THE LEARNING
System

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

THE CHANGING ROLE *of* CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF

Administrators provide a crucial link to learning resources
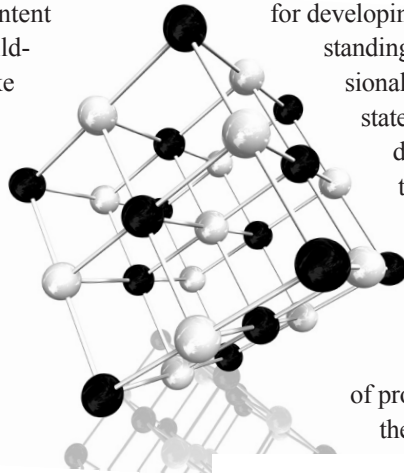
JOELLEN KILLION AND PATRICIA ROY

When central office staff read NSDC's definition of professional development, they frequently ask what their role is. Because the definition moves professional development from a centralized to a school-based function, central office administrators wonder about their role. If the definition is fully implemented, the nature of their work changes — from determining content and delivering the learning to building school staffs' capacity to make sound decisions about their own professional development. In essence, central office staff become learning leaders who are responsible for facilitating professional development decisions at individual schools and coordinating efforts between and among schools to maximize resources and effort.

Central office administrators have seven major tasks in a system that views the school as the primary center of learning.

BUILD CAPACITY

Control over decisions about professional development now rests in the hands of teachers and principals and depends largely on how well the central office has prepared them to make sound decisions. Central office staff are responsible for developing school staff members' understanding of the standards for professional development and district and state requirements for professional development. If those making the decisions about professional development have limited understanding and experience with high-quality staff development, their decisions will reflect the forms of professional learning with which they are most familiar.

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NSDC's purpose: Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.

Hayes Mizell
is NSDC's
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Imagine if every interview included the following statement: "We expect that throughout each school year you will keep learning more about the content you teach and how to engage students more successfully in learning that content."

Establish professional learning expectations *before* day one

When a school system interviews a prospective new teacher, each party has different interests. The candidate wants a job, preferably one that meets his or her expectations regarding salary, benefits, grade level, subject, school, and working conditions. The school system wants a teacher who meets certain requirements regarding preservice education, certification, and experience.

The interviewer may be someone in the human resources department of the central office, or a principal, or both. Their conversation covers many topics, but the interviewer may fail to communicate a critical expectation. As part of the employment and induction process, school systems rarely focus on the prospective teacher's future development. There is an assumption that the teacher will participate in whatever professional development the school system requires, but this overlooks the larger issue of whether and to what extent the teacher is committed to his or her professional growth.

In contrast, imagine if every interview included the following statement:

"It appears you have talents and abilities that can foster the intellectual development of this community's children. But you should be aware that we also expect *you* to develop intellectually. We expect that throughout each school year you will keep learning more about the content you teach and how to engage students more successfully in learning that content.

"We expect you to engage your colleagues in figuring out how to improve classroom instruction, curriculum, assessment, and results. We expect you to seek out and test promis-

Hayes Mizell writes frequently on NSDC's blog: **www.nsdc.org/learningblog/.** Read Mizell's perspective and share yours in response. Engage the NSDC community in dialogue.

ing new ideas from your colleagues and others outside your school and this school system. We expect you to pursue your own new learning aggressively, and to apply what you learn to help raise the levels of your students' academic performance.

"We also expect that, as a member of your school community, you will support your colleagues in their learning. You will keep open your doors as they do theirs, so that you can openly observe and help one another as you refine your practice. We expect that you will be as committed to the learning of your peers' students as you are to yours. Together, we all share collective responsibility for each and every student in the school.

"We will support you, and periodically we will be interested in seeing how your intellectual growth is making you a more effective teacher. And if you ever have reason to believe your school or this school system is doing anything that gets in the way of your intellectual development or that of your students, it is your obligation to let us know about it. If you are not prepared to do these things, then perhaps you would be happier in another school system."

When interviewing candidates for teacher positions, does your school system or school forcefully and consistently communicate high expectations for educators' learning? Do you communicate the culture of collective responsibility that you expect in each school, with the commitment of each employee? And do you subsequently reinforce those expectations with support and practices that encourage and enable teachers to engage in effective professional learning every day? Now is the time.

Intentional mindfulness or mindless conformity?

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

There is a famous cartoon showing a long and complicated mathematical sequence scribbled on a chalkboard. In the middle of this string of symbols and numbers is written *then a miracle occurs*. The caption reads, "I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

District-based staff development also needs to become more explicit about how new information can be transformed into improved classroom practices. The strategy can't be to hope for a miracle; rather, leaders must intentionally build a set of concrete actions into program design to assist educators in transforming their practice. District office staff members **need to apply knowledge of the change process when planning and implementing district-based staff development** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 144).

In *The Six Secrets of Change,* (2008), Michael Fullan explores new ideas about the change process that can be helpful to central office staff. First, is professional learning conducted "in the specific context in which the work is being done" (p. 89) or superficially—disconnected from current work realities? Superficial learning is removed from the daily context of the classroom and requires individuals to translate new information into new practice *on their own*. The deepest learning is contextualized and done in collaboration with colleagues who share a common purpose—the essence of job-embedded collaborative professional learning.

Second, does the professional learning focus on a few "core" elements of practice or on "scripted repetition" of behaviors? "The critical aspects of any work equal about 15 to 20% of the total work" (Liker & Meier in Ful-

> **NSDC STANDARD**
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> **Learning**: Staff development that improves the learning of all students applies knowledge about human learning and change.

lan, p. 80). Marzano has recently commented on the mistake that many districts are making when they require teachers to use all of his nine research-based strategies in the classroom all the time. These strategies are only effective when used appropriately—when they fit the student learning needs (Marzano, 2009, p. 34). Core elements of practice focus on helping teachers decide when to use new strategies rather than merely counting the frequency of use of new strategies. In other words, does our professional learning focus on "precision" versus "prescription"?

Third, does professional learning demonstrate a responsibility toward the learner versus blaming individuals when they don't make desired changes? Some organizations clearly illustrate that leaders believe all teachers can learn when given appropriate support. Professional learning leaders demonstrate responsibility for the learner's success; if a staff member struggles, it is time to change the approach rather than blame the individual. This support includes one-on-one coaching, correcting errors, checking progress frequently, and gradually turning implementation responsibility over to the learner.

According to Fullan, when we focus on precision of practice, core aspects of the work, and a responsibility toward the learner, staff exhibits intentional mindfulness and commitment toward their work rather than mindless conformity and compliance. Intentional mindfulness leads to continuous improvement for students and the organization.

> **Learn more about NSDC's standards:
> www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm.**

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WHAT A DISTRICT LEADER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT ...

CENTRAL OFFICE INNOVATION CONFIGURATION MAPS

NSDC has developed Innovation Configuration (IC) maps for a wide variety of educator roles — central office staff, principals, teacher leaders, superintendents, school board members — for each of NSDC's standards. An IC map outlines the major components of an innovation, such as a standard, and provides a continuum of practices from ideal use to nonuse.

While the IC format is similar to a rubric, there are differences. First, ideal or high-quality behaviors are found in Level 1, the first column on the left. Rubrics typically describe the highest-quality terms on the right. All of the cells of an IC do not have to be filled in; there might be three, four, or five variations for each desired outcome.

ICs can be used in several ways to provide practical assistance to central office staff members:

• To set a vision of a system fully implementing NSDC's standards.
• To assess the level of implementation of the standards.
• To plan specific actions for supporting implementation.

When a school or system takes steps to become a learning school, the IC maps are a useful tool for identifying strengths and planning ways to address system challenges.

Included here is the IC map for the Collaboration standard for central office. Supporting skillful collaboration is a crucial element in building the high-quality professional learning outlined in NSDC's definition.

Collaboration

Desired outcome 9.1: Support a district culture that is characterized by collegiality.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Provide resources so that teachers, administrators, and central office staff can routinely work with each other to learn, coach, and give feedback. Act on the belief that all students are everyone's responsibility—not just the students connected directly to one's pro-grams. Provide time for teachers, administrators, and central office staff to meet with colleagues for discussion and problem solving.	Act on the belief that all students are everyone's responsibility—not just the students connected directly to one's programs. Provide time for teachers, administrators, and central office staff to meet with colleagues for discussion and problem solving.	Provide time for teachers, administrators, and central office staff to meet with colleagues for discussion and problem solving.	Do not address district culture or take steps to develop collegiality among staff.	

Desired outcome 9.2: Build a district culture that is characterized by collective responsibility for student learning.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Create expectations and support all schools to be responsible for the whole district's academic learning.	Create expectations and support feeder patterns tof oster responsibility for the academic learning of related schools' students.	Expect each school to assume responsibility for its students' academic learning	Do not address the collective responsibility for student learning.	

Desired outcome 9.3: Provide experiences for administrators to learn how to work successfully with colleagues.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Teach administrators how to learn from each other about the improvement of instruction and implementation of new classroom practices. Provide experiences for administrators to gain knowledge of ways to monitor and adjust group interaction to improve effectiveness, group decision making, group structures, group development, and effective interaction skills.	Provide experiences for administrators to gain knowledge of monitoring and adjusting group interaction to improve effectiveness, group decision making, group structures, group development, and effective interaction skills.	Provide experiences for administrators to gain knowledge of group decision making, group structures, group development, and effective interaction skills.	Provide experiences for administrators to gain knowledge of the stages of group development and effective interaction skills.	Do not offer administrators opportunities to learn how to work successfully with colleagues.

Desired outcome 9.4: Support school-based professional learning about collaboration.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Advocate for the development of school-based collaboration, support collaboration with resources and materials, and provide professional learning experiences so that collegial interaction is successful.	Promote the development of new schedules that support collegial interaction centered on quality teaching. Compile information about learning teams and school schedules. Assist schools by removing obstacles to implementation.	Recognize the importance of collegial interaction to the development of quality teaching. Assist schools in developing plans and schedules to support these activities.	Do not view collegial interactions as important.	

Desired outcome 9.5: Provide technology to support collegial interaction.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Provide online technology so that educators can participate in subject-area networks and action research studies, and share lessons with their colleagues.	Create electronic discussion groups, web sites, and e-mail to support collegial interaction.	Provide e-mail and chatrooms to support collegial interaction.	Do not provide technology for collegial interaction among teachers.	

Source of IC map: *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation Configurations,* by Patricia Roy and Shirley Hord (NSDC, 2003).

The changing role of central office staff

Because school-based, collaborative professional development requires knowledge and skills that school staff members may not have, central office can provide opportunities for teacher leaders to participate in leadership training that would prepare them to lead collaborative learning teams within their schools. Central office staff can work with principals to identify candidates among teachers who can serve as leaders among their peers.

When knowledge and skills are shared by a broader group of educators, the greater the likelihood that more educators will take responsibility for ensuring high-quality professional learning and for linking professional learning to student learning.

PROVIDE RESEARCH AND MODEL BEST PRACTICES

When professional learning moves to the school, central office staff can significantly impact the quality of school-based decisions about professional learning by providing schools with research and sharing best practices. Central office staff members play a significant role in supporting school-based learning by compiling and disseminating research and resources about professional learning to teacher leaders and principals.

District staff also can engage school professional development committee members in learning about multiple designs for professional learning. These powerful forms of professional learning will allow school staff to see examples of different approaches to learning, and they will become more familiar with alternatives to consultant-driven training.

ALLOCATE RESOURCES

District staff can help schools succeed with collaborative professional learning by advocating for time for teams to work together and fiscal resources to support this form of adult learning. Districts can help schools revamp daily schedules to include time for professional learning. Districts also help develop support for job-embedded time. The educators most closely in touch with the community can help parents understand the link between quality professional development and every parent's desire for his or her children to have the most qualified teachers possible.

In addition, districts can form teams charged with examining policies, administrative procedures, practices, resources, and other guidelines that impact professional development to ensure that they align with school-based professional learning. Finally, districts can ensure that schools receive appropriate budget allocations to support high-quality professional learning.

COORDINATE EFFORTS AMONG SCHOOLS

Central office also is responsible for assisting schools in developing an efficiency of scale. When central office staff bring common goals to the attention of all schools, the potential for schools to collaborate rises, benefiting each individual school by encouraging the schools to share their learning, resources, or solutions. Central office staff also might streamline support by serving schools clustered together by professional learning goals rather than trying to provide support one-by-one.

Central office staff can identify and broadcast successful practices within the district. Individual schools will appreciate knowing about professional learning in other schools so they can learn from others and have opportunities to benchmark their professional learning plans.

COORDINATE CROSS-DISCIPLINE OR CROSS-SCHOOL TEAMS

Staff such as counselors, librarians, nurses, and others often do not have colleagues at their school focused on the same work responsibilities. Central office can foster collaboration for educators who are not members of an in-school collaborative professional learning team by organizing interschool visitations within the district or across districts. By coordinating cross-school, districtwide, or even regional teams, central

Central office staff can significantly impact the quality of school-based decisions about professional learning by providing schools with research and sharing best practices.

NSDC'S BELIEF

Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.

EQUIP YOUR SYSTEM TO SUPPORT LEARNING SCHOOLS

Envision NSDC's definition of professional learning in action in each school in your system:

- Teachers collaborate to identify student needs and the learning they need to address them.
- School leaders engage teams in high-quality learning during the school day.
- Each teacher takes responsibility for the learning of each student.

- All staff expect and contribute to a cycle of continuous learning for every member of the school community.

NSDC's *Becoming a Learning School* is a tool kit designed to help all educators build the knowledge and skills to transform their schools into learning schools. Practical chapters accompanied by dozens of tools (included on a CD-ROM) address various stakeholders' roles in a learning school, finding time for learning, implementing change,

examining data, planning and designing learning, facilitating teams, and evaluation.

Purchase *Becoming a Learning School* at www.nsdcstore.org or call 800-727-7288, item #B423, member price $48, nonmember price $60.

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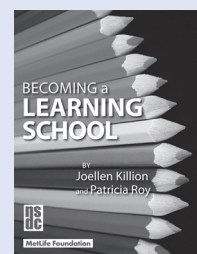
office staff members ensure that every professional is involved in one or more collaborative professional learning teams that focus on student success, core curriculum content standards, assessment, and instruction.

For example, world language teachers, particularly when there is only one per language, might meet in cross-school teams facilitated by the district curriculum specialist to focus on developing curriculum and assessments appropriate for that language.

MONITOR IMPLEMENTATION

Central office holds schools accountable for their professional learning plans. Central office staff meet with school leadership teams quarterly or semiannually to review evidence of schools' progress toward their professional learning and student achievement goals, helping schools focus on results and not just providing services. By reviewing progress and asking schools to use data to focus on results, the district will be able to help schools celebrate their successes and alter their courses of action when necessary. Using data from multiple sources is important so that facts — and not opinions and preferences — guide the district's discussion and are the basis for identifying successes.

IDENTIFY AND PROVIDE ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

District leaders may increase organizational support to help school leaders implement collaborative professional learning. Some forms of organizational support that districts might provide are to:

- Prepare principals and teacher leaders to facilitate learning teams;
- Provide school leaders the flexibility to make critical decisions related to their daily schedules, budget, calendar, staffing, and governance to ensure shared leadership;
- Make relevant data easily accessible to school leaders and provide the appropriate development in using data effectively;
- Create a districtwide resource bank via a district portal or other means using current research on professional learning that is linked to student achievement;
- Conduct ongoing school-based support in the form of walk-throughs, coaching for school leadership teams and the school principal, and ongoing feedback and evaluation.

District leaders make a difference in whether schools successfully implement collaborative professional learning. While some schools are able to make the transformation to collaborative professional learning without district support, the presence of intensive support from the district signals the district's commitment to increasing teacher capacity and student learning. District office staff have a tremendous responsibility to prepare school teams to design, implement, and evaluate sound professional learning aligned to district and school goals. ■

Free evaluation resource online

NSDC and the Maryland Department of Education have jointly released a resource guide for assisting schools and districts to evaluate the impact of teacher professional development on teaching practice and student learning.

Teacher Professional Development Evaluation Guide, written by M. Bruce Haslam of Policy Studies Associates, was developed originally for school districts and schools within the state of Maryland under contracts with Harford County Public Schools and the Maryland State Department of Education. NSDC supported modifications and enhancements to the resource guide to make it useful for schools and districts in all states and beyond. The guide is available on NSDC's web site at no cost.

The guide offers succinct recommendations for more frequent and more rigorous evaluation of teacher professional development to improve both the quality of professional learning and its results for teachers and their students.

In the first section of the guide, readers will find a series of questions for planning teams to consider as they start their work on an evaluation design. The guide continues with a discussion of different approaches to evaluation design and options for data collection. Additional sections cover the importance of monitoring the quality of evaluation data, strategies for data analysis, and advice on preparing evaluation reports. Appendices include references to additional resources and sample teacher surveys.

Download a PDF of *Teacher Professional Development Evaluation Guide* at www.nsdc.org/news/evalguide.cfm.