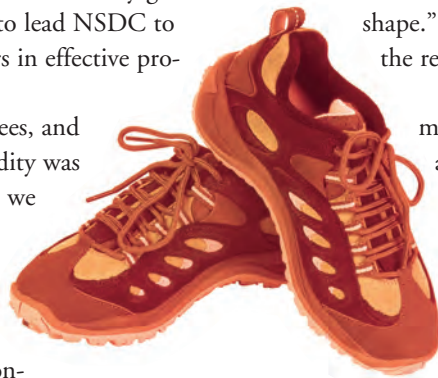
January 2009 marked the 25th anniversary of Lynne's death. She began her professional life as an elementary teacher, became an elementary principal in a suburb outside Chicago, and served as a staff development expert with the Illinois Center for Educational Improvement. Her curiosity and energy were insatiable, and her passion for learning energized others.

After many conversations about how to best memorialize Lynne's spirit, NSDC's Board of Trustees decided to create a foundation. The professionals who benefit from the Impacting the Future Now grants will never know Lynne. Her legacy of unselfishness will live through contributions to the foundation. In turn, recipients of foundation grants will contribute to NSDC's future through their individual efforts and successes, all because of Lynne.

My motivation to contribute to the foundation is to give back to an organization that significantly impacts who I am today as a professional and a person. When I contribute to the foundation, I continue to honor Lynne and her love for NSDC, and I know I make a difference in the professional lives of others.

— *Steve Wlodarczyk*

Impacting the Future Now supports NSDC's purpose as its guiding mission through four major scholarships and grants. The foundation has awarded more than $38,000 in monetary and in-kind donations to fund scholarships and grants to schools and school districts.

In this year's annual campaign, the foundation board honors NSDC as it celebrates its 40th birthday by setting a goal of $40,000. Make a contribution today in honor of this milestone.

Find a donation form and birthday card on NSDC's web site at **www.nsdc.org/getinvolved/foundation.cfm**. Pay tribute to NSDC's early leaders such as Lynne Chidley and Susan Loucks-Horsley and honor today's visionaries, including Stephanie Hirsh, Joellen Killion, and Dennis Sparks.

IMPACTING *the* FUTURE NOW FOUNDATION

NSDC CALENDAR

Nov. 15: Deadline for submitting manuscripts for June 2010 *JSD. Theme: The new central office.*
www.nsdc.org/news/jsd/themes.cfm

Dec. 5-9: NSDC's 41st Annual Conference, St. Louis, Mo.

Jan. 15: Deadline for submitting manuscripts for August 2010 *JSD. Theme: Social justice.*
www.nsdc.org/news/jsd/themes.cfm

Feb. 1: Deadline for submitting proposals to present at NSDC's 42nd Annual Conference in Atlanta, Ga., in December 2010.

NSDC opens the door
to professional learning
that ensures great teaching
for every student every day

A NEW DEFINITION

BY STEPHANIE HIRSH

Too few teachers experience the quality of professional development and teamwork that would enable them to be more effective educators each day. As advocates for professional learning, our job is to make sure that what we know is essential to good teaching is embedded in all teachers' lives.

Good teaching occurs when educators on teams are involved in a cycle in which they analyze data, determine student and adult learning goals based on that analysis, design joint lessons that use evidence-based strategies, have access to coaches for support in improving their classroom instruction, and then assess how their learning and teamwork affects student achievement.

Recognizing the need to ensure high-quality professional learning for every educator, NSDC is advocating for a powerful new definition of professional development based on this model of continuous improvement. NSDC is seeking legislative amendments to the definition of professional development being outlined in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. These amendments clarify which practices qualify for federal, state, and district funding, and specify

STEPHANIE HIRSH (stephanie.hirsh@nsdc.org) is executive director of the National Staff Development Council.

NSDC's position that professional development should directly impact a teacher's classroom practices and student achievement.

Effective professional development affects many teachers as opposed to some, and many students as opposed to a few. The new definition calls for every educator to engage in professional learning at the school as part of the workday. Professional learning should tap the expertise of educators in the school and at the district office, with support from universities and other external experts who help local educators address needs specific to their students and school improvement goals.

Success in changing the definition of quality professional development does not solely depend, however, on including new language in the reau-

The table on pp. 12-14 and 16 includes the elements of NSDC's definition of professional development, along with key points to support highlighted sections.

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thorization act. When schools and school systems adopt the definition and alter their own understanding of high-quality professional learning, teacher practices and student achievement will begin to change.

The new definition of professional development is a moral imperative. The inequity in teaching quality and educational resources across classrooms, schools, and districts denies some students the opportunities for academic success. These inequities can be addressed through effective professional learning within schools. When schools become "learning schools," every student benefits from every educator's expertise, and every educator grows professionally with the support of his or her colleagues. Collaborative professional learning is a powerful way to ensure great teaching for every student every day.

NSDC'S DEFINITION	KEY POINTS IN THE DEFINITION
(34) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT— The term "professional development" means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement —	Several significant research studies in the last decade have concluded that the length and focus of professional development matter in its impact on teaching quality and student achievement. Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley (2007) found that when teachers have an average of 49 hours of professional development in a single school year focused specifically on the curriculum they teach, student achievement increases 21 percentile points. Other researchers, including Garet, Birman, Porter, Desimone, & Herman (1999) and Cohen & Hill (2001) found similar results for sustained professional development.
(A) Professional development fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance and must be comprised of professional learning that: (1) is aligned with rigorous state student academic achievement standards as well as related local educational agency and school improvement goals; (2) is conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders;	Because teachers have traditionally worked in isolation and pursued their own professional development, their learning has benefited them individually and the students assigned to their classes. Successful corporations build teams, and all employees feel accountable and responsible for the company's operation and success (Farren, 1999; Gregory, 1999). High-quality professional development that includes teamwork fosters educators' sense of collective responsibility for all students rather than individuals' feelings of responsibility for some students. Professional development conducted in teams creates an environment of shared responsibility.
(3) primarily occurs several times per week among established teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff members where the teams of educators engage in a ...	Professionals are responsible for continuously improving their knowledge and practice. High-performing businesses understand this. Randy Nelson, dean of Pixar University, the professional development arm at one of this country's most successful movie production companies, said learning is the secret to the company's success. "We're trying to create a culture of learning, filled with lifelong learners," Nelson said (Taylor & LaBarre, 2006). "Every employee is encouraged to devote up to four hours a week, every week, to his or her education." Learning is part of everyone's work. In education, continuous improvement requires that districts make time for teachers to learn and improve their practice during the workday. Many schools set regular learning time in before- and after-school meetings, early release days, or other scheduled times. When teacher learning is a priority, schools can find strategies to schedule time for it.

NSDC'S DEFINITION	KEY POINTS IN THE DEFINITION
... continuous cycle of improvement that — (i) evaluates student, teacher, and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance; (ii) defines a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of the data; (iii) achieves the educator learning goals identified in subsection (A)(3)(ii) by implementing coherent, sustained, and evidence-based learning strategies, such as lesson study and the development of formative assessments, that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement;	American businesses compete for the Baldrige Award, which recognizes continuous improvement and associated results. While most schools believe in continuous improvement, they may not practice the process proven to produce results for students, including reviewing performance data, setting goals based on the data, implementing strategies to reach those goals, and then beginning the cycle again.
(iv) provides job-embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom;	A preponderance of research in both business and education shows that adults exposed to new practices in workshops and team meetings need on-the-job support to make new ideas part of their daily routines (Joyce & Calhoun, 1996; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Odden et al. (2007) conclude that states that invest in classroom-based coaches who provide such support reap greater benefits in student achievement as opposed to those implementing more costly and less effective innovations, including smaller class sizes or full-day kindergarten. In addition, when experienced employees with a system-level understanding regularly share their individual insights about their company's processes and problems, they successfully build employees' knowledge (Leonard & Swap, 2004).

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NSDC'S DEFINITION	KEY POINTS IN THE DEFINITION
(v) regularly assesses the effectiveness of the professional development in achieving identified learning goals, improving teaching, and assisting all students in meeting challenging state academic achievement standards;	Continually assessing professional practice and student learning can be challenging. Using formative assessments requires technical knowledge. Gaining this knowledge and using it effectively is essential to ensuring continuous improvement. School improvement specialist Mike Schmoker (2002) said substantial evidence shows that results are virtually inevitable when teachers work in teams to: • Focus substantially, though not exclusively, on assessed standards. • Review simple, readily available achievement data to set a limited number of measurable achievement goals in the lowest-scoring subjects or courses. • Work regularly together to design, adapt, and assess instructional strategies targeted directly at specific standards that students are not achieving according to assessment data (e.g. "measurement" in math; "voice" in writing; "sight reading" in music). Professional development and team-based learning must improve educators' practice and student learning. Educators must use ongoing assessments of their practices and their students' learning to determine the effect of learning teams' decisions. They then can determine whether the lessons they planned, the new strategies they used, and the explanations they devised helped students achieve what the teachers intended.
(vi) informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning; and	Michael Fullan (2000) said successful schools are places where teachers regularly focus their efforts on student work through assessment and then adjust their instructional practice to get better results. Few initiatives are backed by evidence that they raise achievement. Formative assessment is one of the few approaches proven to make a difference. Continuously identifying areas to improve, however, can occur only when teachers and principals have information about how instruction is affecting students. To have the information they need to determine where they have succeeded, where they may need slight modifications, or where they must completely change plans, educators need continuous evaluation. Continually evaluating practice and outcomes produces actions that lead to sustained improvement as opposed to incremental improvement or no improvement.

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NSDC'S DEFINITION	KEY POINTS IN THE DEFINITION
(vii) that may be supported by external assistance.	Educators who are guided by data on their students and school are in the best position to identify what help they need to address their most important challenges. Occasionally, the school may not have answers and must seek assistance from outside experts. King and Newmann (2000) found that "ensuring the constant interaction of great ideas inside and outside an organization promotes improvement for all." When GE wanted to boost its leadership practices, CEO Jack Welch sought help from an outside expert, Noel Tichy. The result: An organizational culture developed in which employees embraced teaching and learning, emphasized results, and were able to adapt and change (Rothenberg, 2003). The company achieved its goals under Tichy's skillful guidance. Any organization that enlists external assistance, however, must ensure that the assistance aligns with the organization's internal goals.
(B) The process outlined in (A) may be supported by activities such as courses, workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences that: (1) must address the learning goals and objectives established for professional development by educators at the school level; (2) advance the ongoing school-based professional development; and (3) are provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities outside the school such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations.	Teachers often criticize professional development for not addressing their students' specific needs. Principals' criticism is that professional development rarely addresses the school's specific needs. Traditionally, central office administrators plan principals' and teachers' professional development although they have limited capacity to specifically address the needs identified in each teacher's or school's student data. As a result, they design professional learning that may impact some, but not all, teachers. Some districts have allowed teachers to plan their own professional development, primarily by having teachers choose workshops or conferences to attend. This approach, too, leads to impact for some teachers and their students as opposed to more powerful approaches designed to improve the practices of all teachers to affect all students. Traditional professional development relies almost exclusively on outside experts and materials without integrating these resources into existing systems of peer collaboration. The intent of the new definition is to leverage outside expertise to inform and improve the practice of educators inside schools. The definition suggests that outside experts make important contributions, but the tremendous expertise of teachers within the school is required to determine their specific learning needs and then to seek others' help to address these needs. King and Newmann (2000) found that teachers are most likely to learn when they collaborate with colleagues both within and outside of their schools and when they access external researchers and program developers. Under this scenario, schools and teams become continuous improvement organizations, and, as Brandt (2003) states, true learning organizations exchange information frequently with relevant external sources.

How do we stand?

Purpose: To assess the school's professional development in relationship to NSDC's definition.

Time: Approximately one hour.

Materials: A copy of NSDC's definition of professional development for each participant. The full text of the definition is available at **www.nsdc.org/standfor/definition.cfm.**

STEPS

1. Give participants these instructions:

   a. Using the elements of NSDC's definition of professional development, rate where the school stands on each element using a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest rating. Add notes about evidence you considered in assigning your rating. (10 minutes)

   b. Move into small groups of about five. Share your ratings with one another, and discuss as a team the evidence you considered in your rating. (20 minutes)

   c. Ask a reporter from your group to share one or two insights with the large group. (10 minutes)

2. Debrief. Discuss key lessons as a faculty from the small group reports.

RATING SCALE

1. Our school's professional development does not include this element.
2. Our school's professional development occasionally includes this element.
3. Our school's professional development includes this element most of the time.
4. Our school's professional development aligns perfectly with this element.

How to order the book

One of NSDC's fundamental beliefs is that schools' most complex problems are best solved by educators collaborating and learning together. Research increasingly acknowledges the added value of collaboration among educators as contributing to improving teaching quality and student learning. When educators learn together, we believe, student opportunities for academic success increase significantly. Further, we believe that the closer professional learning is to the classroom in which students learn, the more deeply connected it will be to student learning needs and student academic standards.

Becoming a Learning School offers the guidance, structure, and tools that classroom teachers, coaches, principals, and central office staff need to understand their role in the success of collaborative professional learning. This book is a critical resource in transforming schools into places where NSDC's definition of professional learning comes to life each day for every student and every educator.
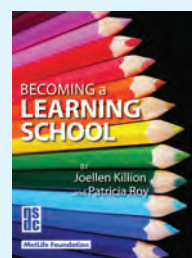
**Becoming a Learning School
(177 pages + CD)
Item #B423
Price: $60 nonmembers,
$48 members
Order at 800-727-7288 or
store.nsdc.org**

Definition elements	Rating	Evidence
comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement		
(A) fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance		
(A) (1) aligned with state and district standards for student achievement		
(A) (2) conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders		
(A) (3) primarily occurs several times per week among established teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff members in a continuous cycle of improvement		
(A) (3) (i) evaluates student, teacher, and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance;		
(A) (3) (ii) defines a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of the data;		
(A) (3) (iii) achieves the educator learning goals identified above by implementing coherent, sustained, and evidenced-based learning strategies, such as lesson study and the development of formative assessments, that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement;		
(A) (3) (iv) provides job-embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom		
(A) (3) (v) regularly assesses the effectiveness of the professional development in achieving identified learning goals, improving teaching, and assisting all students in meeting challenging state academic achievement standards;		
(A) (3) (vi) informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning;		
(A) (3) (vii) may be supported by external assistance.		
(B) The process outlined in (A) may be supported by activities such as courses, workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences that: (1) must address the learning goals and objectives established for professional development by educators at the school level;		
(B) (2) advance the ongoing school-based professional development; and		
(B) (3) are provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities outside the school, such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations.		

STRENGTH TRAINING

INSTITUTES PUMP UP TEACHERS' ROLES AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

BY PEG MONGIELLO, DEBORAH BRADY, GEORGE JOHNSON, AND JILL HARRISON BERG

When Deb Brady, the new assistant superintendent of the North Middlesex Regional School District, came into the district as part of a new leadership team in 2006, she asked teachers from the high school about their hopes for the year. One teacher's reply made quite an impression on her: "I just wish people would start to respect the high school."

Brady knew that the school and the district had urgent challenges.

Isolated programs provided rigor to only some students, student achievement scores showed room for improvement, and a recent accreditation review had raised questions about the high school's scheduling, teaching techniques, and time on learning.

This large high school was not seen as a welcoming place by parents and students.

There was a lot to accomplish in the district,

located in north central Massachusetts near the New Hampshire border. The district's leadership team was confident that the solution lay in instructional improvement. What concerned Brady was the tone of discouragement she heard from the teachers. With such pressing needs in the district, the leadership team could not do it alone.

North Middlesex had few new resources for addressing its challenges, but the leadership team noted that the district already had some critical assets in place. High school department heads, middle school curricu-

Deb Brady

lum leaders, and a cadre of strong elementary teachers held coordinator positions across the district and were well-placed to take on instructional leadership roles. In addition to the instructional improvement possibilities, the team knew that creating teacher leaders could help improve teacher empowerment, morale, and motivation. But teachers would need support to add a new instructional

leadership function to their roles. The district recognized that it had neither the capacity nor the experience with developing teacher leaders to provide training to teachers for these roles, as well as to prepare school leaders and the rest of the faculty for the changes these new roles would create in their work. The leadership team recognized that it would be worthwhile to invest some of its limited resources in outside help for this initiative to distribute instructional leadership and build capacity.

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After consultation with teachers and leaders throughout the district and with support from Teachers21, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit organization promoting educational research, policy, and practice for a comprehensive approach to professional learning, Brady and her leadership team colleagues set about creating a system that could sustain teachers' ongoing, job-embedded professional learning to lead to instructional improvement, professional renewal, and success for all students.

BUILDING TEACHER LEADERS

In the first phase of this initiative, Teachers21 provided a summer institute, "Developing Strong Teacher Leaders," for 27 K-12 teachers from eight schools. See box on p. 22 for a description of this institute. Some of the participating teacher leaders were recruited by school leaders, while others emerged from among department heads and classroom teachers who showed interest in changing the way teachers teach and students learn.

The institute's aim was to support the new teacher leaders to facilitate their colleagues in forming learning communities. Together the teachers explored the purpose and function of professional learning communities and developed a plan to work with their colleagues to open their classrooms so that student learning could become the collective focus of all. The institute also built teacher leaders' group facilitation skills, such as establishing norms, designing agendas, leading meetings, and navigating difficult conversations. The institute's work continued throughout the year in six follow-up sessions, providing teachers with opportunities to learn, practice, and reflect upon key instruc-

tional leadership protocols for using data, setting SMART goals, and looking at student work.

Through participation in these sessions, teacher enthusiasm grew and spread, supporting them in their work to establish professional learning communities. Over time, their participation also enabled them to become effective conduits through which information about effective practices flowed among teachers in individual schools.

BRINGING THE FULL FACULTY ON BOARD

Before school opened in September 2006, the district's teacher leaders partnered with Teachers21 consultants to provide a professional learning kickoff day on which all 350 of the district's K-12 teachers worked to develop a shared language for collaboration and a common understanding of the power of professional learning communities. Teachers' new commitments to establishing learning

NSDC'S DEFINITION

KEY POINTS

- Professional development is conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders.
- Professional development occurs several times a week among established teams.
- Professional development may be supported by external assistance.

communities were supported by the district's commitment of additional time for collaboration. This required a school calendar that was unlike anything teachers or parents had experienced; however, district leaders recognized that if teachers were to collaboratively set goals, change their practices, and assess their successes, time had to be dedicated for this work. The new calendar included 11 early release days and two full professional development days strategically placed throughout the school year. Twice, two of the early release days were scheduled on consecutive days to facilitate the extension of specific objectives, such as districtwide vertical teaming on curriculum.

DEVELOPING STRONG TEACHER LEADERS

The course "Developing Strong Teacher Leaders," offered on-site in North Middlesex schools, provided participants with the research and knowledge base to develop and practice instructional leadership skills to engage the full faculty in working collaboratively to embed professional learning opportunities in their teams and schools.

Module one: Establishing expectations, vision, goals, and community.

Module two: What is a professional learning community, norm setting, team design.

Module three: Reflection and sharing, active listening, difficult conversations, consensus building.

Module four: Change processes, timelines, and action planning.

Module five: Facilitation skills and SMART goal setting.

Module six: Case studies, action plans, and next steps.

These six modules were addressed across nine sessions. The first three days were eight-hour days in the summer; an additional 36 hours were held throughout the year in six six-hour sessions. This graduate-level course offered participants the opportunity to earn four graduate credits from Endicott College.

ADMINISTRATORS' NEW ROLES

The new instructional leadership roles of the teacher leaders caused a shift in administrators' roles. The new distribution of instructional leadership had to be coordinated, negotiated, and managed. Thus, another key component of this change agenda was administrative development. All building principals had participated in the kickoff day on the power of professional learning communities and now they needed to improve their skills for supporting and sustaining this work. Teachers21 consultants supported building administrators and high school department heads in developing a walk-through protocol during the first year. In small groups, they discussed instructional practices, assessment strategies, and classroom management skills. Then two or three administrators and a Teachers21 coach walked through classrooms and debriefed their observations. The data they collected on successful strategies and targeted areas of improvement became an important resource for the communities' work to improve instruction and led to wider participation in classroom walk-throughs and to peer observations among teachers.

NETWORKING ACROSS COMMUNITIES

In North Middlesex, it was likely that students in one 3rd-grade class were experiencing a very different program from 3rd graders across town. The district hadn't yet established a districtwide focus and hadn't emphasized collaborative decision making. With the new districtwide commitment to school improvement, the fledgling communities in each school began to learn from one another. Teachers collaborated as critical friends both horizontally and vertically. In horizontal team meetings, communities from across the district met at each grade level to examine student work. These discussions helped educa-

tors recognize the need to come to consensus on what students in each grade level needed to know, understand, and be able to do across the district. Next, teachers worked collaboratively on assessing vertical alignment. Teachers met with their colleagues from the grade levels above and below to gain perspective on the flow of content that students experience and to improve alignment of the sequence of skills acquisition. Such meetings were enlightening and often led teachers to identify important new questions in their work.

Initially, a team of Teachers21 consultants facilitated the learning community meetings, providing guided practice for teacher leaders during the meetings and focused debriefings afterwards. With the ongoing support of the Teachers21 team and district administrators, teacher leaders met to plan a common agenda and gradually assumed full responsibility for facilitating the meetings, planning and implementing strategies based on specific objectives.

ACCESS TO NEW KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

In professional learning communities, teachers and leaders can share their existing knowledge, but they often come up with questions that they can't answer among themselves. They need opportunities to acquire new knowledge. North Middlesex established what they now call backbone courses to meet teachers' needs. During summer 2007, the district developed a series of institutes — "Writing Across the Disciplines," "Math Study," "The Skillful Teacher" (based upon the book by Jon Saphier), and an expanded "Developing Strong Teacher Leaders II" — and engaged nearly every teacher in the district in focused, collaborative learning. These courses were repeated in 2008, and many are now required for new teachers within

their first three years in the district. The courses provide teachers with a common professional language that supports self-assessment, goal-setting, and implementation of goals within and among the learning communities.

EDUCATING PARENTS

Educating parents was a key step in this change process. Their children's school year was longer as a result of more days off throughout the year. North Middlesex leaders needed to make sure that parents understood the benefits of improved instructional strategies, more focused curriculum, and assessment practices for increased student achievement. Teacher leaders made presentations to the school committee highlighting the numerous benefits of the development of a strong, districtwide professional learning culture. In addition, parents were informed about teachers' professional learning projects through newsletters and open houses.

LET THE TEACHERS LEAD THE LEARNING

Today, all teachers share a role in leading the learning. The new structure for professional learning that has taken two years to establish in North Middlesex has created the conditions for a relatively self-sustaining professional learning system. While Teachers21consultants initially assisted by identifying needs, devising a sustainable structure to support the changes, and providing learning opportunities to build the capacity of the teacher leaders and administrators, today Teachers21 acts as a partner or consultant-in-residence providing assistance as needed. Teachers21 has also continued its leadership coaching role, supporting teacher leaders to be successful as they run horizontal and vertical team meetings, orchestrate content groups to develop common assessments, and lead walk-throughs to learn from each others' instruction-

North Middlesex Regional School District
Townsend, Mass.

Number of schools: 8
Enrollment: 4,267
Staff: 275
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	95.2%
Black:	0.5%
Hispanic:	1.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	0.8%
Native American:	0.2%
Other:	1.4%

Limited English proficient: 0.2%
Languages spoken: 5
Free/reduced lunch: 11.4%
Special education: 17.8%
Contact: Deborah Brady, assistant superintendent
E-mail: dbrady@nmiddlesex.mec.edu

al practices. In these times of shrinking resources and increasing demands, this model of professional learning has enabled North Middlesex to do more with less by drawing upon internal expertise and resources to meet professional learning needs.

While the district once had five very different elementary schools, it now features one solid, core elementary program across the schools. The two once-divergent middle schools are now unified by a shared commitment to the young adolescent, and the high school has left behind its poor reputation, with a single, rigorous program of study with schoolwide rubrics that clearly articulate student success for all students.

The professional culture of the school system has changed as well. After opening the doors of their classrooms, teachers are now committed to working collaboratively to support, problem solve, and plan together. Teachers are applying the skills they have learned to conduct peer observations and have reflective conversations with their colleagues. Taking advantage of opportunities to observe fellow teachers, they celebrate the fact that the classroom walls have come down,

and collaboration has increased as their capacity and confidence have grown with success. Most importantly, the teachers who have become each others' coaches have led this learning. They have redefined what it means to be a colleague in the North Middlesex Regional School District.

The changes have already produced tangible results. Student performance on state tests has shown a slight increase across the district as instruction is more directly aligned to standards and assessments. For example, in 2006-07, students' 10th-grade performance in English increased from 81% to 83% advanced or proficient; 8th grade, 83% to 85%; and 4th grade, 45% to 48%. Math scores over 2006-08 show similar steady improvement: 10th grade, 82% to 85%; 8th grade, 48% to 53%; and 4th grade, 33% to 42%. The district achieved more impressive results at the high school. With greater access to more rigorous curricula and better instruction, student participation and scores in Advanced Placement exams and SATs have risen. In 2005, 157 high school students took AP exams, and 61 received a 4 or 5. In 2007, 182 students took the exams, with 82 receiving a 4 or 5. Similarly, the 228 students who took the SATs in 2006 received an average score of 513 in verbal reasoning and 526 in math. In 2008, a total of 254 students averaged 522 in verbal reasoning and 532 in math. In addition, as parents' opinions of their school system have improved, more parents are making the choice to keep their children in the North Middlesex schools. Whereas the families of 89 students opted out of the North Middlesex schools in 2005, only 65 families took that option this year in 2009. But for Deb Brady, probably the most important sign of success is that teachers now say they are proud to work in North Middlesex. ■

FOCUS, FEEDBACK, FOLLOW-THROUGH

Professional development basics guide district's plan

BY LORI RENFRO AND ADRIEL GRIESHABER

PHOTO BY LAURIE KING/DYSART UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Amy Martin, left, gives feedback to Sharon Densford at Kingswood Elementary School based on a classroom observation using the T4S Protocol.

Reading coach Amy Martin stepped into the classroom of 2nd-grade teacher Sharon Densford, who was asking students comprehension questions and reviewing the main idea of a reading passage. Putting pen to pad, Martin began collecting data on what Densford and the students were saying and doing, recording student engagement levels as the lesson progressed.

During a discussion afterward, Martin praised Densford for stating the lesson objective to her students and consistently using academic language throughout the lesson. She then shared ideas for implementing higher-level questioning to help raise student engagement levels. Reminding Densford of the high reading levels of her students, Martin encouraged her to create questions that would engage the students in learning and encourage thinking beyond the comprehension level. At the end of the conversation, Densford reflected on how she could accomplish this and asked Martin to come into her classroom the next day to model this strategy. After the model lesson, Densford implemented the suggestions Martin had given her and immediately raised her student engagement levels. Densford reflected that it was a simple change to her instruction that made a significant impact on her students. She also noted that students loved the new engagement and questioning strategies that she implemented.

This example highlights what is

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becoming common practice in the Dysart Unified School District in Surprise, Ariz.: supporting teachers through differentiated, job-embedded professional learning, using specific feedback as the vehicle to impact classroom instruction. This process has interrupted the status quo, sending ripples of excitement through what had been stagnant waters. No longer content to deliver large group, one-size-fits-all staff development, the district's recent emphasis on differentiated professional learning has pushed teachers to reconsider their mental model of professional development.

The effective professional learning implemented in the district is grounded in what educators here believe are three professional development basics: a focus on quality teaching; opportunities for specific feedback; and follow-through to ensure a high level of implementation. The payoff is increased student learning as an outcome of reducing the gap between what we know and what we do.

FACING THE FACTS

Dysart invested a significant amount of time delivering professional development focused on research-based instructional practices. Walkthroughs conducted by the educational services team, however, indicated that these strategies were not being implemented on a widespread basis in classrooms. In addition, survey data collected from administration of the NSDC Standards Assessment Inventory indicated a lack of alignment in many cases between school-level professional development practices and NSDC's Standards for Staff Development (NSDC, 2001). Dysart's professional development leadership team took up the challenge to develop a long-term professional development plan, using NSDC's standards as a guiding force. Following the guidance in NSDC's Learning standard to allow teachers

many opportunities to practice new skills and to receive feedback on their performance, the district implemented a professional learning model that emphasizes collaboration between teachers and coaches.

DEFINING QUALITY TEACHING

To effectively implement its differentiated professional learning model, the district relies on locally developed Innovation Configuration (IC) maps (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987; Roy & Hord, 2003; Roy & Hord, 2004). Dysart's IC maps, which are organized around four categories and four levels (see example on p. 30), "make very concrete what the expectations are for implementation of a new program or practice" (Richardson, 2004). Instructional coaches use this tool to assist teachers in reaching desired outcomes. For example, one instructional coach is helping a teacher move to the high-fidelity column in the areas of planning and teaching. The coach, using the IC map as a guide, supports the teacher in thinking through how her literacy stations could be better aligned to specific student needs, supporting the teacher's theory that differentiation is critical in moving students who are not making adequate gains in reading.

A second tool has made a big difference in the way our educational community talks about instruction. The Teach for Success protocol (T4S) (see description at right) helps us further define what we mean by quality teaching (WestEd, 2008b). Administrators, coaches, and teachers across the district come together to collaboratively discuss and examine the practice of teaching, with a universal understanding of what a concept (e.g. student engagement) means. Schools can focus on specific areas of instruction where the need is greatest. For example, Donna Eastin, a coach at Rancho Gabriela Elementary

NSDC'S DEFINITION

KEY POINTS

- Professional development fosters collective responsibility for student success.
- Professional development includes job-embedded coaching and other forms of assistance.
- Teams engage in a continuous cycle of improvement that includes data analysis, goal setting, and identification of student and educator learning goals.

School, explains, "Our focus from the first year consisted of posted and communicated student-friendly objectives, mandatory student engagement throughout the learning, and differentiation strategies."

PROVIDING SPECIFIC FEEDBACK

So how do we meet the specific needs of each teacher? According to Speck (1996), opportunities must be built into professional development that "allow the learner to practice the learning and receive structured, helpful feedback." Therefore, instead of relying on unfocused, random acts of coaching, instructional coaches have consistent, specific coaching conversa-

THE T4S PROTOCOL

The T4S classroom observation protocol, which outlines six components of effective teaching, is a research-based tool that districts and schools can use to determine and plan for the professional development needs of their teachers.

tions with teachers, using the T4S protocol and a data collection process called scripting to collect the data that supports these conversations. (See "How can scripting improve teacher practice?" at right.)

Providing specific feedback "interrupts defensive reasoning," allows people to "recognize and eliminate error," and "helps people see the discrepancy between what they think they are doing and what they are actually doing" (WestEd, 2008a). The scripting process forms the foundation by allowing reflective dialogue to take place in an unbiased manner, highlighting cause-effect relationships that help weed out inconsistent or ineffective practices or reinforce and incorporate effective ones.

FOLLOW-THROUGH LEADS TO RESULTS

In spring 2008, between 79% and 90% of the district's K-3 teachers were demonstrating at least level 2 behaviors in at least two categories of the reading IC map, exceeding our first benchmark by 19%. On Arizona's state assessment, AIMS (Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards), the percent of 3rd-grade

WHAT IS A DATA SWEEP?

A data sweep is an organized procedure used to collect data and monitor instructional practices over time. School teams walk through classrooms, collecting data on specific areas of instruction.

For example, a school might monitor the attributes of student engagement with a data sweep. During this process, leadership teams walk through one or more grade levels and observe for a two- to three-minute period in each classroom. The team leader typically uses a form to check off whether or not the teacher is implementing particular practices or behaviors in the classroom. These data are then compiled by grade level and used by the school to determine future professional development needs.

HOW CAN SCRIPTING IMPROVE TEACHER PRACTICE?

Coaches record and collect data on what is happening in the lesson they are observing. They keep a detailed record, including actual words of the teacher and students, activities used in connection with the lesson, and the number of students on and off task. Based on these detailed notes, instructional coaches can support teachers in identifying effective and ineffective instructional strategies.

students meeting and exceeding Arizona state standards has increased 15 points in reading and 11 points in writing. Before program implementation, the percent of 3rd graders passing the reading portion of AIMS was below the state average. Now the district exceeds the state average. Dysart has also seen growth on the Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), which assesses acquisition of early literacy skills. The DIBELS benchmark levels have increased between 4% and 11% in kindergarten through 3rd grade.

The district attributes these results in part to instituting accountability measures and building a system of follow-up support. Educational services teams visit classrooms regularly. Building-level teams conduct walk-throughs and data sweeps to determine the use of instructional strategies. Instructional coaches conduct classroom observations to follow through on classroom implementation of district- and school-level professional development (see "What is a data sweep?" at left). These data are used at all levels to monitor implementation and plan professional development. The district's follow-through processes will assist educators

in moving from compliance to commitment, further reducing the knowing-doing gaps.

LESSONS LEARNED

Adults need feedback on "how they are doing and the results of their efforts" (Speck, 1996). For some teachers, however, the feedback process has been difficult to embrace. Deprivatizing practice brings down walls and exposes vulnerabilities, creating situations in which coaches have to contend with reluctant or resistant teachers. The training program for coaches cannot focus on content and instructional pedagogy. Skilled instructional coaches need to be able to "establish emotional connections with collaborating teachers" to develop a partnership approach, described by Jim Knight in *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction* (Knight, 2007).

The district has also learned that, while building relationships is critically important, it is very easy for coaches to slip too often into what Joellen Killion (2008) calls a light coaching mode in which coaches want to "build and maintain relationships more than they want to improve teaching and learning." To change practice and impact student learning, coaches have to incorporate heavy coaching, which requires a coach to "ask thought-provoking questions, uncover assumptions, and engage teachers in dialogue about their beliefs and goals" (Killion, 2008). To ensure coaches are finding the right balance between light and heavy coaching, Dysart has put into place "coaching the coach" structures in which instructional coaches also receive specific feedback on coaching practices.

LOOKING AHEAD

In their article, "What might be: Open the door to a better future," Rick and Becky DuFour (2007) write that "the greatest advances in profes-

Innovation Configuration map

K-8 READING INSTRUCTION/TEACHING LEARNING CYCLE

THE TEACHER ...	1 High fidelity	2	3	4 Nonuse
Assess	Consistently uses formative and summative assessments (e.g. weekly, unit, and diagnostic assessments from core program).	Incorporates formative and summative assessments (e.g. weekly, unit, and diagnostic assessments from core program) but is inconsistent in their use.	Seldom uses formative assessments; more emphasis on summative.	Does not use assessments from the core reading program.
Evaluate	Reflects on data from multiple sources and uses data to identify next teaching steps (e.g. analyzes assessment rubrics in order to determine student level of understanding and to identify student needs of differentiated instructional support).	Reflects on data from multiple sources and begins to use data to identify possible teaching points for differentiated instruction.	Reflects on data from limited sources, but does not evaluate data in terms of identifying next teaching steps.	Does not have assessment data or doesn't use data.
Plan	Shows in-depth knowledge of students and core reading program materials (e.g. teaches skills determined by core assessment results, plans for flexible, differentiated instruction using recommended core materials and considers and plans for different learning styles).	Shows some knowledge of students and core reading program materials (e.g. beginning to use assessment results to influence teaching, plans for flexible, differentiated instruction using some of the core reading materials, and plans for different learning styles)	Shows limited knowledge of students and core reading program materials (e.g. does not understand the connection between core program assessment data and instructional planning, shows very little student differentiation and minimal use of core resources).	Does not have knowledge of students or core reading program materials for instructional planning.
Teach	Consistently uses core program reading materials as intended and has in-depth knowledge of differentiated instruction (e.g. teaches targeted skills and strategies, differentiates instruction based on student skill needs, teaches higher-order thinking/questioning skills and elicits student engagement).	Randomly uses core program reading materials and has some knowledge of differentiated instruction (e.g. teaches some targeted skills and strategies, beginning to differentiate based on student needs, and some eliciting of student engagement).	Seldom uses core reading materials and limited knowledge of differentiated instruction (e.g. rarely teaches targeted skills and strategies, shows minimal use of differentiated instruction, and does not elicit student engagement).	Does not teach core program reading and does not have knowledge of differentiated instruction (e.g. teaches whole-group instruction with noncore program materials).

Source: Dysart Unified School District, Surprise, Ariz.

sional development will come not from identifying new strategies or processes, but rather from applying what we already know to be best practice." As little as four years ago, the Dysart Unified School District was still delivering predominantly one-size-fits-all staff development, with limited alignment to the vision articulated by NSDC's Standards for Staff Development. There was minimal accountability for teachers to implement newly learned strategies in the classroom. The district is now taking purposeful steps to differentiate professional learning for its teachers, following the advice that that "if schools are to increase the performance levels of all students, all educators must experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work" (Mizell, 2007). This commitment to differentiated professional learning via specific feedback is being communicated at all levels of the system. Dysart is beginning to see positive changes in classroom implementation and student learning. In the words of kindergarten teacher Miranda Linzey: "There have been so many moments of aha for me. I have become a better teacher tenfold because of the feedback!"

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Dysart Unified School District
Surprise, Ariz.

Number of schools: 23
Grades: K-12
Enrollment: 23,438
Staff: 2,488
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	49.7%
Black:	9.8%
Hispanic:	36.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	3.2%
Native American:	1.1%
Other:	0%

Limited English proficient: 6.5%
Languages spoken: 35
Free/reduced lunch: 48.4%
Special education: 12.8%
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FAST TRACK
TO LITERACY

Kentucky district targets struggling readers in urban schools

THOMAS R. GUSKEY, MARCO A. MUÑOZ, AND JENNIFER ABERLI

Improving the literacy skills of struggling high school readers remains one of the greatest challenges educators face today. Students who are two or more years behind grade level in their language arts skills have little chance of successfully completing a rigorous program of studies in high school and are the most likely to drop out. Accelerating the learning progress of such students is the explicit goal of the Ramp-Up Program in Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Ky. Jefferson County Public Schools is a diverse, metropolitan school district

that includes 150 schools serving approximately 97,000 students, 55% of whom come from economically disadvantaged homes and qualify for free or reduced lunch benefits.

PLANNING

In planning the Ramp-Up Program and its accompanying professional development, school and district leaders followed the backward planning model outlined by Guskey (2001a & b). They began by identifying student learning outcomes they wanted to improve and evidence believed to best reflect those out-

comes. In this case, literacy skills and particularly the reading comprehension skills of struggling high school students were of foremost importance. The evidence best reflecting those skills was students' reading comprehension scores on the Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT), which is part of Kentucky's statewide assessment system.

Next, school and district leaders sought to identify the instructional practices that, if implemented well, would be most likely to bring about those improvements. An investigation of research on practices and programs

This article describes the evaluation awarded the "Best Staff Development Evaluation in 2008" by the National Staff Development Council. A more detailed report of the evaluation was presented at the 2008 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

designed to enhance the literacy skills of secondary school students led them to the Ramp-Up Program. This program involves a two-year course designed to accelerate the learning progress of high school students who are two or more years behind grade level in their English and language arts skills. Activities focus on helping students make rapid progress toward becoming fluent readers, developing wider vocabularies, and comprehending grade-level texts through a variety of instructional strategies. Pilot testing of the program showed it to have a significant positive effect on students' scores on norm-referenced reading and language arts assessments (Muñoz, 2007). Another study evaluated the effectiveness of the program and the associated professional development model, focusing on the effect on students' scores on criterion-referenced reading assessments (Muñoz, Guskey, & Aberli, 2009).

Third, leaders considered the organizational support needed to guarantee high-quality implementation of the Ramp-Up Program. Two aspects of support seemed most crucial: the ongoing, sustained support of building leaders and ready access to expertise in order to address problems quickly and efficiently. To ensure

building leaders' support, the program was first explained at a special gathering of all secondary school principals. In addition, principals and lead teachers were included in introductory professional development sessions where the necessary follow-up and support were outlined. To make certain that program and literacy expertise were readily available, a program coordinator was appointed to guide the initial training, conduct follow-up sessions, and provide ongoing support and assistance to teachers involved in implementing the program.

School district leaders, in consultation with literacy experts and educators familiar with the Ramp-Up Program, then outlined the knowledge and skills high school teachers would need to implement the program with a high degree of fidelity. This became the basis for designing the initial professional development and follow-up sessions. The format made clear that high-quality implementation would require participating teachers to have multiple, structured opportunities to develop materials and practice their skills, receive feedback on their efforts, and then collaboratively adapt the materials and further refine their approaches.

THE RAMP-UP PROGRAM

The theoretical framework behind the Ramp-Up Program stems from current research on high school literacy. The program includes:

- **Independent reading** in which students read a book of their own choosing at their ability level (Allington, 2001; Beers, 2003);
- **Read-aloud/think-aloud/talk-aloud,** where students hear proficient readers make explicit their thoughts and the problems they

KEY POINTS

- Professional development achieves learning goals by implementing coherent, sustained, and evidence-based learning strategies that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement.
- Professional development informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning.
- Professional development regularly assesses its effectiveness.

encounter as they read (Davey, 1983; Hahn, 2002; Richardson, 2000);
- **Work period:** Whole- and small-group instruction that provides students with texts appropriate to their level and guides them in applying what they have learned when reading in other materials (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996);
- **Work period:** Writing instruction in which students learn the stages of the writing process and then write in the genres they are reading (Pearson, 1994); and
- **Cross-age tutoring** that pairs older students with elementary students for tutoring in reading (Labbo & Teale, 1990).

IMPLEMENTATION

Principals nominated teachers for the Ramp-Up Program based on their schools' needs and the teachers' agreement. A total of 40 10th-grade English and language arts teachers

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from 18 high schools were selected to participate the first year. These teachers took part in a three-day summer institute in which they learned about the elements of the Ramp-Up Program and worked collaboratively to develop implementation strategies, practice, and gain feedback. All teachers also attended five, three-hour follow-up sessions every six weeks during the school year. These follow-up sessions, led by the program coordinator, were held after school and played a vital role in program implementation. They offered participating teachers the chance to share their successes, discuss their problems, and then collaborate to develop workable solutions. They also gave teachers time to cooperatively plan additional instructional units and accompanying classroom activities.

In addition, the program coordinator scheduled regular visits to participating teachers' classrooms to offer assistance, feedback, and support. Teachers also could gain immediate help through phone calls or online access to the program coordinator. The program coordinator would also schedule additional visits, sometimes demonstrating techniques or modeling effective strategies on an as-needed basis.

In the second year of implementation, teachers new to the program were nominated either by school principals or by experienced Ramp-Up teachers. The new teachers participated in a similar three-day summer institute directed by the program coordinator but facilitated by experienced program veterans. All experienced teachers also took part in a one-day refresher institute in which

> **High-quality implementation would require participating teachers to have multiple, structured opportunities to develop materials and practice their skills, receive feedback on their efforts, and then collaboratively adapt the materials and further refine their approaches.**

Jefferson County Public Schools
Louisville, Ky.

Number of schools: 90 elementary, 24 middle, 21 high, 20 other learning centers
Enrollment: 95,218 students
Staff: 6,000+ teachers
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	53.0%
Black:	35.9%
Hispanic:	4.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	2.6%
Native American:	0.1%
Other:	3.7%

Limited English proficient: 5.3%
Languages spoken: 95
Free/reduced lunch: 62.2%
Special education: 14.3%
Contact: Marco A. Muñoz, evaluation specialist, marco.munoz@jefferson.kyschools.us

they reviewed their previous work and collaboratively planned for the next year. Both new and experienced teachers were included in the follow-up sessions and the classroom visits by the program coordinator during the second year.

EVALUATION

The five-level evaluation model outlined in *Evaluating Professional Development* by Guskey (2000) provided our framework for evaluating of the effectiveness of the Ramp-Up Program. The model begins with participants' reactions to the experience (Level 1), considers participants' learning (Level 2), looks at organization support and change (Level 3), documents participants' use or implementation (Level 4), and finally assesses impact on student learning (Level 5). Beginning with the desired student outcomes and then working backward through the five levels in the backward planning process (Guskey, 2001a & b) compelled us to address the most crucial evaluation issues before program implementation began (Muñoz, 2005).

Our evaluation was an explorato-

ry, quantitative investigation supplemented with qualitative data to clarify issues brought to light by the quantitative evidence. For Level 1, we used pre- and post-satisfaction questionnaires administered online following the summer institute and after each of the follow-up sessions during the school year. This anonymous questionnaire consisted of 21 items covering the content, context, process, and results of each professional development experience.

At Level 2, we employed pre- and post-knowledge assessments for all teachers taking part in the summer institute and refresher institute. This assessment included six rating-scale items developed by the program coordinator with assistance from the district's research department. Items measured the degree to which participants acquired the intended knowledge and skills from the professional development.

For Level 3, we assessed school and district organizational support using another questionnaire developed collaboratively by the program coordinator and an evaluation specialist from the district's research department. This questionnaire included 15 rating-scale items designed to assess professional development support, program implementation support, and other forms of organizational support and change. We administered this questionnaire in the fall to all Ramp-Up teachers and to the principals/administrators from their schools to check for agreement and consistency in response patterns.

To determine participants' use of the new knowledge and skills at Level 4, we used direct observations. Two trained observers visited Ramp-Up teachers' classrooms in the fall and in the spring to determine both the degree and quality of program implementation. To guide their observations, we created an observation rubric based on critical program ele-

ments related to academic standards; rituals and routines; and pedagogy, literacy, and assessment. Observers rated their observation of these program elements as: (1) nonproductive practice, (2) limited practice, (3) partially operational practice, and (4) fully operational practice. We shared the rubric with teachers during the summer institute and also used the results from each observation to offer teachers guided feedback on their implementation efforts.

For assessing the impact of Ramp-Up on the students at Level 5, we used a matched treatment control group, pre-posttest design (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 1999; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Predictive Assessment Series (PAS) results were used as a diagnostic measure to match treatment and control students on their prior achievement. Results from the statewide assessment in reading (Kentucky Department of Education, 2005) provided the primary evidence of the program's effects. We divided the Ramp-Up classrooms into high- and low-implementation groups based on the classroom observation results (Level 4) to determine the influence of the degree of program implementation. We also compared high- and low-implementation classrooms to matched comparison (control) classrooms from the same participating school.

> **Our findings revealed strikingly positive effects at all levels from the Ramp-Up program.**

RESULTS

Our findings revealed strikingly positive effects at all levels from the Ramp-Up program. They also helped us determine where changes would likely be needed to improve the program's effectiveness.

Level 1 data on participants' reactions showed that participating teachers were exceptionally satisfied with

High school reading novices (2000-07)

PERCENT OF STUDENTS SCORING AT THE NOVICE LEVEL IN READING
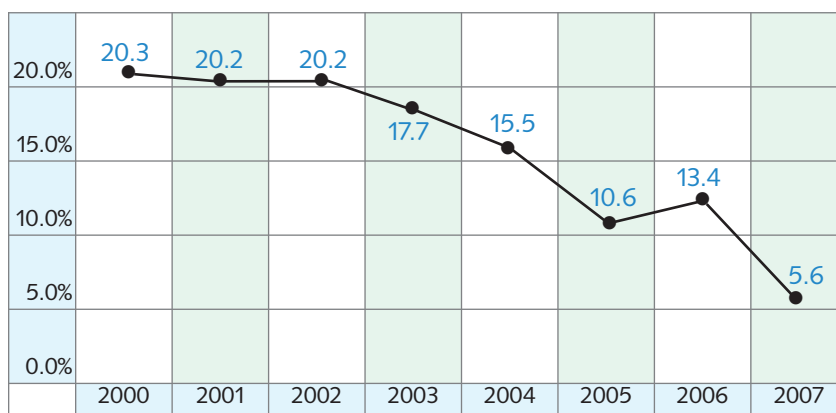
Source: Kentucky Department of Education.

their professional learning experiences during the institutes and follow-up sessions. We attribute this primarily to the practical nature of all sessions, the provision of multiple opportunities for collaborative work, and the insightful leadership of the program coordinator, who kept participants focused on achieving high-quality implementation of Ramp-Up elements.

Evidence gathered at Level 2 on participants' learning confirmed expected results. Teachers who implemented the Ramp-Up Program during the pilot exercise and attended the refresher institute showed little difference in their before and after training measures. Recall, however, that these were experienced veterans of the program. On the other hand, teachers new to the program who attended the three-day induction summer institute experienced a significant increase in their knowledge of critical program elements and implementation procedures.

In analyzing Level 3 data on organization support and change, our interest was not only in assessing support but also in differences in perceptions of support between teachers and school administrators. Overall, both teachers and administrators indicated high levels of agreement (more than 90%) in professional development support, program implementation

support, and other forms of organizational support and change. Comparative analyses showed, however, that teachers were less positive than administrators in their ratings of professional development planning, the quality of district follow-up support, and receiving appropriate resources when needed. These areas will be specifically targeted in planning program revisions.

The observations of teachers at Level 4 on participants' use of new knowledge and skills showed a significant gain in the quality of program implementation from the fall to spring observations. Apparently, the feedback offered to teachers following the fall observations, in conjunction with follow-up professional development support, helped teachers implement critical program elements with much greater fidelity. Observation results also revealed, however, that teachers need more help and guidance implementing some elements than others. In the area of rituals and routines, for example, teachers made the greatest gains between fall and spring in having students enter the classroom according to expectations and adhering to the course schedule. This showed us that these areas need special attention in considering revisions of both the summer institute and refresher institute.

High school reading novice minority gap (2002-07)

PERCENT OF WHITE AND BLACK STUDENTS
SCORING AT THE NOVICE LEVEL IN READING

⊕ Black
★ White
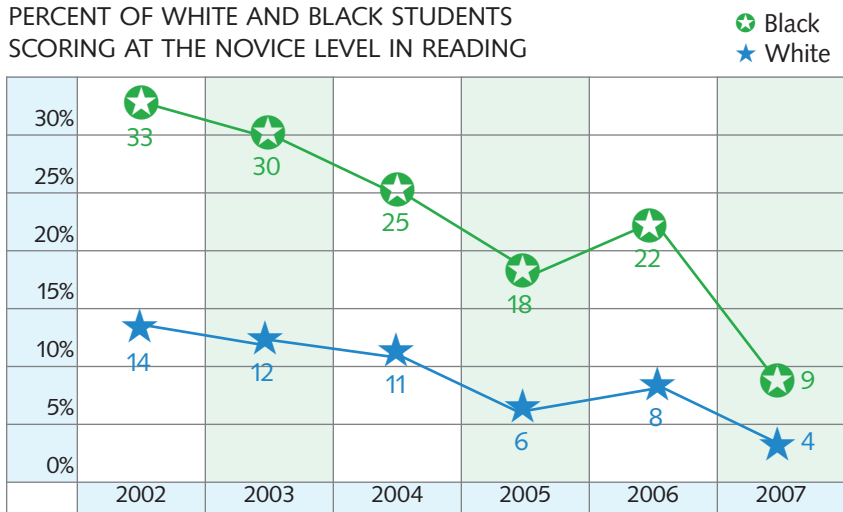
Source: Kentucky Department of Education.

High school reading index (2000-07)

TREND IN THE HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIC INDEX IN READING
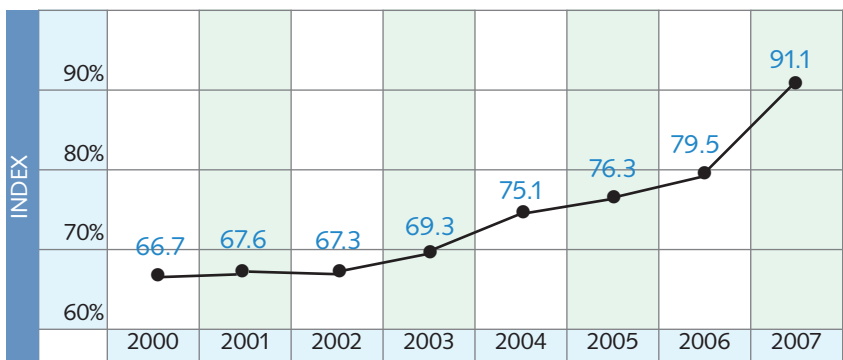
Source: Kentucky Department of Education.

The evidence gathered at Level 5 regarding student learning outcomes was analyzed in several ways. First, we compared achievement results from the high- versus low-implementation groups. Next, we expanded the comparison by considering results from matched comparison groups of students from each participating school. Finally, we analyzed the overall impact of the program on the district's high school system.

To compare high- versus low-implementation teachers, we split the group of participating teachers in half, with 20 teachers in each group, based on results from the spring observation rubric. Using classroom as the unit of analysis, we compared students' scores on the Predictive Assessment Series

(PAS), a ThinkLink (2007) benchmark test that is administered at the beginning of the school year. We did this to determine whether or not the degree of implementation might be linked to the characteristics of the students involved. Analyses showed that there were no significant differences between the students in high- versus low-implementation classrooms in their entry-level skills. Because we used the PAS scores, along with measures of race and participation in free or reduced lunch benefits programs to match Ramp-Up classrooms with the comparison control classrooms, no differences were evident between these groups of classrooms as well.

Our primary measure of student learning was KCCT reading scores.

This assessment consists of 24 multiple-choice items and six open-response items. Our analyses showed statistically significant differences between the scores of students in the high- versus low-implementation classrooms and also between the high-implementation group and the matched control group. Differences between the low-implementation group and the matched control group were not statistically significant. In other words, students in classrooms where Ramp-Up was implemented well made far greater gains in their reading scores than students in classrooms where Ramp-Up was implemented less well and students in matched control classrooms.

We also explored differences over time by comparing aggregated data on academic achievement in reading for all high schools in the district from several years prior to Ramp-Up implementation to the most recent year of assessment data. In Kentucky, student performance on statewide assessments is classified at one of four levels: novice, apprentice, proficient, and distinguished. The chart on p. 36 shows the percent reduction in students scoring at the lowest novice level in reading from 2000 to 2007. While a slow but steady decline in the percent of students scoring at this lowest level was evident each year, the biggest reduction by far occurred following implementation of the Ramp-Up Program. The chart at left top displays these same data broken down by race. This illustrates that not only did the percent of students scoring at this lowest level decline dramatically after implementation of the Ramp-Up Program, but the gap between the performance of white and black students was significantly reduced.

Finally, the lower chart on p. 37

Findings helped us determine where changes would likely be needed to improve the program's effectiveness.

shows the change in the district high school Reading Academic Index from 2000 to 2007. Scores on this index range from 0 to 100 and provide a major component of the accountability metric for Kentucky schools. Again, while high schools in the district were making slow but steady progress each year, the level of progress rose rapidly following implementation of the Ramp-Up Program. These figures represent data from all high school students, not just those included in Ramp-Up classrooms. Hence, they do not show the full extent of the improvements that might be attributable to the Ramp-Up Program. Data such as these have prompted board members and program funders to offer additional funding so that we might continue and expand all of the professional development activities associated with Ramp-Up Program implementation.

DISCUSSION

Our evaluation of the Ramp-Up Program and its associated professional development has its limitations. For the most part, teachers chose to participate in this initiative based on their interest in improving high school students' English and language arts skills. This self-selecting process may have made participating teachers more motivated than their teaching colleagues and, hence, our results may be applicable only to comparably motivated teachers. Still, the comparisons we made between classrooms with high and low levels of implementation, as well as to matched control classrooms, provide fairly strong evidence on the effectiveness of the program and the professional development involved in its implementation.

> **Linking professional development to improvements in student learning outcomes remains a challenge for educators at all levels. We believe that this challenge must be addressed.**

Linking professional development to improvements in student learning outcomes remains a challenge for educators at all levels. We believe, however, that this challenge must be addressed (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). At a time when educators are being pressured by increased demands for accountability, it is imperative that we be able to demonstrate an associative link, if not a causal link, between professional development and improvements in trusted measures of student learning. We also must have the courage to abandon activities and restructure or redefine efforts when such a link cannot be verified. Systematic evaluations of professional development provide the first step in establishing this link. Such evaluations do not require large amounts of time or effort. What they require is thoughtful planning.

Following the backward planning process outlined by Guskey (2001a & b) helped us to address most of the issues involved in our evaluation before beginning the program. In addition, the evidence we gathered at each of the five evaluation levels (Guskey, 2000) helped us improve the program while in operation and provided us with the information we needed to demonstrate its effectiveness to different stakeholders. As result of our evaluation, the district is now providing more ongoing, job-embedded professional development to teachers who continue to score low on their implementation of Ramp-Up elements (Level 4). We also have made specific improvements in the summer institute, the refresher institute, and the follow-up sessions. Through these more tailored professional development opportunities, we hope to better meet teachers' unique instructional needs while enhancing their skills in working with a diverse population of struggling readers.

Effective professional development cannot be a one-size-fits-all activity with little follow-up support (Robb, 2000). Instead, it must be a purposeful, professionally embedded endeavor that offers educators the ongoing guidance and support they need to adapt research-based strategies to the unique context of their classrooms and the students with whom they work. If professional development leaders begin planning with clear ideas about what they want to accomplish in terms of learning and learners, and work backward from there, not only will planning be more purposeful, but evaluation efforts will be easier, more focused, more informative, and much more meaningful.

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theme/ LEARNING SCHOOLS

BY TERESA M. EGAN, BETH COBB, AND MARION ANASTASIA

Conferring at St. Johnsbury School are, clockwise from lower right, Bridget Ferrin, Brian Dumais, Lorraine Sprout, Michele Taylor, Matt McLean, and Jodie Elliott.

THINK TIME

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT EMPOWERS TEACHERS TO TRY NEW PRACTICES

All of the students waited patiently while a classmate focused on the problem he was trying to solve on the board. He attempted one solution and realized it didn't work, then haltingly tried another. His classmates watched intently, apparently all thinking through their own solutions. Many of them referred to their writings on individual whiteboards in front of them. No one snickered. No one sighed impatiently. Eventually, the teacher offered the student the option to request help from a classmate. The classmate respectfully suggested he adjust his strategy slightly, and in doing so, both worked together to find a solution. The teacher then asked other students to offer alternate solutions, with several appropriate ideas proposed and accepted by the class.

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

As a former middle school teacher, I (author Teresa Egan) found the students' patient and cooperative attitude both surprising and refreshing. By integrating several key assessment for learning instructional strategies, Matt McLean, a 6th-grade math teacher at St. Johnsbury School in Vermont, had established a classroom environment where students were

given time to process their solutions, while all other students engaged with the question at hand and were prepared to serve as an instructional resource if help was requested. Although no longer a practicing teacher myself, I was interested in observing how middle school teachers and students were engaging with formative assessment practices in the classroom (Black & Wiliam, 1998a). At this school, I witnessed firsthand just what it looked and sounded like when done well. I also observed the complex changes in the classroom contract that exemplified fundamental changes in how students and teachers viewed their respective roles in the learning process. Students clearly understood that they had responsibility for their own learning and recognized that their peers were resources in this endeavor. Teachers were gradually transitioning to a role of sharing responsibility for learning with the learner.

Jeremy Ross, a literacy lab teacher at St. Johnsbury, explained the whole-school emphasis on changing classroom practice: "In the past, if I asked a question of a student, and that student needed a few minutes to think, that student's thinking would be interrupted by somebody else who'd be shouting out. Now we're really focusing on think time for students and really working with other students in the classroom to be respectful. That think time and wait time encourages respect among students and from student to teacher and teacher to student and extends beyond the classroom."

SUPPORTING AND SUSTAINING JOB-EMBEDDED LEARNING

These fundamental classroom changes are the result of a sustained effort to introduce teachers to research-based formative assessment theory and provide them with practical techniques for integrating forma-

tive assessment into their daily instruction. The new learning environment empowers teachers to take risks in trying new practices, knowing that they will have opportunities to discuss their efforts and get support and feedback from colleagues engaged in the same job-embedded learning. A key element of this framework for professional learning and growth is a district commitment to providing teachers with regular meeting time in teacher learning communities (TLCs), protecting that time against encroachment by other school demands, and structuring the time so that meaningful examination of practice will regularly occur. This structured meeting time is guided by a modularized curriculum that sets expectations for every meeting as a time when teachers will share what they have tried in the classroom, receive feedback and questions from colleagues, engage in new learning, and create an action plan for what they will attempt upon returning to the classroom (Educational Testing Service, 2007). Teacher learning communities are scheduled once a month on early release days. Parents, community members, and the school board are supportive of this school improvement strategy for professional learning.

Teacher willingness to take risks and learn from successes and failures, and to try again with help and support from colleagues, is another key factor in gaining the most significant benefit from community learning. "The TLC is probably the most professional thing I've ever participated in," Ross said. "It's really important that you are feeling safe to share what is working and what is not working in

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your classroom. Everybody is really eager to share what is working. It is hard to get to a point where you're comfortable saying, 'Well, I gave this a shot, and it blew up in my face.' When we get to that point, that's when I think a TLC becomes most effective. It's great to share what is most effective, but maybe it's more important to share what's not working, because you can get help from other people."

In summer 2006, the Vermont Department of Education partnered with Educational Testing Service to host Keeping Learning on Track (KLT) professional development training for schools identified as being committed to closing student achievement gaps. During the pilot project, St. Johnsbury participants included a coach, six classroom teachers, and the principal. In 2009-10, the program includes 11 teacher learning communities, each facilitated by a Keep Learning on Track coach.

NSDC'S DEFINITION
KEY POINTS

- Professional learning occurs among teams of teachers.
- Teams of educators evaluate student, teacher, and school learning needs through data review and evidence-based strategies such as formative assessments.
- Professional development may be supported by external assistance.

"It's great to share what is most effective, but maybe it's more important to share what's not working, because you can get help from other people."

— Jeremy Ross

The program's success was due to Coburn's (2003) dimensions of scale: depth, sustainability, spread, and shift. The depth includes the change in teachers' roles, practices, professional learning, and relationships. The change in the beliefs and attitudes of teachers has caused a transformation in classroom culture from teaching-centered to learning-centered. Sustainability is ensured through structures that include an internal KLT trainer, a schedule that embeds teacher learning communities within the workday, shared leadership roles, and administrative and school board support. Spread is evident through deep pedagogical principles that have influenced policy, school procedures, and professional development. Lastly, shift is promoted through the shared leadership roles of teachers.

> **One of the biggest challenges of formative assessment is the actual adaptation of instruction in real time based on evidence of student understanding.**

As developers of the Keeping Learning on Track program, Educational Testing Service was invited to observe St. Johnsbury classrooms where the program is in its third year of implementation. The program introduces assessment for learning content in a multiday workshop, then outlines a process for a gradual integration of formative assessment into classroom practice, with ongoing support through participation in school-based teacher learning communities. Both the content (assessment for learning strategies and techniques) and the process (teacher learning communities) of this program are based on research on classroom practice that is most effective in improving student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). This professional development structure clearly aligns with NSDC context, process, and content standards, with a particularly strong emphasis on the importance of

St. Johnsbury School
St. Johnsbury, Vt.

Grades: Pre-K-8
Enrollment: 715
Staff: 80 professional, 6 clerical, 50 paraprofessionals, 4 administrators, 2 contracted services
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	94%
Black:	2%
Hispanic:	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	2%
Native American:	0%
Other:	0%

Limited English proficient: 0%
Languages spoken: N/A
Free/reduced lunch: 65%
Special education: 14%
Contact: Marion Anastasia, principal
manastasia@stjsd.org

providing educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate and the critical role of school and district leaders to guide continuous instructional improvement.

The Keeping Learning on Track program exposes teachers to a wide range of classroom techniques, all unified by one big idea: Students and teachers using evidence of learning to adapt teaching and learning to meet immediate learning. This one big idea is further defined through five key strategies for classroom practice:

- Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success;
- Engineering effective classroom discussions, questions, and learning tasks;
- Providing feedback that moves learners forward;
- Activating students as the owners of their own learning; and
- Activating students as instructional resources for one another.

This KLT framework, illustrated in the diagram on p. 44, provides a common structure for implementing formative assessment that is equally powerful for teachers of all content areas and at all grade levels (Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, & Wiliam, 2005).

In each of the three years of implementation at St. Johnsbury, a new cohort of teachers participated in the initial workshops, then joined teacher learning communities to support their efforts as they applied what they learned in the classroom. The teachers spoke freely about the value they found in these monthly opportunities to share practice and get honest feedback from colleagues. Deb Smith, a 5th-grade teacher at St. Johnsbury, commented on the changes she has begun to see in her classroom as she works with colleagues to develop clear learning expectations for students: "It's been great after 30 years to find something that reinspires you and really keeps the light under what you're doing — the fire. It's much more fun to teach with it because you feel like you saw the involvement that kids have — ownership — it's their work. They know what they have to do and how they're going to show it, and there's a responsibility level. I work, I plan backwards. We decide what it is we want them to know and then figure out a good way to get them there. And, of course, the whole idea of letting them in on the secret about what they're expected to know; it's not a big surprise at the end. So I think that's a big change from traditional teaching that I was trained to do and did for years."

INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION MAKING

One of the biggest challenges of formative assessment is the actual adaptation of instruction in real time based on evidence of student understanding. In a 2nd-grade classroom at St. Johnsbury, teacher Kathy Merrill demonstrated how this works. She began her math lesson by asking students to complete an entrance task by drawing an example of a figure of their choice. Though Merrill's lesson plan was designed to focus on two-dimensional figures, she quickly rec-

KLT framework

• Success criteria • Key word posters • Share exemplars of student work • Student-developed rubrics • Learning intentions	• ABCD cards • Whiteboards • No hands up: Popsicle sticks • Exit tickets • Diagnostic questions	• Find and correct errors • Two stars and a wish • Reach for the next level • Strategy cards • Comment-only marking	• Stop/slow signals • Concept list • Question strips • Pre-flight checklist • Traffic lighting set	• Think/pair/ share • Carousel • Homework help board • Evaluation with rubrics • Jigsaw

MANY ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING TECHNIQUES

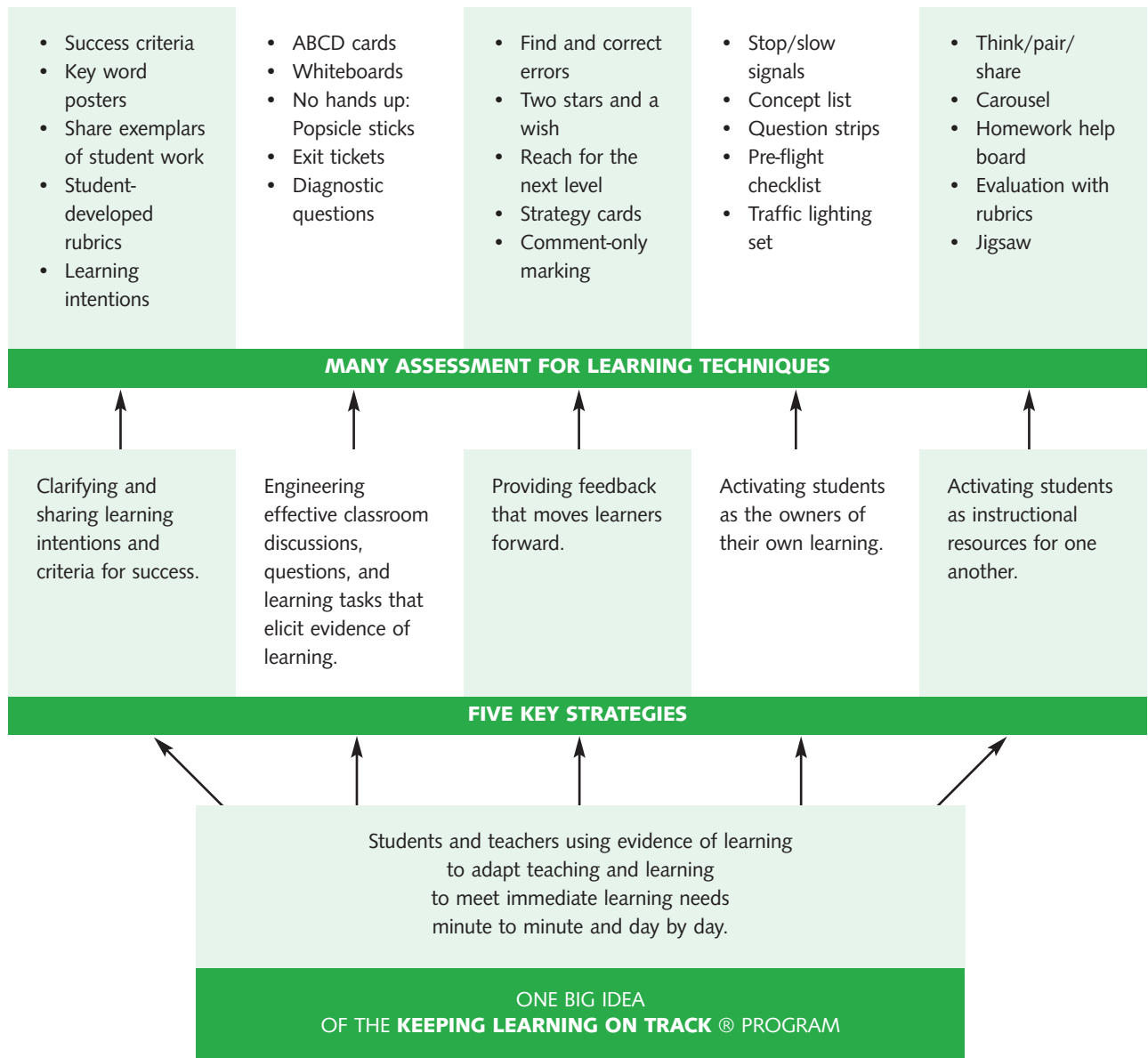|				
Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success.	Engineering effective classroom discussions, questions, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning.	Providing feedback that moves learners forward.	Activating students as the owners of their own learning.	Activating students as instructional resources for one another.

FIVE KEY STRATEGIES

Students and teachers using evidence of learning
to adapt teaching and learning
to meet immediate learning needs
minute to minute and day by day.

**ONE BIG IDEA
OF THE KEEPING LEARNING ON TRACK ® PROGRAM**

ognized that many of her 2nd-graders had drawn three-dimensional figures. Merrill quickly adjusted her plan to briefly review characteristics of two-dimensional figures, then moved on to a discussion of the characteristics of three-dimensional figures, based on this evidence of student understanding. She did several quick checks on student understanding with diagnostic questions to ensure that her judgment was accurate (Ciofalo & Wylie, 2006). Brian Hulbert, a 4th-grade math teacher, explained: "To me, formative assessment means asking questions, doing various techniques that we have to try to gather information about students' performance at that very second, and then using that information, that data, to make a decision about how you're going to instruct the next piece of whatever subject area you're talking about. Each of the techniques gives me information about each of the students and about where the next step is to move them ahead in their learning."

What we observed was not just a schoolwide commitment to professional growth, but a transformed atmosphere where students exhibited skills that would serve them well for a lifetime beyond the school setting. "Providing these opportunities for students in the classroom now — whether they're in kindergarten or 8th grade — is certainly going to be something that's going to be beneficial to them on into the future," Ross

said. In addition to developing these lifelong skills, St. Johnsbury has also increased student achievement in standardized test scores across all subject areas and grade levels. There were overall gains in all content areas for all groups on the fall 2008 New England Common Assessment Program. Although the achievement gaps for students in poverty and with disabilities remain, the results of the accountability test show a decrease in the gap for all students. These documented achievements, as well as the increased leadership role of teachers within their learning communities and changed student attitudes about who is responsible for learning, have all combined to transform St. Johnsbury School into a model of successful professional development.

Principal Marion Anastasia reflected on the three years of school-based learning and teacher collaboration in their professional development process: "The teachers have taken on leadership roles so that it will be sustained." Werner Heidemann, a school board member, added: "There's no question that, especially this year more so than any other year, you can

What we observed was not just a schoolwide commitment to professional growth, but a transformed atmosphere where students exhibited skills that would serve them well for a lifetime beyond the school setting.

feel that change among the teachers. Very simply, I think it will help kids to learn, to learn more effectively, to learn to think. The whole atmosphere it has created — the trust, the acceptance, and the eagerness with which I see most of the teachers embracing this concept — that's why I think this will work." St. Johnsbury's professional development effort has been a multifaceted success: teacher leadership and renewed enthusiasm, student ownership of their own learning, increased student achievement on accountability and local assessments, and a transformed school environment where everyone is learning together.

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SLOW TURN AHEAD

5 principles guide district through a changing demographic landscape

BY MARGARET N. MILLER,
ELLEN V. BELL,
AND DAVID F. HOLLAND

Transforming an entire district from one that is satisfied with being academically good enough into one keenly focused on improved student performance requires overhaul that reaches from end to end, from building to building, from bottom to top.

Leaders in Birdville Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas, learned that applying five fundamental principles of professional learning can jump-start the transformation. The five-year journey of this midsized suburban school district serving more than 22,000 students offers significant implications for any district preparing for a big turn ahead.

Birdville ISD lies just east of Fort Worth near the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. While the seven-city area began as a community of modest neighborhoods, the boundaries now expand to include upscale suburban areas. Birdville, where the first school opened in 1858, has grown into a district large enough to have some resources yet small enough to maintain a strong sense of family and pride in longevity of district residents. Many staff members who started school in BISD returned to work in the district where their children and grandchildren now attend.

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While deep roots bind stakeholders and staff, problems arise when people who remember the good old days fail to see that those days are gone. These community natives sometimes overlook the rapid demographic changes, socioeconomic decline, and achievement disparity among specific populations of students. Consequently, the dynamics between natives and newcomers can be strained. In a culture of intelligent, caring people, leaders in BISD formed a cohesive team to bridge this divide through high-quality staff development and stakeholder awareness.

Ellen Bell's arrival as associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction launched a series of transitions she and leadership teams facilitated through a five-year district transformation. By constantly asking, "What needs to be done?" and "How do we begin?," Bell worked with her staff to reshape long-standing professional development structures and practices. They worked to show how three district initiatives align and to prove that a comprehensive professional development plan ensures the consistent implementation of those initiatives.

Ellen Bell

The diagram below illustrates Birdville's three key focuses: student engagement, continuous improvement, and Gallup strengths. Gallup's Strengths Finder is an assessment instrument that Birdville educators use to identify their natural talents to build their personal strengths and heighten their success.

The strong pillar of professional learning ensures total implementation across the district.

BIRDVILLE'S PRINCIPLES

Birdville applied five principles of effective professional development to implement these tightly linked initiatives.

1. Allocate time and resources.

Staff members in Birdville, like those in many districts, work hard to do their best with fewer resources. A key factor limiting resources is the double-edged sword of unfunded mandates. While some state legislation improves the educational system, other laws are so convoluted that they do nothing more than wear staff down. Since tight budgets force the district to spread the dollars thin, BISD demonstrated stewardship by drawing on the expertise of its internal leaders and specialists and using Title I funds to purchase materials.

Leaders and specialists collaborate

- Professional development is aligned with rigorous state standards, as well as related local school improvement goals.
- Teams engage in a continuous cycle of improvement that evaluates student, teacher, and school learning needs through a review of data on teacher and student performance.

to pool their talents at every level:

- District-level directors and coordinators meet quarterly to align their departments with district goals and objectives as they work with staff to filter actions through district beliefs, vision, and mission. They use skills and concepts from all three initiatives to model for their staffs how to implement new learning in their daily work.
- Consultants provide content-area sessions to help teachers align student work to the standards and scope and sequence. Teachers then implement these models in their classrooms.
- Assistant principals form small learning communities to extend their own learning before implementing that learning on their campuses.
- Campus instructional leaders (assistant principals and teacher leaders) drive campus implementation of district initiatives. Advanced academics specialists model and teach teachers effective differentiation strategies to use with gifted and talented students.

Birdville's key focuses

Engagement. What?

Continuous improvement. How?

Professional learning

Gallup strengths. Who?

Source: Birdville ISD.
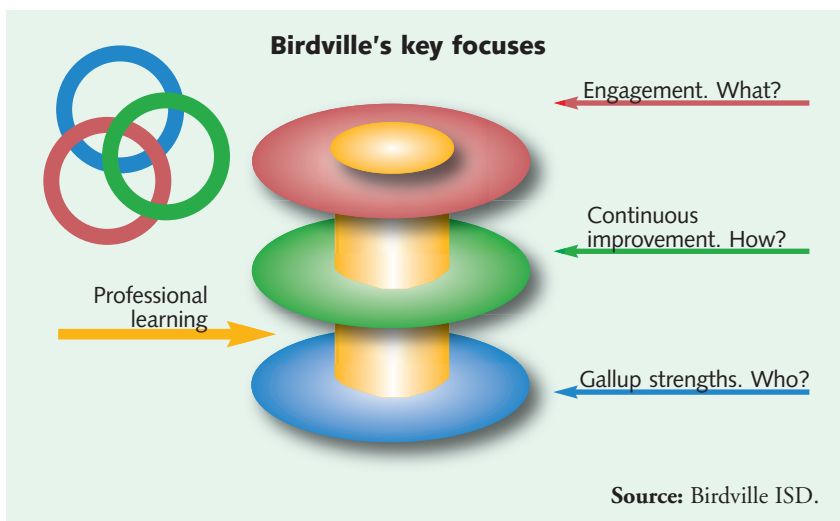
TAKS PERFORMANCE, all students, all grades combined

SUBJECT	GRADE LEVELS	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Writing	4, 7	88	91	92	93	95	95
Reading/ELA	3-11	85	86	89	91	93	93
Social studies	8, 10, 11	90	91	90	91	92	93
Math	3-11	69	72	74	77	80	82
Science	5, 8, 10 ,11	64	70	73	74	77	78

Source: Birdville ISD.

- Elementary and secondary reading specialists host sessions in effective reading strategies for struggling readers.
- Campus continuous improvement teachers coach teams to use tools to collect data to measure progress towards goals.
- Campus-based action learning team teacher leaders facilitate small collaborative groups that focus on one of four modules for widespread campus professional learning.

Even though academic focus has been hard for the instructional team in the face of monetary shortages, leaders ultimately determined that with caution and care, the district can survive the difficulty of doing more with less.

2. Include all leaders.

Both the board of trustees and Superintendent Stephen Waddell provide stability and vision for Birdville ISD. Instructional leadership has metamorphosed from principal meetings that merely disseminated information to collaborative opportunities for authentic learning. Campus administrators engage in book studies to learn and apply research to local decision making. By studying the works of such visitors to the district as Mike Schmoker, Doug Reeves, Robert Marzano, and James Popham, BISD leaders learn and use strategies appropriate to the district's No. 1 goal — student achievement. In short order,

Birdville Independent School District
Fort Worth, Texas

Number of schools: 21 elementary, 7 middle schools, 3 high schools, 1 alternative high school, 1 center of technology and advanced learning
Enrollment: 22,576
Staff: 2835
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	54.1%
Black:	7.2%
Hispanic:	32.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	5.6%
Native American:	0.7%
Other:	0.1 %

Limited English proficient: 14.9%
Languages spoken: 35
Free/reduced lunch: 47.4%
Special education: 11.4%
Contact: Stephen Waddell, superintendent
Stephen_Waddell@birdville.k12.tx.us

leaders bonded in a reading community, sharing applications and implications of their new learning. Campus principals meet regularly in instructional learning teams.

Such leadership practices extend to every school. Some schools conduct book studies during which teachers post discussions on campus blogs. Others have designed campus professional learning sessions around topics such as interdisciplinary instruction, Stephen Covey's *The Leader in Me* (Free Press, 2008), and the work of Ruby Payne. Others establish Working on the Work (WOW) (Schlechty, 2002) days during which teams of teachers collabo-

rate as they design engaging work for their students using protocols and student work samples to guide their curricular decisions. Principals flex time to allow grade-level teams to coach each other in skillful lesson design. Still other campuses establish data teams to analyze performance and perception data in order to make changes in the way they do their work.

Small groups of first-, second-, third- and fourth-year principals deepen their leadership skills in special principal academies led by Stephen Waddell, Ellen Bell, and Lane Ledbetter, director of curriculum. Tuna sandwiches in hand, developing administrators collaborate by analyzing data, discussing current research, and, best of all, designing effective procedures to implement a stronger academic focus on their campuses. In addition, a newly formed leadership team, consisting of co-chairs from each campus (one assistant principal and one lead teacher), meet monthly with Margaret Miller, director of professional learning, and David Holland, director of accountability, research, and pro-

Margaret Miller

David Holland

Sample Innovation Configuration

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: Using tools to measure and monitor progress towards goals and objectives.

Indicators	1 Not yet	2 Progressing	3 Proficient	4 Advanced
Mission statement	I am unfamiliar with classroom mission statements.	I am aware of classroom mission statements, but I do not have one.	I have established a classroom mission statement.	I have engaged students in drafting a classroom mission statement.
Goals/objectives	I do not identify learning objectives or classroom goals.	I write learning objectives and classroom goals.	I sometimes communicate the learning objectives and involve students in setting classroom goals.	I regularly communicate the learning objectives and involve students in setting classroom goals and their personal learning goals.
Measures/results	I do not collect student data to track student progress. (This is formative data.)	I collect student data for my own use (grades, etc.).	I collect and chart data to track student progress or improvement towards goals and objectives.	I systematically and purposely collect and chart data to track student progress or improvement towards goals and objectives. (This can be formal and informal data.)
PDSA	I am not familiar with PDSA.	I know that PDSA is a continuous improvement tool.	I sometimes use PDSA to improve classroom processes.	I engage my students to use PDSA to measure and refine classroom processes.
TOOLS Plus/delta Issue bin Affinity diagrams Student data folders Pareto charts	I do not use Continuous Improvement tools.	I use Continuous Improvement tools.	I regularly use Continuous Improvement tools.	I systematically engage my students in the use of Continuous Improvement tools.

Source: Birdville ISD.

gram evaluation, to ensure districtwide implementation of key initiatives. These tri-level looping teams share authentic evidence of district initiatives at work in classrooms and design "digging deeper" measures to increase staff and student learning on every campus.

A task force from this group recently crafted a much-needed Implementation Innovation Configuration map to measure implementation levels of the key initiatives in BISD. Baseline data collected from classroom teachers help campuses determine their implementation levels. These data provide the foundation for goal setting in campus improvement plans. The descriptors and indicators on the Implementation Innovation Configuration set guideposts as teachers collaborate about how to move from their current status to a deeper level of implementation. (See the Innovation Configuration above.) District leaders benefit from active participation in region-wide consortia at the Educational Service Center, where they network with others regarding continuous improvement practices to achieve results.

3. Collaborate in teams.

Before 2003, staff development in BISD had been either nonexistent or a disconnected series of random acts of inservice. Bell garnered the strengths of the curriculum and instruction staff to design professional learning that placed job-alike teachers in small learning communities across the district. Using *A Facilitator's Guide to Professional Learning Communities* (Jolly, 2005) as a framework, Miller coordinated more than 125 action learning teams that met five days throughout the year. These teacher teams analyze data, set goals, design action plans, implement those plans, examine student work, use protocols to examine their own work,

and try new practices to improve student performance. Teachers report that they look forward to staff development days and collaborative learning. Teachers found that learning teams afford them a deeper understanding of the interconnections and alignment of what had seemed like isolated initiatives before. Those initiatives work in tandem to engage staff and students in a systemic and systematic journey of continuous improvement.

A transformational shift from thinking about what teachers need to teach to thinking more purposefully about what students need to learn spread like a virus across the district. Teachers eagerly design professional learning to address specific student learning goals. For example, one teacher offers sessions on using Singapore math strategies, while other teachers design professional learning called ShareFests where teachers display and discuss their data, action plans, common assessments, rubrics, units, and student work samples. Teachers and leaders in BISD have become what Doug Reeves (2006) calls "learning leaders" who effectively design their learning in order to facilitate the learning of others, thereby deepening the level of the learning of their students.

4. Engage everyone in meaningful learning and work.

Birdville educators believe that individual staff engagement in their daily work directly impacts student engagement in meaningful learning. Results of the Gallup Q12, a national survey designed to measure employee engagement, reveal increasing staff engagement and satisfaction in the last two years. High Q12 scores indicate organizations with lower turnover, better productivity, better customer loyalty, and superior performance. Birdville staff surveyed responded that they have multiple

opportunities to learn and grow. As part of the Schlechty Standard Bearer Network , BISD teachers and leaders focus on designing meaningful work that appeals to the motives of student and adult learners. BISD leaders embed design qualities into all learning experiences through a process called Coaching for Design. Designers use the high-yield classroom strategies that Robert Marzano compiled to address the varied learning needs of BISD adult and student learners.

5. Use data to make decisions.

Birdville ISD designed a tool called the District Dashboard to display data to track progress toward district goals and objectives. Campuses access a variety of student performance reports online. The district recently invested in a data warehousing program that will allow teachers and leaders to manipulate data to answer customized queries. Leaders and teachers have been trained in the use of Baldridge tools and continuous improvement processes. District, campus, and classroom mission statements are posted for all to see. Many teachers engage students in tracking their own performance in data folders using formative and summative assessments. Data walls greet visitors in campus foyers. Principals engaged in an in-depth study on using formative assessment to transform classroom instruction. James Popham, author of *Transformative Assessment* (ASCD, 2008), will be the keynote speaker at this year's administrator retreat.

By using data to make decisions in the past five years, BISD leaders have reallocated funds, changed requirements, and created programs to boost academic excellence. As a result, the number of National Merit Scholars has increased from 5 to 22. The district pays for PSAT examinations for all 10th- and 11th-grade students. Selected students are invited to participate in a new Superintendent's

Scholars program that provides recognition and preparation for PSAT success. Students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses now take the AP exam as an expectation of participation in the college-prep program. BISD allocates money to cover AP examination fees.

BISD has added a program to its three high schools that addresses the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Site teams support minority students in advanced academic opportunities and college preparation.

LOOKING AHEAD

Is the team of Birdville leaders satisfied with where the district is today? No. The good news is that because of the focus on staff engagement in small learning communities and the use of continuous improvement tools and high-yield strategies to transform instructional practices, student achievement results are beginning to reflect movement in the desired direction. Implementing simple professional learning principles has positioned the district to make a big turn ahead. BISD teams stand ready to lead that transformation.

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SKEPTICS TO PARTNERS

University teams with district
to improve ELL instruction
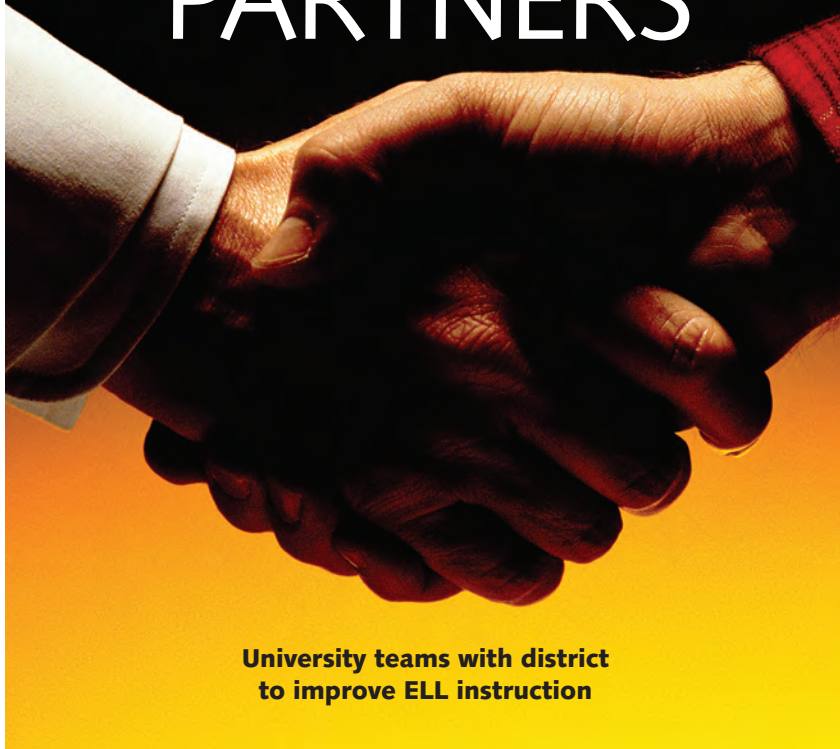
BY DEBRA O'NEAL,
MARJORIE C. RINGLER,
AND DIANA B. LYS

As residents of the ivory tower, we know we cannot exist on our own. Without our partners in local school districts, we have no research and no real-world context. We also know that to establish a meaningful partnership with schools, all participants must perceive value and anticipate meaningful outcomes. What started out as an effort to help two schools achieve high levels of teacher implementation of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008) resulted in a deeper understanding of the true learning value of a sustained and committed partnership among university faculty, district personnel, and school-based educators.

Our partnership began when, as faculty members at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C., we facilitated a three-day summer workshop and developed a plan for ongoing follow-up with the schools. This effort yielded high levels of implementation of the model, improved teacher attitudes, and most importantly, developed higher levels of professionalism and leadership within the schools. Partnerships such as these create valuable relationships where university faculty are welcomed into schools, teachers and administrators benefit from research-proven methods, and all stakeholders learn.

MANY LAYERS
OF COLLABORATION

The goal of this partnership was to implement the SIOP model in rural North Carolina elementary schools. The SIOP model gives teachers the necessary skills to teach content while simultaneously focusing on academic language development. Primarily designed for use with English language learners (ELLs), the model is being implemented widely in schools with high ELL populations, where all students benefit from an approach that focuses on both language and content knowledge. The two schools in the study have a 40% ELL population, which makes them perfect for implementing the SIOP model.

There were many layers in this collaboration: personnel from several university departments, the federal programs director at the district level, and two elementary school principals and 17 teachers at the schools. Each stakeholder had a specific role, with

university personnel collaborating with the district to plan and finance the summer professional development and faculty members providing content and working directly with principals to plan follow-up and peer coaching sessions.

BACKGROUND

Showers and Joyce (1996) discuss the importance of peer coaching and how this model, when successful, helps teachers develop collegial relationships based on improving their content knowledge. We were hoping to create this type of partnership not only among teachers, but between teachers and their principals, principals and the federal programs director, and public school personnel with university faculty. To this end, we were fortunate to have buy-in from all parties.

The participants demonstrated their commitment through their actions. The two principals actively participated in the summer training, met with the university faculty monthly, and most importantly, spoke with each other on a regular basis to reflect on implementation of the model. The federal programs director attended our monthly coaching sessions and served as a constant cheerleader for the project. At the time, we had no idea how powerful and important her role was. But now, working with other districts and attempting to replicate our success, we realize the importance of that level of support.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

From the beginning, this project was planned as a professional learning community. Based on the research of Joyce & Showers (1980), we knew that a one-shot approach to profes-

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sional development was not an effective path. Darling-Hammond's (2005) research indicates how poorly we fare in collaboration, observation, and curriculum design when compared to countries such as China and Japan. With this knowledge of the ideal, we knew we had to get a long-term commitment from stakeholders to continue the learning beyond the initial workshop, and so we began our planning six months before the first gathering.

The SIOP is a research-based model that we teach to others through 20 hours of intensive immersion in a 2½-day block. We begin with an introduction to new terminology that we would use over the course of the sessions. We built understanding of background information and explained that we were modeling what the SIOP should look like in the classroom. The next crucial component covered key features of first- and second-language acquisition through a highly interactive session that allowed participants to discover and discuss the similarities and differences between the two. The SIOP model was then presented through eight blocks, one for each component of the model. See box on p. 54 outlining the components. Each block contained an introduction specific to that component, an activity that implemented the component, and a video clip of the model in action in a classroom.

The initial sessions were followed by eight monthly coaching sessions, monthly principals meetings, and homework for the teachers. During the initial year of follow-up, we focused on implementing one new component a month. The university faculty spent a half-day observing in each school looking for particular SIOP components, meeting with each principal to discuss his or her observations and involvement, and a final joint meeting with the two teacher

groups. The after-school meetings included an opening activity focused on the previous month's component, review of the component, a preview of the next component, and an activity to support its implementation in the classroom.

Each school was responsible for creating a public bulletin board that highlighted the monthly SIOP component. In pairs, the teachers decided what was important to share in the public forum and updated the bulletin board each month. Principals also included a "SIOP moment" in faculty meetings to raise faculty awareness, as they would be taking the model schoolwide in the second year.

As part of the homework, teachers communicated with a grade-level colleague at the partner school using Skype to discuss a new strategy they tried and to evaluate its success or failure. The goal of using Skype was

NSDC'S DEFINITION KEY POINTS

- Professional development may be supported by external assistance.
- Professional development provides job-embedded coaching or other assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom.
- Professional development achieves educator learning goals by implementing coherent, sustained, and evidence-based learning strategies that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement.

EIGHT COMPONENTS OF THE SIOP MODEL

1. Lesson preparation:
- Providing content and language objectives for all lessons
- Using supplementary materials
- Adapting content

2. Building background
- Linking concepts to students' background
- Creating links between past learning and new learning

3. Comprehensible input
- Using appropriate speech
- Explaining academic tasks clearly
- Using a variety of techniques to make content accessible for ELLs

4. Strategies
- Teaching learning strategies
- Using scaffolding techniques
- Using higher order questioning

5. Interaction
- Providing frequent opportunities for interaction
- Using grouping configurations
- Allowing for sufficient wait time

6. Practice/application
- Providing hands-on experiences with new knowledge
- Integrating all language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing)

7. Lesson delivery
- Promoting student engagement
- Enacting lesson supporting language and content objectives
- Reflecting on practice —"did I do what I set out to do?"

8. Review assessment
- Reviewing lesson objectives
- Getting regular feedback from students

Source: Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008.

to build a professional learning community across schools and to model the effectiveness of interaction for learning.

The university coaches created a monthly electronic newsletter with tips and review. They were also available through e-mail and Skype videoconferencing. By maintaining ongoing communication between teachers and coaches, professional development was always front and center. Each carefully planned activity for university faculty, teachers, and administrators served as foundational elements for the learning community to come.

CREATING THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

After the initial year of collaboration, principals became responsible for ensuring follow-up in their schools. One of the schools had a new principal who was not involved in the project, so schoolwide implementation was left up to the teachers. At the other school, the principal played a leading role in sustaining the learning. She scheduled two meetings a month: an information session on SIOP and a

work session for developing grade-level lesson planning and materials focused on the SIOP topic of the month. Each grade level had a SIOP day, where a teacher demonstrated a SIOP-based lesson followed by a group discussion. These discussions led to implementation of new classroom strategies. The principal required teachers to turn in two SIOP lesson plans monthly and performed SIOP-focused observations. This would not have been possible without a principal who was engaged in the learning process, was trained as a coach, and who, most importantly, served as an educational leader. She summed up the two-year process by stating, "I really feel the focus on SIOP strategies has strengthened our instructional program. It has now become a way of life for our folks. Kids enjoy and are engaged in instruction, and lessons are more productive."

One of our hidden goals was to re-energize teachers, to give them pride in their skills, to create ownership in the learning community, and to nurture a new sense of collegiality

and leadership within the schools. The learning community we created allowed for teachers to make all of that happen through their constant grade-level collaboration and continued involvement with the model.

We saw evidence of the evolution of the SIOP learning community when administrators and teachers shared the project's success with others. The principals and two appointed lead teachers from each school attended a national SIOP training for coaches. At the state level, these same teachers presented their work at a conference for English language learners. We felt great pride as we witnessed this evolution taking place. The professionalism, confidence, and collegiality they exhibited was inspirational. None of this would have been possible without the support of the federal programs director's funds; support from this office was essential to the sustainability of the project.

RESEARCH

We examined our project's effectiveness based on Guskey's model (2000) for evaluating professional

development. We looked at the five critical levels of professional development and evaluation: participants' reactions, participants' learning, organizational support and change, participants' use of knowledge and skills, and student learning outcomes. The teachers completed self-assessments of their use of the SIOP before the workshop and at the end of the school year. Another group of teachers from the same school district, but not at these two schools, received the initial SIOP training but did not receive the follow-up coaching and served as a control group. There was a significant difference in the implementation level between those who participated in the follow-up learning community and those who did not. The level of fidelity of implementation of the SIOP model reported by the teachers in the learning community supports the use of sustained and supportive professional development to realize change in teacher practice.

Teachers completed a survey at year's end about the level of administrative support they received. The administrators answered the same questions, and the data indicated that their perceptions of what they provided were closely aligned to their teachers' perceptions. The learning outcomes were all viewed positively; their comments included: "Students spent more time on task," "students were more actively engaged in learning," "grades improved from low C's to high B's and A's," "SIOP has helped both ELLs and struggling learners." Finally, teachers believed that students were more involved as active learners and became true stakeholders in their own learning.

Although the focus of this article is the creation of the learning community, we cannot overlook the effect that the positive experience has had on the learning communities. If all of the participants' efforts did not yield the desired results in the classroom,

we believe that the excitement and renewed commitment to teaching and learning would not have evolved as successfully as they did. We observed vast improvements in teacher attitudes, motivation, and collaboration, and a renewed focus on professional development to improve student achievement. Additionally, the heightened school awareness created a buzz of excitement for those who were to embark on this journey the following year.

THE FUTURE

The entire faculty at both schools, including the earlier participants, participated in the next SIOP summer workshop. At the end of the summer, the appointed coaches and principals returned from their national coaching workshop with new ideas and excitement. They spent the summer planning for the upcoming year and have set in place a calendar that includes bimonthly meetings and observations. With the support of a substitute for their classes, the school coaches have a day each month to observe and coach their colleagues. These are informal, nonevaluative sessions to deepen collaboration and provide ongoing encouragement. Teachers have additional meeting time to review the monthly SIOP component and share successes and challenges. All of these sessions require coaches and principals to collaborate and conduct instructional conversations with school teams. The university faculty has retreated to a more supportive and consultative role, allowing teachers and administrators to develop the learning community to meet the unique needs of the school and students.

BENEFITS

This partnership has benefitted all parties, but most importantly, the schools participated in high-quality professional development in keeping with the value Showers and Joyce

(1996) placed on peer coaching teams. They remind us that, although on the surface this should be very natural, this work is often complex, requiring teachers, administrators, and university faculty to change their relationships. The partnership we created achieved the cohesiveness and respect needed to sustain ongoing learning communities.

Through this project, we realized that we had started out with a limited view — seeing professional development only through the eyes of the teachers who work with students. Now we know that as faculty coaches, we were not only facilitating sessions and offering content but also honing the entire process and learning alongside all stakeholders. Through this new lens, we now have a higher level of appreciation for the important role that both the principal and district leadership play in creating and sustaining quality professional development. The positive relationship that developed between the school district and university has replaced former skeptics with true partners for the benefit of all stakeholders.

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Chris Steinhauser

As superintendent of schools for the Long Beach Unified School District in Long Beach, Calif., Chris Steinhauser leads a system that serves 87,000 students in 93 public schools. The district employs more than 8,000 people.

The schools in Long Beach are widely lauded for their success. This year, the district was recognized for a record-tying fifth time as a finalist for the prestigious Board Prize, which the district won in 2003. *Newsweek's* national ranking of "America's Best High Schools" included six of Long Beach's high schools.

Steinhauser has long stressed the importance of professional development in achieving districtwide success. With the system's deep commitment to professional learning and widespread use of data, Steinhauser provides a unique lens on what it means for a district to exemplify NSDC's definition of professional development.

LET DATA DO THE TALKING

ASSESSMENT IS AN EVERYDAY ACTIVITY
FOR HIGH-ACHIEVING LONG BEACH

BY TRACY CROW

JSD: What role has effective professional development played in your district's success?

Steinhauser: It's No. 1. When you have highly trained individuals both on the certificated and classified sides of the house, you're able to really push looking at student data, finding out what your holes are, and aligning your professional development to whatever those proficiencies are. You can then attack whatever the issue is and use the data to see if whatever you identified as the problem and the solution are working.

Determining the right solution is like the scientific method: You have a hypothesis, you look at data, you train folks, they go out in the field and deliver on what they've learned.

Along the way, you hone your methods: If your solution is not meeting the identified needs, then you can make immediate changes. When you have a robust data system and professional development system working hand in hand, there is total alignment for the kids.

JSD: So you're looking at data at a variety of levels, right?

Steinhauser: All levels. Looking at assessments is something we do every day. So it happens in grade-level meetings, it happens in department meetings, it happens in professional development meetings, it happens in principal-teacher meetings. It happens with the assistant superintendents who are in charge of the different levels with their principals, it happens with me with my executive team, and it happens with all of us with our board of education. For example, next week we have a board workshop, and one of the agenda items will be looking at our test data that just came in. What successes did we have, what areas of need do we still have, and then how are we going to address those areas of need? This is where professional development comes in, interventions come in, and sometimes realignment of people and resources.

People at all levels are looking at data, and they're doing it all the time. We look at the statewide data and then eventually drill all the way down to the individual class level. Now, I'm not going to drill down to the individual class level. That's going to be the principal and the teachers, and, in some cases, the assistant superintendent. I'm looking at system-level questions. For example, we have a new program that we just implemented at our middle schools for math. So I'm looking at the fact that we spent a lot of money on training teachers, we

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Long Beach Unified School District

Long Beach, Calif.

Number of schools: 93
Enrollment: 87,499
Staff: 8,000
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	16%
Black:	17%
Hispanic:	52%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	14%
Other:	1%

Limited English proficient: 24%
Languages spoken: 26
Free/reduced lunch: 68%
Special education: 9.5%
Contact: Chris Eftychiou, public information director
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have math coaches to continue that training — now we need to know, what did the assessments say at the end of the year? We knew what the assessments told us along the way because we had our own district assessments aligned with the professional development we were doing. We saw some good progress there. Now I need to know, did that progress show up in the state testing? And it has.

You identify your problem, and then you work backwards to find all the areas of support. That's where you have professional development, data analysis, and interventions that are all linked together, they're not isolated. Where some people make mistakes is that they may do a lot of professional development, but they don't know why they're doing it — it's not connected to anything.

If we're asking teachers to change the way they teach mathematics, then we also need to ask how do we know that what they are doing is working or not working, how do we know whether we need to adjust the student interventions? And that's why we need to have the triangulation of all this data and resources on an ongoing basis.

JSD: With all this data in front of you, who is making the determination about what type of professional development is needed at any given time?

Steinhauser: It's a hybrid process. In some cases, the teachers will tell us what they need. We do a lot of piloting in the district. With this math program, for example, we piloted the program at four schools last year. The teachers told us what was working and what wasn't working based on data. That's how we adjusted the program before we rolled it out to the entire content-level group.

All teachers new to this district are trained in a two-year program — what we call essential elements of effective instruction. Then they also receive content training where data is brought in on a regular basis. So when a teacher is in a meeting with the principal to discuss data, it's not a surprise because they were already exposed to it in their very beginning days as an educator in this district.

> **People at all levels are looking at data, and they're doing it all the time.**

JSD: How long has the district used this data-intensive approach to determining what to learn and how to go about it?

Steinhauser: It started in about 1994, when the district under Carl Cohn launched three improvement initiatives. One was to end social promotion. All kids had to read at a certain level by 3rd grade. Another was that kids who had two Fs couldn't go on to high school from the 8th grade. The third was the use of uniforms in our K-8 schools. At the same time, we were developing our own standards — California didn't have standards at the time. We had identified common standards across each content area at all grade levels, we needed to know what was an acceptable level of proficiency, and then we had to know how

we were going to assess those. And that's where our data system came in.

At the very beginning, the teachers were not allowed to access the data system from anywhere but the sites. The teachers said, "If we're going to really use this, we need to have access to this 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. " The program has grown over the years based on the needs of our teachers. Now it's so much more sophisticated than it was when we first started.

Our biggest challenge has always been to figure out how much can we do in a given year and do it really well.

Our data system has been successful because it is a tool to help teachers become better at their craft. When teachers give an assessment, they can immediately see the test data, and if they want to regroup their kids by a certain strand or certain skill, they can do that right away and reteach. For us as a school district, I can look at the first trimester of mathematics and say, "Wow, our kids have failed on these three standards. We need to provide support to those kids districtwide." If it's a districtwide problem, we need to meet with our teachers and figure out what that is. We were never able to do that in the past. At the same time, we've gotten rid of programs because we could see that they aren't working.

JSD: You were working in the district at the time. Was the culture of the district ready for this?

Steinhauser: I was a principal. We had come from a system that was very top-down and had a superintendent before Cohn who decentralized everything. The idea was that everything would bubble up from the bottom. But what happened was that the parents and the teachers all

To learn more about the Long Beach Unified School District, see **www.lbusd.k12.ca.us.**

demanded consistency. At that time, we had 23 different report cards. Teachers were unhappy. They had to know that if they said something was meeting a high standard that it was the same across the district for every program. So that's where the need for the standards came in. They were developed with our partners in the higher education and business communities as well as with our teachers and parents.

At that time, we didn't have a data system. We started with common end-of-course exams in mathematics and benchmark reading exams because of the social promotion initiative. Once the other content teachers saw the power of this assessment data, they demanded it, too. Now we have more than 211 common end-of-course exams. You know you're on to something good when the art and foreign language teachers say they want common exams.

Our biggest challenge has always been to figure out how much can we do in a given year and do it really well. At the central office level, we're playing catch-up because the list of what teachers want is longer than we can give right now due to resource issues. It is a good challenge to have, but also a problem. You want your teachers to be the best trained and to do the best job possible; when you can't deliver on all of those things, you don't want them to be discouraged.

JSD: Are you finding that a particular challenge with budget crises?

Steinhauser: Yes. We have to choose those projects that are most aligned to our strategic plan as our highest priorities. We just launched new end-of-course exams in language arts in grades 2-5. We expanded in that direction because those exams are in alignment with our dashboard. We

have a dashboard aligned to our strategic plan that says by 2013, our kids will meet certain proficiency standards at different levels.

JSD: How prevalent are coaches in your district?

Steinhauser: Not every building has a coach, and some have more than one. It's all based on the data at the school site. When we roll out a new focus for the district, those schools with the greatest need will get the greatest amount of support. Then as the data show that they're progressing, we'll gradually release that support. A school might be doing really well in language arts and terrible in math, so they'll get math coaches and not language arts coaches. On the flip side, people get upset when you take coaches away because they really bond with them well. That is a down side.

JSD: Would you say you have a sense of collective responsibility among all your teachers for all students? How does professional development feed that?

Steinhauser: I would say that as a community, we have a collective responsibility for all kids. When you have a highly trained workforce, everyone in the community knows what your mission is and what you're there for. This vision raises the level of professionalism for everyone. We're always saying we're not going to blame the kids for any issues. We have to look at ourselves and how we can become better at what we're doing because we are the professionals. If you communicate and you open up about what's working well and what's not working well, then everybody in the system sees that. There's a sense of trust there, and everyone knows we're in this together, that this is for kids, for our kids.

JSD: What challenges are you seeing in the coming year or two

that you expect professional development will help you address?

Steinhauser: We have a huge focus on our English language learners, particularly those who have been with us for four to five years. We're doing some pilots in the district K-12 on why these students who have been with us now for four or five years are not proficient. We're offering a couple of different services to our kids and looking at how we support our teachers on that.

We're also working on our resource specialist program (RSP). We need to know how we can make sure that our special population is getting the best program possible and how to ensure that the teachers delivering that program are the most highly trained possible.

We are using some of our best coaches in the different content areas to give support to our RSP teachers, concentrating on common learning strategies and the use of data. At least for the next two to three years, this will be how we enhance our special education program and how we provide services to our English language learners.

A big concern I have right now in this economic crisis is that there are two areas that people will cut first. One is professional development. They'll just get rid of that money, because people will say you really don't need that, or I've been professional development-ed to death. The second one is research. They'll get rid of their research department. Both of those are huge mistakes. Yes, you have to work within your budget. Sometimes as educators we're not always as creative as we could be. People need to be as creative as possible to ensure that they provide ongoing professional development based on the data that shows what kids and teachers need. That's the critical piece. If you abandon this altogether, you will lose all the ground that you have achieved.

I advocate for the greatest flexibility possible. In education, you have too many pots where money can only go for certain things, and in reality, we need to spend money where the need is. Maybe I don't need to buy a bunch of new textbooks, I need it for my teachers in grade 6 in English language learner support. We need to advocate for a system that holds us accountable for the outcomes of our kids, but gives us the greatest flexibility possible to assure that we can do that.

Once you have a highly trained workforce, you can't take that away. But if teachers don't continue to hone their skills, they won't continue to improve. Good teachers will always remain good teachers, but they could become great teachers with better support.

JSD: What would it take for this — cutting professional development and research — not to be the default reaction when times are tough?

Steinhauser: It takes strong leaders — teachers, principals, board members, superintendents — to say to their communities that we need to spend this money. If we don't, we're going to set kids back even further, which then becomes an economic development problem. If we don't produce a workforce that is able to go out and get the jobs they need, then we're in serious trouble, because we're going to have higher unemployment or more remediation at the college level. People forget that sometimes you have to spend money to make money. ■

DEVELOP A PROTOCOL TO MAKE THE MOST OUT OF SCHOOL VISITS

I recently had the opportunity to visit schools with a superintendent of a large urban school system. I enjoyed spending the morning observing instruction and interacting with teachers and students. On this particular morning, the superintendent had told principals she was interested in observing math classes. At each school, the principal escorted us through a number of math classrooms, allowing time to observe instruction, talk to students, and visit with the teachers.

We discussed what we learned as we traveled from high school to high school by car. At the end of the morning, the superintendent was satisfied that she had achieved the agenda she had set for the visits. However, she wondered about ways she might improve the process. I used that observation as an opportunity to think about how superintendents and principals might leverage school visits to advance effective professional learning.

While not every school visit offers an opportunity to improve professional development for all school staff, most school visits can. There is a missed opportunity when leaders don't use school visits for that purpose. With the permission of my superintendent colleague, I offer a few suggestions. While her intention was to get a sense of math instruction in the high school, the principals acted as escorts rather than providing their views to her about what was working well and where improvement was necessary. If the principals had a protocol in advance to guide the visit, the entire process — from preparation through debrief — becomes a powerful learning experience for all involved.

OBJECTIVES FOR SCHOOL VISITS

So while not all visits can offer these learning opportunities, many can. Consider these potential objectives for

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What is your objective?

I welcome your suggestions on objectives for school visits as a reply to my posting on this topic on NSDC's blog (www.nsdc.org/learningBlog) so that together we can expand upon the bulleted list at right.

school visits:

- To model the district's expectation for classroom observation strategies;
- To calibrate how principals and teacher leaders define, recognize, and document effective teaching;
- To assess the quality of professional learning occurring during faculty meetings;
- To monitor learning teams' applications of a district's cycle of improvement;
- To assess to what degree teachers are following district pacing guides and curriculum documents;
- To determine to what degree teachers are using effective teaching strategies identified in the district's instructional framework;
- To demonstrate how talking to and observing students can provide a powerful source of data on the instructional program; and
- To convene focus groups to discuss the quality and value of professional development in addressing student learning needs.

ASSESSING THE CYCLE OF IMPROVEMENT

I'll elaborate on two of these ideas. In my first example, the objective of the visit is to determine how learning team meetings apply the district's cycle of improvement.

A superintendent or principal informs learning teams to expect a visit. The visitors will be observing their next team meeting and recording answers to the following questions:

- Which student performance data were reviewed and what did the data tell the learning team?
- How does the learning team use the data to determine specific learning needs for students and the team?
- How will the learning team acquire new knowledge or skills it needs?
- If the learning team is reviewing recent learning experiences, can it identify what new knowledge and skills were gained and whether the investment was a smart decision?
- How does the team approach planning joint lessons, developing common assessments, and providing each other with classroom-based support?
- If the learning team is reviewing results from a recent classroom assessment that was developed to determine the impact of application of a new strategy or process,

In each issue of *JSD*, Stephanie Hirsh will share a professional learning challenge and possible solutions that create results for educators and their students. All columns are available at www.nsdc.org.

what results did it get and what will it do next?

- If the learning team is struggling with a problem, does it consider seeking help from an external assistance provider? How does the team talk about making this decision?
- What help does the team need from the principal, superintendent, or others in the central office?

Following the observation, the superintendent and principal debrief and determine what feedback to provide to the team and if any specific actions are required by central office staff. Follow-up actions may include asking a district facilitator to temporarily facilitate team meetings for a team that has strayed from its original purpose or identifying a content expert who can help the team with a problem it faces. In either case, the observation leads to action that demonstrates the administration's commitment to the learning team structure and advances higher quality collaborative work and learning. In addition, the superintendent has valuable data to share with central office administrators regarding how its vision for professional learning teams is being implemented in schools.

DO MEETINGS LEAD TO LEARNING?

In my second example, the objective of the school visit is to observe and document the quality of professional learning occurring during faculty meetings.

Faculty meetings provide principals a key opportunity to not only promote effective professional development for all educators but to model it as well. Savvy principals who take advantage of this opportunity begin faculty meetings by declaring an objective. Perhaps the purpose of the meeting is to share some recent student data such as benchmark exam results, and then to move the faculty into grade-level or subject-matter teams to examine the results at a deeper level. Perhaps the faculty had invested the previous six weeks in new instructional strategies and they are investigating to see if the data provide any indications that their new learning and practices affected the results. The principal's role is to use the data to promote reflective practice and ultimately to bring the faculty to a point where they can say what they need to learn and do next.

Learning is core to every conversation in this faculty meeting. While the principal uses the faculty meeting to promote reflective practice, the superintendent uses debriefing with the principal to promote reflective practice as well, and might ask some of the following questions to debrief the meeting.

- Was the objective for the meeting clear?
- Was there a learning goal?
- To what degree do you believe the faculty understood the goal?
- What do you believe the majority of the faculty learned today?
- What do you believe the majority will do next? What will you do next?
- Is there anything you would do differently to achieve your goal?

Returning to the morning I spent with my superintendent colleague: After reviewing this column, she developed the following protocol that she will use in the future to promote deeper learning and reflection for the principals in the school. She will invite the principal to join her on a math learning walk on a particular day and time. She will tell the principal that she is interested in reviewing his goal for math this year and what instructional strategies he expects to see in the classrooms. Following each classroom visit, they will record the instructional strategies they observed. Before the superintendent departs, they will discuss to what degree the instruction they observed represented the principal's priorities for the year and what actions the principal intends to take next.

Every time I speak to a group, someone asks me a question about time. It is our most precious resource in schools. We need to make sure that we are very deliberate about how we use it. In my view, we can use the time that administrators commit to school visits in even more powerful ways to advance professional learning for staff and students. What have you done to make the best use of your school visits? I'd like to hear from you, and I invite you to respond to my suggestions. ■

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR EMOTIONAL WAKE

A friend describes his home at the foot of San Diego Bay, where all of the houses have docks. The speed limit in the bay is five knots. Once in a while, some cowboy rips through the area and rocks all of the boats, knocking them up against the docks. The person might not have done this on purpose. However, if a boater causes damage, he is responsible for it. Yes, the other boats should have bumpers, the right-sized bumpers; still, each boater is required to take responsibility for his own wake.

The question is not whether he can boat in those waters. Of course he can. The question is at what speed.

One of the principles of fierce conversations is: Take responsibility for your emotional wake. Emotional wake is what you remember, what you feel after I'm gone, the aftermath or aftertaste. Our individual wakes are larger than we know. As a leader, teacher, colleague, parent, there is no trivial comment. Something you may not remember saying may have had a devastating impact on someone looking to you for guidance and approval. By the same token, something you said may have encouraged and inspired someone who is grateful to you to this day.

One conversation at a time, we are building relationships we either enjoy or endure. Each conversation is a link in the chain of events called life. Conversation A leads to result B, which ultimately produces C and so on, like Rube Goldberg's simplified pencil-sharpener, at right.

While our conversational paths may sometimes seem as haphazard as Rube Goldberg's invention, they aren't, not really. Our careers, our companies, our relationships and our very lives, succeed or fail,

one conversation at a time. We enjoy or suffer the consequences of every successful or failed conversation we've ever had. When we become aware of the impact of our emotional wake, we can begin to make sense of past results and improve them from this moment on.

Whether deliberate or unintentional, a negative emotional wake is expensive. Individuals, schools, students, and ultimately, the communities in which they live and work pay the price.

We must learn to deliver the message without the load. Loaded messages come in many guises. No matter how much sugar someone sprinkles throughout a loaded message, we read the underlying intent loud and clear. The principal or colleague who says, "That's good, but next time why don't you ..." is delivering the message: "Nothing you do is good enough." Each of us has a unique fingerprint, the load we might attach to a message, such as …

- **Blaming.** "This is your fault." "You really screwed this up."

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In each issue of *JSD*, Susan Scott will explore aspects of communication that encourage meaningful collaboration. All columns are available at www.nsdc.org.

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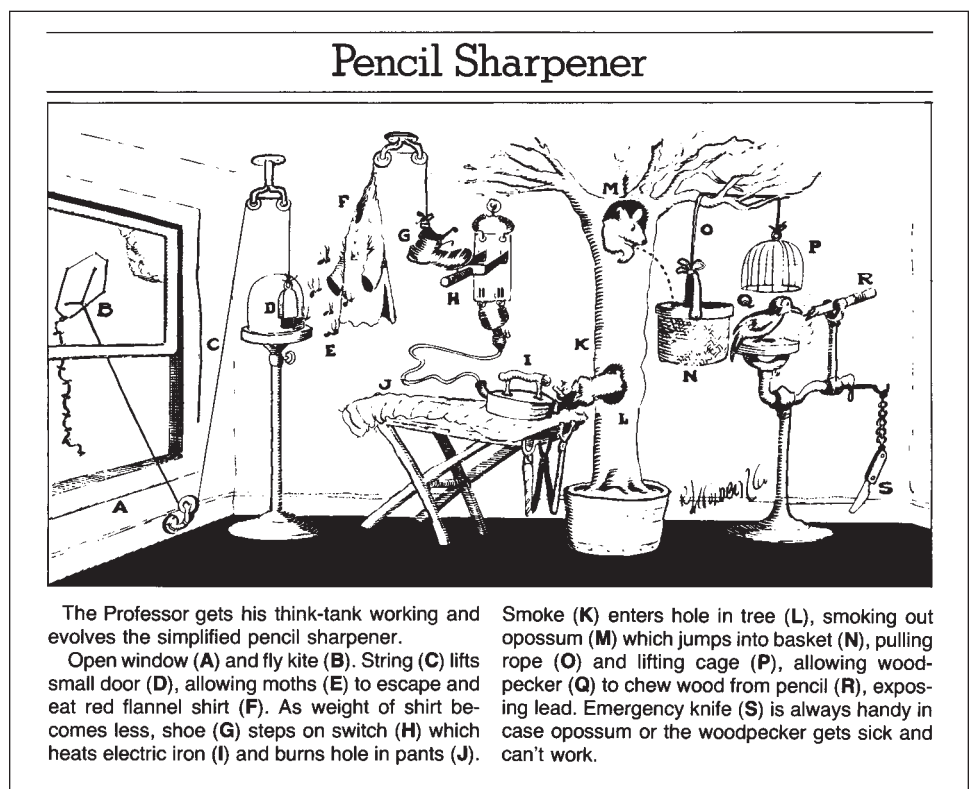
Pencil Sharpener

The Professor gets his think-tank working and evolves the simplified pencil sharpener.

Open window (**A**) and fly kite (**B**). String (**C**) lifts small door (**D**), allowing moths (**E**) to escape and eat red flannel shirt (**F**). As weight of shirt becomes less, shoe (**G**) steps on switch (**H**) which heats electric iron (**I**) and burns hole in pants (**J**).

Smoke (**K**) enters hole in tree (**L**), smoking out opossum (**M**) which jumps into basket (**N**), pulling rope (**O**) and lifting cage (**P**), allowing woodpecker (**Q**) to chew wood from pencil (**R**), exposing lead. Emergency knife (**S**) is always handy in case opossum or the woodpecker gets sick and can't work.

Rube Goldberg is the ® and © of Rube Goldberg, Inc.

- **Name calling, labeling.** "You're an insensitive narcissist." "You're a liar."
- **Using sarcasm, black humor.** "Apparently, your life goal is to live on the cutting edge of mediocrity."
- **Attaching global weight to tip-of-the-iceberg stuff.** This small thing happened and it means this huge thing! "You don't love me and never did."
- **Threatening, intimidating.** "Guess you don't value your job." "You'll never make it to college."
- **Exaggerating.** "You always do this." "This is the hundredth time …"
- **Taking a position of superiority.** "You don't get it." "I can't get through to you."
- **Saying, "If I were you …"** "Why can't you be more like me?
- **Gunny sacking, bringing up a lot of old baggage.** "This is just like the time when you …"
- **Public assassination.** This is cowardly, and we usually try to get away with it by pretending it's funny. "OK, John, apparently you have all the answers."
- **Negative facial expressions.** Despite our polite words, how we feel is written all over our faces.
- **Ascribing negative motives.** "What you're really saying is … " or "What's really going on is …"
- **Being unresponsive.** Refusing to speak, the cruelest load you can attach. It demonstrates a lack of caring, a lack of validation.

So what should we do? Ultimately, the problem belongs to both participants in a conversation. However, since you and I have little control over how others will react, the most effective position to take is to focus on our own actions. We can say to ourselves: "This is my problem. From this day forward, I will take responsibility for my emotional wake."

Take a moment to recall a conversation that did not go well. Forget about the other person's ineffective behavior. Focus on yourself. Revisit the conversation. See the expression on your face. What was your body language? Replay your words and listen to the tone with which they were spoken. View the part of the conversation when your partner, colleague, or student became upset or angry. What did you say or do that triggered your partner's response? What load did you attach to your message? Is that your typical, unique fingerprint? What effect did it have on the conversation?

Given that one of the purposes of fierce conversations is to enrich relationships, we need to acknowledge our load if we have one. If you need help recognizing the load you sometimes attach to your messages, just ask the people who work or live with you. Let them know that you'd like to understand what it is you do or say that causes a negative emotional wake. Then shut up and listen! Don't argue,

> **Let them know that you'd like to understand what it is you do or say that causes a negative emotional wake. Then shut up and listen!**

defend, or explain. Encourage them with, "Say more about that, please." And mean it.

The danger in receiving frank feedback may be in going too far over to the other side. Withholding the message is as dangerous to the relationship as delivering a message with a load attached. For each of us, the challenge is to reconcile being real and doing no harm.

The key is in your attitude, not necessarily the words, though, of course, words are important. What I've noticed is that the people who consistently leave a positive wake tend to:

- View and talk with others, all others, as their equals.
- Invite and consider multiple, competing realities.
- Seek to be influenced by others, versus seeking only to influence others.
- Put the greater good ahead of self-serving agendas.
- Be "here" (in each conversation) prepared to be nowhere else.
- Tell the truth, with good intent.

You can't fake "fierce." Hang in there. See your conversations through to completion. If you create a mess, either single-handedly or in partnership with someone, do not bolt when things get emotional. Sometimes you just need a well-oiled reverse gear. "I was wrong. I'm sorry." These are important words that too often remain lodged in our throats, even when we know they are desperately needed. People who are never wrong are likely teetering on the edge of a relationship in danger of crumbling.

ASSIGNMENT

Ask yourself: To whom do I need to deliver a message, and what is the message I wish to deliver? What is my intent? In other words, what do I want of this relationship?

Accept the responsibility to be present, aware, authentic, appropriate, truthful, and clear. Keep in mind that being in a relationship with the persons close to you, including each teacher in your building, is more important than being right all the time. Say less and listen more.

When you begin to hear your students, your life partner, and your co-workers at a deeper level, you'll start getting far more information from them. The quality of your listening will allow your colleagues to discover who they are and to value themselves. They will know that you care about them, and will commit to their dreams for themselves. And who wouldn't want that as an outcome for all of us? ■

FOR DIVERSE FAMILIES, PARENT INVOLVEMENT TAKES ON A NEW MEANING

Educators often ask how they can increase parent involvement, particularly among culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families. They believe doing so will improve student achievement.

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) recently issued revised National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. As with previous versions, the revised document includes six standards: welcoming all families, communicating effectively, supporting student success, speaking up for every child, sharing power, and collaborating with the community. These standards represent important ways families and school can work together. They also represent a shift in the way we think about working with families. Rather than talking about parent involvement, these standards move us to think of engagement.

This is an important shift because it allows us to acknowledge that what we are asking of parents is much more than involvement in their children's education. We are asking parents to engage in the work of schools. A school that engages its parents will become a better place for students. However, if we only look at parent engagement, the contributions of many families will be overlooked.

Parents and families support students and schools in a variety of ways. Involvement is one kind of support. Engagement is another, and empowerment is a third. Involvement refers to the actions parents and families take to support their own children. Engagement refers to parents and families working with educators on the broader goals of the school by providing input and serving on decision-making committees. The third kind of support, empowerment, refers to parents and families having actual ownership of the school. Rather than responding to what the school wants, empowered parents and families work as full partners with the school, sharing decision making in all aspects.

All three kinds of support are important. As we make the shift to thinking about parent engagement, we must

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also continue to think about parent involvement, and we must acknowledge that all parents are involved in their children's education. Some forms of involvement, however, may go unrecognized by schools, and parents may be labeled as unconcerned or unwilling to support education. This is often the case with culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families.

Several research studies (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Daniel-White, 2002; Lopez, 2001, Delgado-Gaitan, 2001) illustrate that that parents of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students not only have high expectations for their children's academic success, but they also support their children's education in important ways that may differ from the kind of parent involvement noted in traditional or middle class parent involvement models. To help educators better understand the kinds of involvement identified in this research, we have developed five categories that describe ways in which parents and families may be involved in their children's education that go beyond traditional forms. These categories build upon traditional forms of parent involvement to create an expanded, rather than separate, definition.

In each issue of *JSD,* Sarah W. Nelson, above, and Patricia L. Guerra write about the importance of and strategies for developing cultural awareness in teachers and schools. The columns are available at www.nsdc.org.

1. PARENTING

In traditional parent involvement, parents and school are viewed as partners with overlapping roles and responsibilities. Both are equally responsible for the education of the child. Schools assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students. Parents assist schools in understanding family circumstances and make recommendations for how best to work with the child at school. For many culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse parents and families, school and home are viewed as having distinct roles and responsibilities for the child. The parent's job is to socialize children's behavior. The educator's job is to teach. In this relationship, most of the work of parents is done at home. The socialization that occurs at school (e.g. walking children to class, eating lunch with children) is often unrecognized as involvement and may even be viewed negatively by the school as interference with children developing the independence so valued in the school setting.

2. COMMUNICATING

With traditional parent involvement, two-way communication is expected between school and home. The school informs parents about schoolwide events and individual student progress, and parents contact the school when they need information or want to inform the school about their child. Because the role of schools and parents is distinct in many culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse communities, parents rarely initiate contact with the school. Parents respond to school communication and make themselves available when dropping off or picking up their children. Parents will also attend school meetings when possible and will often send a relative or friend as surrogate when they cannot attend.

3. DEMONSTRATING SUPPORT OF ACADEMICS

For many culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families, education is viewed as a privilege rather than a right. Parents work to provide a home, clothing, and food for children so that the children may attend school. Many culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse parents have risked their lives so their children will have better educational opportunities. Parents ensure children are ready to benefit from school by dressing them appropriately, getting them to school on time, and instructing them to listen to the teacher. Children may be excused from household responsibilities and given exclusive use of a shared space in the home when they have important school assignments to complete.

4. DECLARING THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

While acquiring education is an unstated, but understood, expectation in many middle-class families, many culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse parents consistently communicate the importance of education to their children through words and actions. Parents may be unable to give assistance on homework or important educational decisions due to language differences, limited literacy, or unfamiliarity with the assignment or school operating procedures, but they insist children complete the task. They may remind children why education is important and encourage them to strive for a better job than what the parent has. The parent may even take children to work in manual labor jobs to show them how difficult the work is and to convince them to stay in school.

5. CONVEYING TRUST BY GRANTING AUTONOMY

As children mature and demonstrate responsibility, their parents may grant more autonomy. This may take the form of parents having few household rules for the children or allowing children to be responsible for tasks such as completing course selection forms or college entrance

materials. The parents may provide guidance, but they rarely tell the child what to do. In doing so, parents encourage children to grow into their role as an adult. This form of involvement is often misunderstood as lack of caring or giving children inappropriate levels of responsibility.

When schools recognize and value these forms of involvement, they can use them as a bridge to more traditional forms of parent involvement and to move the school toward parent engagement and empowerment.

A colleague has created an activity we find useful in helping teachers and school leaders develop an appreciation for an expanded definition of parent involvement (Alemán, 2009). Working with a group of teachers and school leaders, our colleague gives each participant a piece of paper and markers. He asks them to illustrate how their own parents were involved in their education as a child. Participants are instructed to use only pictures, no text. The pictures are then posted around the room, and participants volunteer to explain their drawings. As educators share, it becomes clear that many of their own parents were not involved with school in the traditional way. In fact, many of their own parents showed support in the ways that research suggests many culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families often do.

This is a powerful way to deliver the message that if we want to develop authentic relationships with parents and families, we must assume that parents are involved in the education of their children, and we must value what parents and families bring, even when it is outside traditional forms of involvement.

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FROM THE field

THE EXPERT NEXT DOOR

"Teaching students and teaching each other: The importance of peer learning for teachers"
NBER Working Papers, October 2009

The students of teachers who work alongside more effective peers experience benefits that result in gains in test scores. This study, conducted over 11 years, focused on test scores in mathematics and reading in 3rd through 5th grade. The researchers measured teacher quality both by experience and certification as well as the test scores of those teachers' past students.
www.nber.org/papers/w15202.pdf

COORDINATION IS KEY

"Teacher quality: Sustained coordination among key federal education programs could enhance state efforts to improve teacher quality"
U.S. Government Accountability Office, July 2009

An examination of U.S. Department of Education programs related to improving teacher quality revealed a lack of strategic planning and coordination in the distribution of $4.2 billion annually. The report recommends that the secretary of education establish a strategy for information sharing as well as coordinating efforts to help states, school districts, and institutions of higher education in their initiatives to improve teacher quality.
**www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-593**

BEYOND THE FACTORY MODEL

"The widget effect: Our national failure to acknowledge and act on differences in teacher effectiveness"
The New Teacher Project, June 2009

This report on the failure of teacher evaluation systems to recognize and respond to variations in teacher effectiveness has profound implications for policy and professional development. When teachers are labeled as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory, systems have no way to identify and address the professional support that would improve those teachers' performance with students. Recommendations include integrating performance evaluation systems with human capital policies such as those that determine professional development support.
http://widgeteffect.org/downloads/TheWidgetEffect.pdf
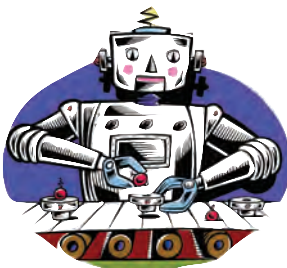
DISTRICT TACKLES TURNOVER

"Hiring (and keeping) urban teachers: A coordinated approach to new teacher support"
Boston Plan for Excellence and Boston Public Schools, June 2009

www.bpe.org/files /NewTeacher Support.pdf

To combat the challenge of teacher turnover and its associated costs, Boston Public Schools and partners undertook a multiyear initiative to study and improve the district's hiring and support practices. In addition to changing preparation and hiring practices, the district overhauled professional development and induction for new teachers. New teacher developers — carefully selected veteran teachers — work closely with new teachers in a nonevaluative mentoring capacity, modeling lessons, co-teaching, and giving one-on-one support. The new teacher developers participate in specialized learning in order to best support the district's newest hires.

BROAD PRIZE FOR URBAN EDUCATION

Texas' Aldine ISD is 2009 winner

The Aldine Independent School District near Houston, Texas, won the 2009 Broad Prize for Urban Education. The district will receive $1 million in college scholarships. Aldine has shown consistent student achievement gains and is recognized as one of the most improved urban systems in the country in four of the last six years.

Each year, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation highlights outstanding urban districts that show growth in student achievement while narrowing achievement gaps between income and ethnic groups. Broad Prize funds provide college scholarships for graduating seniors at the winning and finalist school districts.

In addition to Aldine, 2009 Broad Prize finalists are:

- Broward County Public Schools, Florida
- Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia
- Long Beach Unified School District, California
- Socorro Independent School District, Texas

Learn more about this process and the practices at the highlighted districts at **www.broadprize.org/prize.shtml**

Sculpture
© TOM OTTERNESS

See an interview on p. 56 with Chris Steinhauser, superintendent of schools in Long Beach, Calif., a five-time Broad finalist and winner in 2003.

FOR YOUR TOOLBOX

ARE YOU WATCHING THIS?

Learning Matters

Veteran correspondent John Merrow helms this web site dedicated to highlighting critical education reform questions. His interviews with leading voices in education, from researchers to practitioners to policy makers, explore such topics as leadership, innovation, teacher support, urban education, and federal policy. Two blogs are included on the site — Merrow's thoughts on education and a news-focused blog. Video supports many of the interviews and articles. This site is created by a nonprofit production company focused on education that produces PBS reports and documentaries.
http://learningmatters.tv/

TOWARD TOLERANCE

Teaching Diverse Students Initiative
Southern Poverty Law Center

This professional learning tool kit includes online, research-based resources to improve the teaching of racially and ethnically diverse students. These resources can help school leaders and teams to identify policies and practices that support effective teaching and high levels of student learning. Tools include assessments for individuals and schools, overviews and articles on aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy, case studies, and videos from key leaders in the field.
www.tolerance.org/tdsi/

PUT CONCEPTS TO WORK

"Leading change handbook: Concepts and tools"
Wallace Foundation, June 2009

A missing ingredient for many leaders responsible for leading change has been how to translate concepts into actions, continuous improvements, and sustainable results. This tool kit was developed to fill that need with tools and explanations for many steps in the change process: assessing and improving participants' readiness; engaging stakeholders; planning early wins; minimizing resistance; using collaborative planning methods; and developing ways to bring initiatives to scale and sustain them over time.
snipurl.com/rytkw

CONNECT RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Usable Knowledge: Connecting research and practice for leaders in education
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Designed to bring Harvard's research to practitioners in education, this web site covers five big categories, including leadership and policy, learning, data, community, and teaching and curriculum. Articles synopsize relevant research and point to additional resources, and videos and interviews help to create a compelling compilation.
www.uknow.gse.harvard.edu

STATE SNAPSHOTS

Education Watch 2009 state summary reports
The Education Trust, April 2009

Find snapshots of state-level data on demographics, student performance, graduation rates, teacher quality, and funding. The reports show trends across the states: Gaps still separate low-income students and students of color from other students, and improvement continues but at a slow pace. Sources of data include the U.S. Department of Education, the Census Bureau, and the College Board.
www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/summaries2009/states.html

TUNED INTO TED?

TED: Ideas worth spreading

There is no disputing the power of video to connect people to the new, interesting, funny, and informative — look at the popularity of YouTube. If you haven't already checked out this source of compelling speakers, visit today to watch leaders on such themes as technology, entertainment, business, science, and global issues. Educators will be inspired and provoked. Collaboration and creativity are among the topics speakers address.
www.ted.com

ARRA AND WHAT WORKS

Doing What Works and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
U.S. Department of Education
One of several topics covered in this collection of evidence-based practices in education, this resource on ARRA covers three areas: Using data for improvement, increasing teacher effectiveness, and turning around the lowest-improving schools. In each area, the site offers several resources such as video interviews, planning templates, and assessments.
http://dww.ed.gov/arra.cfm

MATH EVIDENCE MULTIPLIES

"Effects of teacher professional development on gains in student achievement"
Council of Chief State School Officers, June 2009

The National Science Foundation funded this meta-analysis study of professional development in mathematics and science to answer two questions:

1. What are the effects of content-focused professional development on improving teacher knowledge and skills as well as improving student achievement?

2. What characteristics of professional development explain the degree of effectiveness?

Findings show evidence across multiple studies that professional development in mathematics does have positive effects on student achievement.
http://snipurl.com/s37e2

theme / LEARNING SCHOOLS

A new definition.

Originally created for federal legislation, NSDC's definition of professional learning outlines effective learning for educators. Key elements of the definition cover the use of data in a continuous cycle of improvement, teams of educators working together, and the connection between adult learning and student learning.
By Stephanie Hirsh

Strength training: *Institutes pump up teachers' roles as instructional leaders.*

When a Massachusetts district determined that instructional improvement was a priority, it turned to an external partner to boost leadership capacity in the district. Summer institutes were just the first step in building a long-term, collaborative learning culture that relied on strong teacher leadership and resulted in improved student outcomes.
By Peg Mongiello, Deborah Brady, George Johnson, and Jill Harrison Berg

Focus, feedback, follow-through: *Professional development basics guide district's plan.*

Coaches are a critical piece in implementing what is now districtwide practice in Surprise, Ariz. — supporting teachers through differentiated, job-embedded professional learning and using specific feedback as the vehicle to impact classroom instruction. Protocols for sharing feedback and collecting classroom data guide the learning conversations.
By Lori Renfro and Adriel Grieshaber

Fast track to literacy: *Kentucky district targets struggling readers in urban schools.*

After determining the student outcomes they desired for high school students falling behind in language arts, educators identified a particular instructional program and accompanying professional development. To measure the effectiveness of the program, they employed a five-level evaluation model using a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence.
By Thomas R. Guskey, Marco A. Muñoz, and Jennifer Aberli

Think time: *Formative assessment empowers teachers to try new practices.*

Students take on new responsibilities for their learning and the learning of their peers in this Vermont school, thanks to the use of formative assessments. At the same time, the role of the teacher shifts. An external partner assisted educators in implementing the use of formative assessments, while teacher communities provide ongoing support and learning.
By Teresa M. Egan, Beth Cobb, and Marion Anastasia

Slow turn ahead: *5 principles guide district through a changing demographic landscape.*

A midsized Texas district worked to boost student performance through transformed professional learning practices. Central to the transformation was the alignment of professional development with the district's improvement initiatives. Time for learning, enlisting all leaders, team collaboration, engaging everyone in the work, and using data for decision making are the guiding principles.

By Margaret N. Miller, Ellen V. Bell, and David F. Holland

Skeptics to partners: *University teams with district to improve ELL instruction.*

Faculty from a nearby university worked with elementary schools in North Carolina to implement the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, a professional learning model to assist teachers in best supporting English language learners. Summer institutes, school-based learning communities, and coaching sustained the learning throughout the year.

By Debra O'Neal, Marjorie C. Ringler, and Diana B. Lys

feature

Let data do the talking: *Assessment is an everyday activity for high-achieving Long Beach.* **Q&A with Chris Steinhauser.**

The superintendent of Long Beach (Calif.) Unified School District sees professional development as central to the success of the district. He also takes a scientific approach to improvement, immersing all levels of staff in the use of data to track progress, determine next steps, and document successes and failures.

By Tracy Crow

coming up

In Winter 2010 *JSD*:
**Fundamentals of
professional learning**

forum / RANDY ZILA

A LOVE FOR LEARNING IS WORTH PASSING ON TO OTHERS

Love of learning — that's what we want for students sitting in classrooms across the country. When kids want to learn, teaching becomes more rewarding and easier to do. Though I am now retired, my love of learning was a powerful driver in my career.

I like to think that teachers choose their path not only because of the desire to teach, but also because of a sincere desire to learn. Loving to learn is not just good for the kids we teach but for the teachers who teach them. Just as professionals must learn how global economies shift or how ecological environments change, the best ways to reach children will evolve.

I dedicated myself to being a lifelong learner as a staff development director in the 1980s and believed it was my good fortune to discover the power behind questioning what we do, how we do it, and how we could improve it. As I moved forward, and as education sometimes did not, I continued to ask questions. I also sought out colleagues, and we inquired together about the ways we might improve our impact on kids' education in preparation for their future.

With the help of grant money from the Lynne Chidley Foundation, my colleagues and I were able to set in motion a mentor and peer coaching program to serve the needs of our teachers.

Twenty years ago, there weren't many grants being given to improve learning opportunities for educators. To be the benefactor of such a grant, and then implement some of these early professional development practices, was exhilarating and meaningful. The grant allowed us to research, observe, and explore habits and behaviors, and then establish effective professional development, guaranteeing the success of our educators and ultimately our students.

The model we developed in the early '80s enabled us to begin professional conversations that grew into global perspectives about learning. We discovered how to design a strong, effective professional development foundation on which we built a productive framework to house the instructional and relationship skills that impact student achievement. When I retired, I could see the successful outcomes of the investment in professional development in turning around student achievement.

These best practices worked so well at the St. Vrain Valley School District that we extended them to all teachers engaged in classroom teaching with the same ratio of success.

I still encourage educators to question what they do, how they do it, and if they could be doing it better to provide kids with the very best education for the 21st century. Are there coaching programs that aren't being used effectively? If one doesn't exist, could someone get a grant to seed one? I know from experience that a seed program can grow into a districtwide program that becomes standard practice, even after its originator is gone. I urge you to believe it can make a difference for you. ■

Randy Zila retired as superintendent of St. Vrain Valley School District in Longmont, Colo. In 1986, Zila was the first beneficiary of a grant from NSDC's foundation. At that time, the foundation was named for Lynne Chidley to honor the life and work of a former NSDC board president. (See a remembrance of Lynne Chidley on p. 8.)

TO APPLY for Impacting the Future Now grants, visit the NSDC web site to link to the foundation for grant applications, due dates, and general information. Impacting the Future Now offers four opportunities:

- **The Childley Scholarships** provide funding to support participation in NSDC's Academy for Staff Developers to develop their skills to lead professional learning that results in increased student learning.
- **The E6 Grant** supports a team's efforts to advance NSDC's purpose that every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves. The grant awards up to $5,000 and the registration fee for the three-day NSDC Annual Conference for three members of the project team.
- **The BridgeBuilder** is a multiyear award to principals to lead professional learning through coaching and attending the annual NSDC conferences.
- **The Affiliate grant** supports state affiliate organizations in working toward NSDC's purpose. Grant application deadlines are in early February.

To ensure that others have the opportunity that Randy Zila had, please consider a donation to the Foundation. Visit www.nsdc.org/getinvolved/foundation.cfm.