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# THE LEARNING Principal®

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

## KIDS AT THE CENTER

*21st-century learning carries school towards excellence*

BY TRACY CROW

**A**s one of her colleagues noted, Marta Gunderson isn't willing to settle for meeting standards – she has shifted the emphasis of Canyon Valley Elementary School to set-

ting higher goals for all kids. Gunderson is in her third year as principal of the school, her 31st in the Catalina Foot-hills School District in Tucson, Ariz. She emphasizes how good the schools are in the district already. Now it's time to push towards excellence – no ceilings for kids.

The district as a whole is using 21st-century learning as the lever to achieve excellence.

Gunderson is an ardent advocate, and when she walks through her building, she sees evidence everywhere that this emphasis is transforming academics as well as student engagement. Recently, she watched students presenting group



science projects in a 5th-grade class. The other students in the room were listening deeply – and starting to question some of their own work. They asked their teacher for the opportunity to go back and rethink their

conclusions based on what they learned from other groups. Gunderson laughed, “How often do you hear kids say, ‘I want to go back and

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Meet Christine Lynch, principal of Shaw Middle School in Spokane, Wash.  
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**CHRISTINE LYNCH**

Principal, Shaw  
Middle School  
Spokane, Wash.

**Grades:** 6-8

**Enrollment:** 620  
students

**Staff:** 45 teachers

Shaw Middle School student population is 70% white, 6% Hispanic, 6% black, 7% American Indian, and 11% Asian/Pacific Islander. Bilingual students make up 9% of the population; 80% of students receive free or reduced-price lunch; and 18% are special education students.

# Q&A Relationships build shared accountability

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

**Q. What do you do to build relationships in your building?**

I work hard to treat staff the same way we treat our students. I get to know their strengths, their challenges, their personal lives — for example, if they're taking care of parents, if they have a sick child. I have an open door policy; people don't need to make an appointment to see me. And, do what you say you're going to do when you say you're going to do it. That goes to trust.

**Q. How did you find the line between personal and supervisory?**

It's the same language we use with students: We're friendly; we're not friends. Part of who I am is the clarity of what I expect.

**Q. Why are relationships important?**

Ruby Payne and many others stress the importance of having positive relationships. People have to know what you're willing to do for and with them, and you need to do that consistently. When people can count on you to do what you say you're going to do, they'll reciprocate. We don't have issues with work ethic, with climate, because people are appreciated, but are also accountable for working *together*.

**Q. How do you encourage collaboration?**

We use protocols and we structure it. We have unit assessments. In our building it's an unwritten responsibility to continue to learn about how I can best do this. I create a master schedule where core teams have a shared prep period and

are expected to meet once a week during that period. The reality is, they meet more often than that. When a parent wants to meet with a teacher, they meet with the team because we're a team of teachers who work with shared students, and we want parents to have the perspective of the entire team. You build in collaboration through the processes you use consistently.

**Q. How do you afford collaboration?**

We use Title 1 funding, but even without that, I could make it work. Part of it is getting out of the box and figuring out the best way to make that happen. It's so prominent in the literature to have smaller learning communities, to own the strengths, challenges, successes of your kids as a team. Our teachers wouldn't go back. It's just worth the work to make it happen.

**Q. How do you practice instructional leadership?**

I try to get to classrooms daily, although not all classrooms every day. Teachers don't stop doing what they're doing because I'm in and out so often. We can't be instructional leaders if we're not in the classroom to get the reality of what is going on. I also can be a net-worker of great processes. I can say, 'Go watch this teacher; she's doing this exceptionally well.' I'll have a coach or I will cover their classes for a little bit. We are doing a book study about the power within.

It's always about growth. The essence is that you can't make anybody do anything; you have to figure out what they need and help them get there.

**"People have to know what you're willing to do for and with them, and you need to do that consistently."**



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

## Preparing the ground for growth

Does the creation of learning teams automatically mean that teachers will use – or even possess -- the skills necessary to work well within those teams? The answer for one elementary principal was a definite no. His district began developing learning communities by creating grade-level learning teams. Some teams jumped in, worked productively, and accomplished amazing results while having fun. Other teams struggled. One team leader, for example, refused to discuss any alternatives to her ideas, leaving other team members to describe the team's leadership as a "my way or the highway" approach.

After this shaky start, the principal developed a series of learning activities to help teachers understand what collaboration looks like and sounds like. Given the importance of collaborative professional learning, all principals will need to follow this route and **assist teachers in learning how to work successfully with colleagues** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 95). There are a number of issues for principals to consider.

First, the principal will need to assist teachers to **use trust-building skills** in their learning teams. "Trust is the foundation for productive interpersonal relationships... Building trust sets the stage for open communication, collaboration, and engagement" (Parsley, 2009, p.4). Building and using **group decision-making skills** is another learning focus. In the past, teachers have been expected to make curricular, instructional, and classroom management decisions quickly and independently. A highly productive learning team needs to make joint decisions concerning collaborative actions.

School-based staff should learn about the stages of **group development**. Research identified that teams move through four stages of development: **Forming** (testing), **Storming** (infighting), **Norming** (getting organized), and **Performing** (mature closeness). The progression through each of these stages is not inevitable—in other words, teams can get stuck in a stage unless they possess the skills to resolve the issues inherent in that stage. Principals could ask team members to assess their current stage and use the results to determine next steps (Richardson, 2005, p.5-7).

A productive team isn't necessarily conflict free. Effective teams *will* have disagreements and conflicts. Team members need to know how to manage those disagreements through the use of effective **conflict resolution skills**. The conflict will involve both

disagreements over ideas as well as interpersonal differences. Tackling conflict directly, sometimes called the Storming stage of group development, is one step that teams will need to learn in order to become highly productive (Jolly, 2009).

Teams should also establish norms of operation. Norms establish how teams desire to work together. Norms should focus on collaborative interactions such as listening as an ally or paraphrasing. Teams can check their own development by routinely debriefing their use of these norms throughout the school year.

Building collaborative skills is like preparing the garden for seedlings—effective professional learning thrives when collaborative skills have been laid as groundwork first.

### NSDC STANDARD

#### Collaboration:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate.

Learn more about NSDC's standards:  
[www.nsdcs.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsdcs.org/standards/index.cfm)

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## WHAT A SCHOOL LEADER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT ...

# THE ROLE OF THE CURRICULUM TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATOR (CTI)

## JOB DESCRIPTION

Curriculum Technology Integrator (CTI)  
Catalina Foothills School District

## POSITION TITLE

Curriculum Technology Integrator (CTI)

## REPORTS TO

Building principal

## QUALIFICATIONS

- Certified teacher.
- Three years or more of successful teaching experience and demonstrated leadership.
- Conversant with the district's curriculum and technology standards.
- Strong foundation in pedagogy and teaching methodologies.
- Demonstrated success in the planning and delivery of instructional technology and integrated lesson plans.
- Additional specialized training and knowledge in the area of technology.
- Capable of providing assistance on first-level technical questions, instructional applications, and software.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE POSITION

The CTIs are identified as those teachers possessing a strong technology background, leadership skills, a commitment to implementing the district's technology plan and a desire to work collegially towards connecting technology and education for students. The CTI is critical to ensuring that teachers can more effectively support students' 21st-century learning needs and utilize technology in a context of relevance, "just in time," rather than "just in case."

## IN A 21ST-CENTURY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, THE CTI:

- Provides direct support to the classroom teacher via coaching or modeling for the utilization of technology tools and resources to support student learning.
- Consults and collaborates directly with teachers, but works with students only for the purpose of modeling, demonstrating a lesson, or team teaching.
- Advises and assists teachers to determine what, when, and where to integrate appropriate technology tools in the curriculum to enhance teaching and learning.
- Models technology usage for staff and shares the vision of integrating technological components.



- Supports learning practices and physical environments that will support the teaching and learning of 21st-century skill outcomes.
- Supports professional learning communities that enable educators to collaborate, share best practices, and integrate 21st-century skills into classroom practice.
- Enables students to learn in relevant, real world 21st-century contexts (e.g. through authentic or other applied work).
- Allows for equitable access to quality learning tools, technologies, and resources.
- In collaboration with other CTI's and information systems personnel (site and district) and assistant superintendent for 21st-century learning, coordinates the selection and acquisition of software.

#### **DAYS OF EMPLOYMENT**

- Teacher contract year, possible summer workshops (stipend).

#### **SALARY**

- Commensurate with the CFSD Certified Salary Schedule.
- Ability to participate in Career Ladder opportunities.

Source: Catalina  
Foothills School  
District, Tucson, Ariz.



## 21st-century learning carries school towards excellence

*Continued from p. 1*

do more work?”” She believes the 21st-century learning focus helps to drive this engagement and desire for higher quality work.

### HOW THE DISTRICT DEFINES 21ST-CENTURY LEARNING

Staff and community across the district collaborated to determine what 21st-century skills would look like for their children. They worked over the course of several meetings to refine the combination of skills that schools would emphasize. See box on p. 7 for the list of skills.

Lifelong learning and systems thinking have long been focuses for Gunderson. As director of curriculum in the district before she became principal, she helped to develop a set of standards around lifelong learning. She noted, “That was a huge deal for me, that we would look at how kids collaborate and we would look at their levels of thinking. When our district went to the whole focus of 21st-century learning, it was a natural shift.”

The concepts of cultural competence and global awareness are newer for the school. Changing demographics have added a welcome diversity, and the district has chosen to group those skills within the broad heading of digital-age literacy. As Gunderson said, “Digital-age literacy isn’t only about the technology tools — really, the world *is* smaller with all the ways we can communicate. How do we leverage that on our campus?” And, Gunderson noted, everything has to happen through the core academic subjects.

### TRANSFORMING THE CURRICULUM

When Canyon Valley staff carefully examined the curriculum last year, Gunderson said, “what we saw was a lot of ‘describe’ or ‘tell.’” There wasn’t much in the curriculum that looked at relationships between cause and effect in an ecosystem, for example. “So we thought, how

would we take all of the benchmarks that fall under each of the measurement topics for the curriculum, and redesign those so that we would incorporate the 21st-century skills and organize our district curriculum in terms of a unit?”

Gunderson and her staff chose to start with science. “We wound up reconceptualizing the science curriculum, and then looking to see how we could infuse technology tools to help kids move towards achieving those higher-level goals. Kids can’t do that if you don’t redesign

the way that you’re presenting materials for them and also the avenues that you use to help them get there.”

With the influx of money from a bond voters passed to increase technology access in the schools and the emphasis on digital literacy, students and teachers alike are learning to use technology in new ways. While students are eager to use laptops to create presentations or podcasts to showcase their learning, teachers are also in the

position of learning and integrating technology in their teaching. Each teacher in the building has a growth plan where they must implement at least eight lessons using technology over the course of the school year, which hasn’t turned out to be an unreasonable stretch. In four of the lessons, teachers can use technology as a presentation tool, and in four, students must interact with the technology as part of the lessons.

Gunderson found that this strategy really helped teachers grow. “Long before four presentation lessons were done, most teachers had already moved to having the kids working with the SMART Boards or interacting with laptops. We’re finding that the presentations were the key to get teachers into using their document cameras and PowerPoint and their computers and projectors, but once they felt comfortable with that, the technology use has just mushroomed, where kids are involved in most every lesson doing something interactively.” To support teachers in this learning period, the building used learning

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#### NSDC’S BELIEF

Remarkable professional learning begins with ambitious goals for students.

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time they have set aside on early-release days to work through the nuts and bolts of using different hardware and software.

### **SUPPORTING TEACHER LEARNING**

The building also has the support of a site-based specialist, called the curriculum technology integrator (CTI); the role is designed to help teachers foster 21st-century learning environments. The CTI works with teachers when they first start using new tools, team-teaching as appropriate, and planning with teams. See the job description for the CTI on pp. 4-5.

Technology is not the only focus of collaborative learning and planning. Grade-level data teams work together to set goals for students, determine appropriate instructional strategies, and follow through with assessment. The school has 18 early-release days over the course of the year, and most of those are spent on teachers' growth and learning, all based on the instructional needs of students.

Beyond their early-release times for team learning, teachers also have district-level opportunities. There are courses for 21st-century learning topics, and such courses typically include a coaching follow up.

### **LEADING THE TRANSFORMATION**

"I was very lucky to inherit the whole notion that kids drive what happens here at the school. I noticed that although teachers were committed, sometimes my job would be to say, 'Does that decision really keep kids at the center?'" said Gunderson. She doesn't find this part of her task hard, but keeping teachers buoyed up and ready to do this work is more difficult. "Part of my job is to think—just as a teacher would do in lesson planning—how do I lay this out so that we can chunk the growth over time, so that although teachers are taking big steps eventually, it's actually small steps until there's a time when you can push people just a little harder."

She noted that a leader has to have a clear idea of the big picture for the campus, as well as

a vision for how to get there. "I usually present what I'm thinking and then we have conversations where the teachers would say, 'You know, this might work better if we do it this way,' or 'No, that's really a good idea,'" Gunderson said.

"It's a very collaborative process," Gunderson continued. "Sometimes slower is faster, because people invest, and the principal has to be in tune to that pacing. All the things that happen at the school can't happen just with me. Teachers have got to be on the ride, too."

In spite of that sentiment, Gunderson doesn't spend much time worrying about teacher buy-in. Once the district has outlined a vision, she maintains that if teachers want to be in the district, they know they must focus on what district teams and the Governing Board have said is important. "So my question to a teacher isn't, 'Can you support this?' My question is, 'How will you support this?' There are different pathways, and I don't have a problem with that. But there's not a question that we're going to move forward on 21st-century learning. That seems to help. People know and are dedicated. And they're here all the time. They are here all the time, working." ■

### **PUTTING THE LEARNER AT THE CENTER**

The district's 21st-century skills are represented in a pyramid, with the student at the center, and fall into three broad categories with specific skills within each. The district emphasizes that the core academic subjects remain at the foundation of a student's education and underlie each of these areas.

#### **Personal and social responsibility**

- Leadership
- Productivity
- Self-direction
- Teamwork

#### **Digital age literacy**

- Cultural competence
- Global awareness
- Interactive communication
- Technology and tools

#### **Learning and thinking skills**

- Data analysis
- Scientific inquiry
- Systems thinking
- Critical and creative thinking

Source: Catalina Foothills School District. (2008). *Our commitment to learning in the 21st century*. Available at [www.cfsd16.org/public/\\_century/centMain.aspx](http://www.cfsd16.org/public/_century/centMain.aspx).

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Oxford OH 45056

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