

The authority on  
professional  
learning

# JSD

JUNE 2010, VOLUME 31, NO. 3

**theme** THE NEW CENTRAL OFFICE

## 8 UP CLOSE DEEP SMARTS START HERE

- The role of the central office in a learning school
- *Functions of the central office administrator*
- Districts under the microscope

## 10 A new definition in Atlanta:

Q&A WITH BEVERLY HALL.

**By Tracy Crow**

As superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools, Hall accelerates student progress and teacher quality while leading the district to a sharp focus on teaching and learning.



## 18 The can-do central office:

WITH AN EYE ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT, ILLINOIS DISTRICT REDEFINES ITS ROLES AND GOALS.

**By Deanne Hillman and Donald S. Kachur**

District leaders became learning facilitators as part of the Decatur Public School District 61 (Ill.) central office reinvention.

## 24 Central office and school leaders create a conversation.

**By Sue McAdamis**

Educators in Rockwood School District (Eureka, Mo.) reshaped professional learning through a series of intentional conversations, with good results for students.



## 28 Road trip:

JOURNEY TO IMPROVEMENT TAKES TWISTS AND TURNS.

By Ellen S. Perconti

As educators in the Lewiston (Idaho) School District shift their professional learning expectations, they find themselves leading in the midst of learning.



## 32 Leadership practices accelerate into high speed.

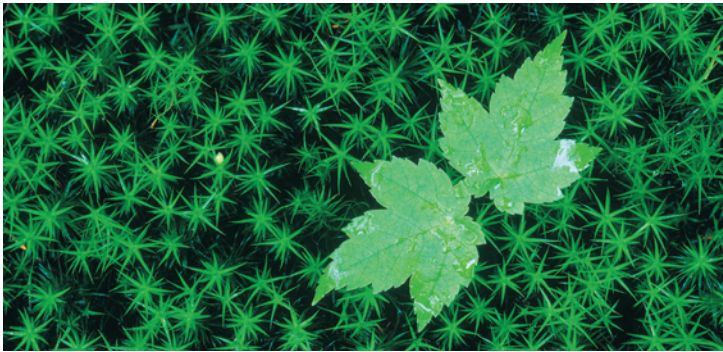
By Dori Novak, Marceta Reilly, and Diana Williams

Learning with leadership coaches helped central office staff in Howard County, Md., meet their high standards.

## 38 Central office plants the seeds, schools cultivate their own learning.

By Valerie von Frank

While a common vision guides all schools in West Des Moines (Iowa), educators in each building determine their learning needs.



## 42 Seaside culture shift: FLORIDA DISTRICT CHANGES THE CENTRAL OFFICE TO SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING.

By Bette H. Zippin

Prompted by state law, district leaders in Broward County (Fla.) Public Schools recultured the district office to support standards-based learning.



## 46 Whether a building or a state of mind, the central office must evolve.

By Hayes Mizell

If effective professional learning is the goal, the offices that operate school districts must undergo radical change.

## departments

### 4 FROM THE EDITOR BY TRACY CROW

#### 6 ESSENTIALS KEEPING UP WITH HOT TOPICS IN THE FIELD

• Peer review • *Central office transformation* • What job-embedded means • *Increasing teacher effectiveness with TAP* • Strategic staffing for turnaround success • *Interim assessments*

### 58 NSDC TOOL Creating norms.

### 61 COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

BY SUSAN SCOTT AND ELAINE CASH

A change in beliefs leads to a change in behavior — and improved student achievement.

### 63 CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

BY SARAH W. NELSON

AND PATRICIA L. GUERRA

Eliminate inequities to transform the college prep process in elementary school.

### 65 nsdc.org Site highlights

### 66 ABSTRACTS

for June 2010 *JSD*

### 68 NSDC@WORK NOTES FROM THE NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

• Foundation scholarship winners • *NSDC Book Club selection* • **On Board:** Ingrid

Carney on professional learning communities for central office staff

### 72 FROM THE DIRECTOR

BY STEPHANIE HIRSH

## feature

### 50 6 steps to learning leadership. By Cathy A. Toll

Principals can become learning leaders when they attend to six critical elements.





## A new state of mind: The expectations we hold for each other determine how far we can go together

As Hayes Mizell writes (p. 46), the central office is not just a place — it's a state of mind. As such, we have an obligation to pay careful attention to our expectations and perceptions of the central office, no matter what our role in education. Just as teachers' perceptions and expectations influence the actions they take with students — and the student results they see — what we expect from educators in the system will shape the future we create for schools.

NSDC members and friends are ready to reconsider outdated definitions of who does what in a district. A willingness to engage in ongoing inquiry about the most effective ways to achieve our purpose is part of what makes NSDC what it is. However, sometimes it's tempting to slip into an us-them mentality when we don't see the larger picture. That can happen when we talk about the central office.

Us-them doesn't just apply to central office-school. Teachers-parents. Administrators-teachers. School board-school employees. We fall into false dichotomies because they provide easy explanations for thorny challenges. Unfortunately, the resolution to any challenge is rarely easy.

•

**Tracy Crow ([tracy.crow@nsdc.org](mailto:tracy.crow@nsdc.org)) is associate director of publications of the National Staff Development Council.**

The articles in this issue of *JSD* indicate shifts in the mind-sets of many leaders who work in the central office. Notice the words — journey, roads, transformations, pathways — that convey motion and transformation. Whether it is superintendents setting a new standard or professional development leaders forging new partnerships, districts know that placing student learning at the center of a district's focus necessitates new ways of looking at decades-old job titles and relationships.

To understand the core of what makes a central office new, we need to investigate the processes districts use in concert with schools to set and meet learning goals and measure the success of professional learning. At the same time, the professional learning available to those who work in central offices is also critical in ensuring a new set of outcomes.

There is an abundance of evidence that new central offices are at work all over. Schools and districts are establishing learning communities that cut across hierarchical boundaries. Effective superintendents are facilitating visions that create new webs of connections among teachers, school leaders, and administrators.

The challenge, then, is to articulate and implement a new set of expectations for what happens between central offices

and schools, and to hold educators in any role to those expectations.

We hold high expectations for principals when we expect them to act as instructional leaders. Same for teacher leaders, whom we expect to open their doors and cross the hall to solve a teaching challenge. We've adjusted our expectations when we know that making time for school teams isn't optional.

The actions we take as we implement new expectations are what really make the difference. For example, when we have an expectation that principals will be instructional leaders, what do we do? We demand principal preparation programs that stress instructional leadership, we seek professional learning to build principals' capacity, and we

hold principals accountable for succeeding in that role. Eventually, perceptions about what it means to be a principal change to the point where parents don't expect their children's principals to carry out their duties in the same way principals did 25 years ago. And they realize that's a very good thing for their children.

So now the same must happen for many other roles in a school system. What is the part you play? What are your expectations for the role the central office plays in your district or school? What actions follow those expectations? I welcome your feedback and responses. ■



## A TURNAROUND SUCCESS STORY

**“Strategic staffing for successful schools: Breaking the cycle of failure in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools”**  
*Education Resource Strategies, April 2010*

A case study of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district’s efforts to help its failing schools highlights the use of strategic staffing in reform. The district’s three-year initiative uses a differentiated approach that allows it to assess the needs of its lowest-performing schools and provide

targeted support, focusing the system’s top talent on the

biggest challenges and making staff changes as necessary.

The authors posit that an effective turnaround strategy requires

the coalescence of several factors: a strong

leader, teacher teams that use assessment data to adjust instruction, school designs that prioritize academics and provide student support, and central office resources and backing.

[http://erstrategies.org/resources/details/breaking\\_the\\_cycle\\_of\\_failure\\_in\\_charlotte\\_schools/](http://erstrategies.org/resources/details/breaking_the_cycle_of_failure_in_charlotte_schools/)



## THE VALUE OF INTERIM ASSESSMENTS

**“From testing to teaching: The use of interim assessments in classroom instruction”**

*Consortium for Policy Research in Education, December 2009*

Although interim assessments are commonly used and widely believed to improve both instruction and learning, very little research exists on how these assessments are actually applied in the classroom. A three-year study in 45 urban and suburban elementary schools explored the ways in which interim assessments and policies supporting their use affected math instruction. Perhaps surprisingly, it found that interim assessments designed for instruction were helpful but not sufficient to spur instructional reform. Teachers’ practices appeared to be more affected by their ability to understand their students’ learning needs than by the type of assessment the teachers used.

<http://hub.mspnet.org/entry.cfm/20696>

## INTEGRATED REFORM

**“More than widgets: TAP: A systemic approach to increased teaching effectiveness”**

*National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, December 2009*

Differentiating teachers’ effectiveness — moving away from the standard satisfactory/unsatisfactory dichotomy by which many teachers are evaluated — is increasingly recognized as an important component in improving teaching and learning. However, new evaluation tools by themselves are not sufficient to effect reform. They must be integrated with professional

development, compensation, and advancement opportunities to create sustainable, long-term change. One program gaining attention, the System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP), seeks to align these factors by offering an evaluation structure that includes multiple career paths, ongoing professional development, instructionally focused accountability, and performance-based compensation.

[www.tapsystem.org/publications/ffo\\_rpts\\_eckert.pdf](http://www.tapsystem.org/publications/ffo_rpts_eckert.pdf)



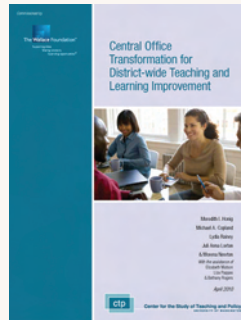
## WHAT DO LEADERS NEED?

### “Central office transformation for district-wide teaching and learning improvement”

*The Wallace Foundation, April 2010*

This report, part of a series investigating how leaders affect student learning and achievement, explores one main question: What does it take for leaders to encourage and support powerful, equitable learning at the school, district, and state levels? Using a comprehensive study of educational reform efforts in three major cities — Atlanta, New York, and Oakland, Calif. — the authors argue that effective change hinges on providing principals with sustained support and shifting the focus of central offices from administration and compliance issues to classroom instruction.

[www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/EducationLeadership/Pages/central-office-transformation-for-district-wide-teaching-and-learning-improvement.aspx](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/EducationLeadership/Pages/central-office-transformation-for-district-wide-teaching-and-learning-improvement.aspx)



## PEER POWER

### “Teacher to teacher: Realizing the potential of peer assistance and review”

*Center for American Progress, May 2010*

## Center for American Progress



Improving the quality of teachers is essential to improving students' educational outcomes. This report explores

a new program, Peer Assistance and Review (PAR), in which expert teachers evaluate novice and underperforming teachers, providing regular feedback and mentoring. The system helps to recruit, identify, and reward the most effective teachers; provides ongoing support; and, where necessary, lays out a clear path for transitioning ineffective teachers out of the classroom. The authors describe the program, consider its strengths and challenges, and suggest the best means for implementation.

[www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/05/par.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/05/par.html)

## WHAT JOB-EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MEANS

### “Job-embedded professional development: What it is, who is responsible, and how to get it done well”

*National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, April 2010*

This issue brief, written in collaboration with the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center and NSDC, takes a look at job-embedded professional development. What learning opportunities meet the criteria? How can these opportunities be used to positively impact teacher instruction and, ultimately, student achievement? What conditions encourage

the most effective professional development, and how can leaders at the school, district, and state levels best provide support? These questions and others are explored, with an emphasis on professional development for teachers.

[www.tqsource.org/publications/JEPD%20Issue%20Brief.pdf](http://www.tqsource.org/publications/JEPD%20Issue%20Brief.pdf)



## JSD STAFF

Editor: Tracy Crow

Designer: Kitty Black

Copy editor: Sue Chevalier

Editorial assistant: Rebecca Bender

## 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 nonmembers of NSDC are welcome.

**Manuscripts:** Manuscripts and editorial mail should be sent to Rebecca Bender ([rebecca.bender@nsdc.org](mailto:rebecca.bender@nsdc.org)). NSDC prefers to receive manuscripts by e-mail. Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are provided at [www.nsd.org/news/jsd/guidelines.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/news/jsd/guidelines.cfm). Themes for upcoming issues of *JSD* are available in each issue and also at [www.nsd.org/news/jsd/themes.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/news/jsd/themes.cfm).

**Advertisements:** Advertisements are accepted in *JSD*. The *JSD* ad rate card is available at [www.nsd.org/news/jsd/advertising.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/news/jsd/advertising.cfm).

**Correspondence:** Business correspondence, including orders for back copies, memberships, subscriptions, and remittances for advertisements, should be sent to:  
NSDC, 504 S. Locust St., Oxford, OH 45056  
Phone: 800-727-7288

**Permissions:** NSDC's permission policy is available at [www.nsd.org/news/permpolicy.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/news/permpolicy.cfm).

JOURNAL OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT  
ISSN 0276-928X

*JSD* is a benefit of membership in the National Staff Development Council. \$89 of annual membership covers a year's subscription to *JSD*. *JSD* is published bimonthly. Periodicals postage paid at Wheelersburg, OH 45694 and additional offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *JSD*, 504 S. Locust St., Oxford, OH 45056.

© Copyright, National Staff Development Council, 2010. All rights reserved.

The views expressed in *JSD* do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the National Staff Development Council, nor are products and services being advertised endorsed by NSDC.



**DISTRICTS** UNDER THE MICROSCOPE [www.broadprize.org](http://www.broadprize.org)

Since 2002, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation has annually awarded the Broad Prize to urban school districts that demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among income and ethnic groups.

The web site for the Broad Prize offers tools and data to support learning for any district leader. Investigate in particular the best practice videos and tools offered online. And become inspired by the learning leaders recognized for making a difference.

IN THIS ISSUE OF *JSD*

THE LEARNING STARTS HERE ▼

If you're interested in ...	Start with the article on page ...
• THE ROLE of the superintendent in transforming the central office	10
• IMPROVING learning for central office staff	32
• HOW POLICY changes practice	42
• DEVELOPING a collaborative partnership	18, 38
• PLACING student learning at the center	24, 28, 38, 46
• KEY COMPETENCIES of the new central office	10, 46

Functions of the new central office administrator

<b>Visionary</b>	Assist in the development and implementation of an organization-wide vision and mission.
<b>Planner</b>	Support the district or schools in systematic planning to determine their mission and goals.
<b>Facilitator</b>	Facilitate change and all the interactions that surround it.
<b>Boundary spanner</b>	Build linkages across institutional boundaries.
<b>Communicator</b>	Communicate effectively in a variety of ways.
<b>Dispute resolver</b>	Resolve and mediate rather than suppress conflict and disputes.
<b>Efficiency enhancer</b>	Enhance the efficiency of the organization.
<b>Coordinator</b>	Coordinate efforts of different levels of the organization.
<b>Standard setter</b>	Define standards for which different units of the district will be responsible.

“When central offices participate productively in teaching and learning improvement, everyone in the central office orients their work in meaningful ways toward supporting the development of schools’ capacity for high-quality teaching and expanding students’ opportunities to learn.”

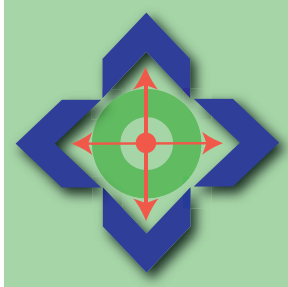
**Quotable**

*Source: Central office transformation for district-wide teaching and learning improvement. Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 2010.*

*Source: “Will our phones go dead? The changing role of the central office.” Issues about Change, 2(4), SEDL, 1993.*

# The role of the central office in a learning school

A decade ago, professional development experts began to describe a necessary shift that school systems would be required to make to guarantee powerful, effective professional development for their teachers, the kind of professional development that leads to improved student learning. With this shift, central office staff have a new role —



to build the capacity of school-level personnel to design, manage, and implement improvement efforts.

When professional development moves from a centralized district to a school-based function, central

administrators' work actually increases. The nature of the work changes — from determining content and delivering the learning to building school staffs' capacity to make sound decisions about their own professional development.

Central office staff members — those who work in school district offices with responsibility for curriculum, instruction, professional development, mentoring, teacher quality, and student success — have seven major tasks in a system that views the school as the primary center of learning. They are:

1. Build the capacity of school staff to make sound decisions about professional development;
2. Provide research and models of best practices regarding professional development;
3. Allocate resources to schools to support school learning plans;
4. Coordinate efforts between and among schools;
5. Coordinate the formation of cross-school collaborative professional learning teams;
6. Support collaborative professional learning teams;
7. Monitor implementation throughout the district.

**Source:** *Becoming a learning school*. NSDC, 2009. Available at [www.nsdstore.org](http://www.nsdstore.org).

Download the guide at [www.nsd.org/news/jsd/](http://www.nsd.org/news/jsd/)

With each issue of *JSD*, NSDC publishes an online companion to the magazine to facilitate the use of *JSD* articles with school faculties, teams, district staff, or other groups of education stakeholders.

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Assess your perception of your district's current practices and consider how the perspective of the authors in this issue might differ or offer insights to transforming practice.

1. Central office staff provide resources for school-based, collaborative professional learning.

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
----------------	-------	------------	----------	-------------------

2. The district comprehensive professional development plan designates schools' use of collaborative professional learning.

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
----------------	-------	------------	----------	-------------------

3. Central office staff share knowledge, research, and best practices about professional learning broadly and widely throughout the district with principals and teachers.

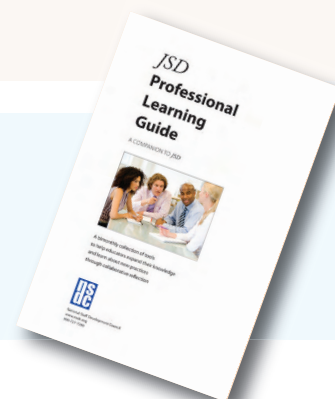
STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
----------------	-------	------------	----------	-------------------

4. Central office staff tailor district-provided professional development to support the goals included in schools' professional development plans.

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
----------------	-------	------------	----------	-------------------

5. Central office staff understand how they support schools in the area of professional learning.

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
----------------	-------	------------	----------	-------------------



Use *JSD* as a professional learning resource

Q&A with **Beverly Hall**

# A NEW DEFINITION IN ATLANTA

**Superintendent's efforts focus on creating a central office that serves the schools, not vice versa**

By Tracy Crow

**J**SD: In today's large urban school systems, how does the central office best support a focus on teaching and learning that helps all students? How have roles changed over the last several years?

**Hall:** I don't think we have any other choice but to re-create our central offices because principals clearly must focus on instruction. They must spend the majority of their time supporting teaching and learning. The old central offices never allowed for that kind of focus. The bloated bureaucracies — where people could never get a response, where the central offices told the schools what they needed and did not find out what the schools needed from the central office — those days are long gone. If you listen to principals and if you're going to be fair when you're holding them accountable for student results, you've got to make it so that central offices

are redesigned to “flip the script,” as we say here in Atlanta Public Schools. That means our central office serves the schools, rather than vice versa. We have to provide services to schools in a timely manner that will allow schools to get on with teaching and learning and what's best for students without worrying constantly about meeting the needs of a central bureaucracy. I just don't see how today, in an era of high-stakes accountability and where there is a need to educate students to high standards, we can remain barriers to students' success. We've got to be a contributing factor. That's why we have to redesign our central offices.

## **TRANSFORMING THE FUNCTIONS OF THE CENTRAL OFFICE**

When I came to Atlanta as superintendent, now almost 11 years ago, in surveying our principals, they said what principals have been saying since I was a principal: We spend too much time on operations, adminis-



## BEVERLY HALL

**B**everly Hall has been superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools since 1999. Before coming to Atlanta, Hall was state district superintendent of Newark Public Schools, deputy chancellor for instruction of New York City Public Schools, superintendent of Community School District 27 in New York City, and a principal in Brooklyn.

Hall chairs Harvard University's Urban Superintendents Program Advisory Board, mentoring doctoral candidates. She is a member of the board of trustees of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Smart Government Advisory Board of the Center for American Progress.

In 2009, Hall was elected to serve a one-year term as secretary-treasurer of the Council of the Great City Schools. Hall has received numerous honors and awards, and in 2009 was named National Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators, as well as State Superintendent of the Year by the Georgia School Superintendents Association.

Hall earned a Doctor of Education degree from Fordham University and obtained a Master of Science in Guidance and Counseling from The City University of New York and a Bachelor of Arts in English from Brooklyn College.



In Atlanta Public Schools, we decided to look at how we were going to reorganize the central office so that we could transform it into a service-driven operating unit that empowers the principals and the schools, that releases them to focus on the core business of teaching and learning. So we divided our system into what we call school reform teams, which are not simply area offices. Even though they are geographically dispersed throughout the city, school reform teams function very differently from the old traditional area offices. School reform teams have an executive director, equivalent to an associate superintendent or assistant superintendent, who is responsible for a group of schools. The school reform teams serve as a one-stop shop staffed by a team of professionals who serve the cluster of schools within a specific geographic area. The school reform teams provide not just oversight, which is clearly a component of their responsibilities, but they also provide support, and we believe that's key. They're supposed to remove barriers by linking principals to facilities, human resources,

**Beverly Hall is working to change the central office in Atlanta to a service unit.**

trative tasks, responding to e-mails — not instructional matters. The research indicates that if principals don't provide the instructional leadership, clearly the schools won't perform so that students can be educated at high levels. So we had the research saying one thing, and then we had the old way of working, requiring principals to do more noninstructional tasks than instructional tasks.

transportation, nutrition, and other critical support services that help the schools run efficiently. Within each of the school reform teams, there are what we call “critical connectors” who facilitate the needs of the schools in those particular business-operational areas, again, so that the principals can provide instructional leadership. Atlanta went from being top-down — where we in the central office determine what the schools need and tell them to do it, and then pile things on top of them — to creating bottom-up decision making. The district has become a more student-centered, school-focused environment through the school reform teams.

The school reform teams also facilitate job-embedded professional development and provide all of the professional learning resources that are necessary so that teacher practice can improve and students can learn. We have within each school reform team model teacher leaders for the various content areas: literacy, math, science, social studies, and special education. Model teacher leaders are experts who go to the schools and provide support for teachers and principals so they can improve their practice and focus on teaching and learning.

#### SUPPORTING SCHOOLS THROUGH STRATEGIC PLANNING

We also created a strategy and development office. That office manages the balanced scorecard, which cascades throughout the central office. The balanced scorecard spells out our annual objectives, performance measures, as well as strategic initiatives for students and stakeholders. The balanced scorecard forces each central office employee to evaluate his or her work against the question, “How does my work support students, schools, and instruction?” It’s a strategic plan, and strategic planning is the way we operate. We plan and execute all of our major systems initiatives, and we use project management methodology and cross-functional teaming.

So, for example, instead of a room full of curriculum and instructional staff planning a literacy project or major professional development that could later be stalled by various human resource, financial, or facilities concerns, as well as a lack of understanding about what the schools really need, each system project is staffed at the outset with cross-functional or departmental teams representing all of the district functions. Everybody’s in the room talking about this initiative so that at the end of the day, every-

body knows what his or her department is required to contribute — and why — to the success of the initiative.

We also have placed in our larger schools the equivalent of a business manager position. The Wallace Foundation did some research on this approach to show how much more time is gained for the principals in terms of focusing on instruction. In our schools, 85% of the principal’s evaluation is linked to instructional leadership. We can’t hold principals accountable for instruction if we don’t provide them the opportunity and support to get the job done. So those are some of the ways in which we have really changed the language of central office functions to better service the schools.

**JSD: We just completed a leadership issue of *JSD* that was sponsored by The Wallace Foundation, so we had a chance to learn about school administration managers (SAMs). Why has it taken so long to come up with that idea of a business manager to support a principal?**

**Hall:** I think it has to do with resources — clearly, there’s a cost factor — and we didn’t have data to really demonstrate concretely how much you gain. And the fact that Wallace came in — actually, Atlanta was one of the systems that the foundation used in order to collect the data — and we were able to go to our board and show that indeed the principals did get more time to focus on instruction, then we could justify the cost. I think that’s certainly a part of it.

There is also the old image of the principal. When I was a principal in New York City, the high school principal was really a tough manager. He was kind of the operations guy; he walked around with a lot of keys; and his role was never viewed to be one of an instructional leader. He was managing the environment, both in terms of managing the discipline aspects of the school but also dealing with the business operations of the building. Now we have come a long way from that.

**JSD: What have these changes in the central office meant for your role as superintendent?**

**Hall:** My role is to really keep a focus on accelerating the progress of the district, and to make sure that we’re removing all the barriers that would get in the way of students not only meeting but exceeding standards. Another priority is more students graduating from high school as well as more students finishing college successfully. And my third priority is to make sure that we proceed with the work of putting an effective teacher in every classroom. We want to make sure we’re adequately compensating teachers and providing them with career opportunities and meaningful professional development so that they can bring about the kind of learning that we need in classrooms.

My role is to make sure that the things that stand in the way of us getting these top priorities accomplished are removed. So I meet with my principals in small groups periodically, and I ask them, “How are we supporting you?” I have my senior staff sit

#### BEVERLY HALL’S TOP 3

1. Accelerate the progress of the district. Remove barriers to students meeting and exceeding standards.
2. Increase numbers of students graduating from high school and finishing college successfully.
3. Put an effective teacher in every classroom; provide adequate compensation, career opportunities, and meaningful professional development.

in the room, but they do not interact because I don't want them to feel they have to be defensive or the principals to feel they can't be frank. I ask, "What's working? What can we do better? Are there things that are really getting in your way?" The principals are free to talk about whatever the issues are. If we had taped these conversations from my first year, when I began these meetings, you would have heard a lot about human resource issues and facilities issues and IT issues, with very little discussion on teaching and learning. Today, you may hear one or two concerns about a business area, but 95% of the conversation is about what we can do to get more students to exceed standards, to get more students better prepared for college, and, of course, to deal with the issue of an effective teacher in every classroom every day.

**JSD: How do you make teacher effectiveness a priority?**

**Hall:** The Gates Foundation just gave us \$10 million to intensify the work we're doing around effective teaching in every

classroom. We're looking at a new evaluation instrument, an electronic tool called the teacher effectiveness dashboard, to identify those things that would allow teachers, principals, and central office support personnel to look and know which teachers are highly effective, which ones are average, which ones have poor performance, what professional development has been offered, and what other types of professional development we need to offer. The

new evaluation instrument will help principals support teachers and ultimately students. The Gates grant is going to help us to really move the needle on teacher effectiveness.

**JSD: So how about professional development?**

**Hall:** We have invested tremendously in job-embedded professional development. We employ instructional experts, facilitators, mentors, coaches, and model teacher leaders, and their sole job is to work in schools, building teachers' knowledge and using data to adjust and improve instruction. An education resource strategist came in and did a comparative study of Atlanta Public Schools, at the Gates Foundation's expense. The study concluded that our investment in our coaches, mentors, and others is really what has contributed significantly to the improvements that we're seeing.

Again, we also have at the school reform team level model teacher leaders. They perform demonstration lessons, model effective instructional practices, co-teach, conduct observations, and give feedback in a nonevaluative way. And they help teach-

ers in planning, using data, and using benchmark and formative assessments. So we invest a lot, even providing professional development for model teacher leaders, mentors, and coaches so that they can be on top of their craft as they work with our teachers. We have worked hard to make sure that our schools have common planning time, whether it's horizontally, vertically, or both, depending on the level, whether elementary, middle, or high school. Teachers come together as a professional learning community using data and student work to talk about instructional practice, to learn from each other, and to learn from the coaches and mentors.

You can go into just about any school in Atlanta, and you'll find that these aspects of professional development are all operational there. We have consistently supported professional development every year, even with the budget crisis. We provide an instructional management system that we've been implementing over time, very costly, that allows teachers to access model lessons, benchmark testing, and formative assessments because we want them to be able to differentiate instruction and understand what best teaching practice looks like even as they're teaching and implementing right there in the classroom.

**JSD: How about leadership development? How do you bring up effective leaders?**

**Hall:** I came through the ranks, starting as a middle school English teacher a long, long time ago. I went into the principalship because I realized that unless I had an effective leader in the building, I was never going to be able to maximize my potential to teach. So when I came to Atlanta, I decided that I really needed to look at principal leadership. Over the past decade, more than 90% of the principals have been changed. Many people resigned or retired, and others just moved on. Initially, we had to recruit from outside to fill those positions. We decided we had to cast a huge net in order to get applicants who fulfilled the requirements for a principalship as we defined it. However, we also received support from The Wallace Foundation to start our own formal induction and leadership development program — the Superintendent's Academy for Building Leaders in Education. This program provides an intensive two-year experience to groom internal aspiring leaders who want to serve as principals in Atlanta. Many of our current principals are coming from that pool, and we're happy because they're very instructionally focused. They understand the kind of leadership that we require to move our schools.

So making sure we have this pathway to leadership is one example of our work to build leadership capacity.

Secondly, we continue to cultivate current principals as instructional leaders, and I can give you an example.

When several elementary school principals were expressing difficulty getting a larger percentage of students to exceed standards, they assembled a professional learning team to review the research, to identify best practices that would assist them in helping teachers redesign instruction. At another school, principals

**"We have worked hard to make sure that our schools have common planning time, whether it's horizontally, vertically, or both, depending on the level, whether elementary, middle, or high school. Teachers come together as a professional learning community using data and student work ..."**

decided that they would participate in instructional rounds. During the rounds, the principals observed that students were not being asked higher-level thinking questions, so the principals sat down and, question by question, they worked together to make recommendations for how teachers could challenge students to do analysis and evaluation rather than simply recording facts. So the principals are forming their own professional learning communities so that they can improve student outcomes and their skills as instructional leaders.

Furthermore, through our Effective Teacher in Every Classroom Initiative, we're empowering principals to be good human capital managers so they will be using the teacher effectiveness dashboard that I mentioned earlier.

Doing so will allow them to make data-driven, clear, human capital decisions to support their teachers. The teacher evaluation dashboard will have multidimensional performance data — that is, student test scores, teacher assignments, teacher evaluation data, and the various components of the teacher's contribution to student growth. The idea is for all of that data to be used to decide intervention strategies. And it will also allow, I believe, for deeper conversations between teacher and principal with continuous improvement for the teacher being the ultimate goal. The principals are very excited that our district is piloting the teacher evaluation dashboard in several schools.

**JSD: What words of wisdom would you share with aspiring leaders within and beyond your district?**

**Hall:** There's no question that as a leader, you have to surround yourself with very competent and talented people. This whole notion of a superhero doing everything and being capable of moving large systems is flawed. You have to have a team that has bought into the vision that you articulate, but they must also be extremely knowledgeable and competent themselves, and leaders in their own right. And I always say to people, "Be sure to surround yourself with the right team if you're going to get the job done." If you're to survive as a leader who does anything worthwhile, you also have to have political savvy with a small "p." I don't care how knowledgeable and competent you are, if you can't stay long enough to get anything done, then nothing will change. So you have to be able to understand the political dynamics as well as the cultural dynamics of wherever you are. Otherwise, you will be distracted by continuous turmoil and not able to focus on teaching and learning and moving the system so that students can perform better.

•  
**Tracy Crow ([tracy.crow@nsdc.org](mailto:tracy.crow@nsdc.org)) is associate director of publications of the National Staff Development Council. ■**

# THE CAN-DO CENTRAL OFFICE

**WITH AN EYE ON STUDENT  
ACHIEVEMENT, ILLINOIS DISTRICT  
REDEFINES ITS ROLES AND GOALS**

**By Deanne Hillman and Donald S. Kachur**

**T**o the leadership of almost any school district and its supporting staff, the educational challenges are clear: 1) Reduce the achievement gap among students; 2) increase the graduation rate; and 3) attain the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) mandated by No Child Left Behind. Facing a superintendent change in 2006-07, Decatur Public School District 61 in Illinois was already confronting the major challenges of a widening student achievement gap, increasing dropout rate, and schools not meeting AYP. Located in the central part of the state, District 61 is a midsize urban district serving approximately 8,600 students pre-K through 12th grade in 22 building sites.

From the beginning, Superintendent Gloria J. Davis professed several simple beliefs that resonated among all district staff: “We understand all of our children can learn and achieve at high levels. It is our responsibility,

as a district, to do all we can to help them reach those high levels. All of our children can learn, and we can teach them!”

However, it was going to take more than words to turn such beliefs into realities for schools. It would call for transforming the roles and functions of the central office to form a consistent, systemic partnership with schools across the district. Together, schools and the central office would establish a clear directive for teaching and learning that would generate the initiatives and efforts to make the district’s vision a reality. This transformation called for the central office to take the lead in building the capacity of all staff to make sound decisions about their own ongoing professional learning that would impact student learning and achievement (Killion, 2006, p. 249).

#### **A TRANSFORMED VIEW OF THE CENTRAL OFFICE**

To begin, the district reviewed how the central of-





office offered professional development to schools. In collaboration with the schools, the central office realized that it needed to:

- Provide a more focused and compelling districtwide vision for all schools;
- Allow professional development needs to be identified at the building level;
- Provide leadership and support, differentiated at the building level, for continuous improvement of all professional staff;
- Work with individual schools in data-informed decision making; and
- Measure the progress of students and the school resulting from professional development.

The district needed a culture change. The central office saw the need to move from a managerial or compliance orientation of directives and controls to a service orientation in support of students, teachers, and administrators (Honig & Copland, 2008, p. 3). Staff

realized they would focus on and facilitate the improvement of instruction by offering opportunities and support for ongoing professional learning at the building level. The central office would develop greater visibility, accessibility, and resourceful responsiveness to school-level professional learning needs. Principals and teachers would need to know that they could request and expect central office staff to respond to their needs for professional learning.

The district began the change process by reorganizing central office staff and redefining roles and relationships. The central office administration became a collaborative team of

district facilitators. They shifted priorities to focus major attention on teaching and learning rather than noninstructional responsibilities. The director of teaching and learning became responsible for overseeing quality professional development aimed at building leadership capacity in all administrators and teachers as instructional and curriculum leaders. The director was also responsible for overseeing a continuous improvement process that ensured the alignment of professional development with curriculum and instruction activities.

To accomplish a central office service orientation, District 61 established a district leadership team that included 15 central office administrators. The district leadership team, a high-performing, goal-oriented team that provided vision and direction for the district, served in an advisory capacity

**The ultimate goal of the central office transformation was to build the capacity of all faculty and staff through professional development to offer a quality education and accept responsibility to meet the needs of a diverse population.**

to the superintendent. Working with building-level leadership, members of the team held weekly three-hour meetings analyzing issues and providing information, support, and solutions to building administrators. The team provided input in strategic planning and decision making; guided administrators by using clear, timely communication; improved academic achievement by participating in and supporting decisions at the district level; and monitored building-level administrators. The goal of the district leadership team was to build leadership capacity at the central level to effectively support building leadership and ensure student success at the school level.

Central office administrators were spending significantly more time serving as consultants and collaborating members of school improvement teams. They were responsible for building relationships and working full-time with school principals to support their work in improving teaching and learning and addressing professional learning needs of building staff. Central office and building-level administrators were now working alongside each other on a frequent basis. Together, they learned and worked through issues and addressed the challenges in each school to improve teaching and learning.

### CREATING A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

Many researchers in professional development call for an increased emphasis on job-embedded and collaborative teacher learning. As part of and in addition to formal professional development opportunities, the literature increasingly describes how teachers learn by working with their colleagues in professional learning communities, engaging in continuous dialogue, and examining their practices and student performance to develop and enact more effective instructional practices (Hord, 2009, pp. 40-43). In order to provide opportunities for educators to share their experiences and knowledge, District 61's central office administrators guided and supported individual schools in evolving as professional learning communities. The model enabled each school staff to undertake learning practices that included observing, analyzing, and learning from each other and from school data and student work. The director of teaching and learning provided support, guidance, and resources for the development of these learning communities. During this past year, three full days on the district calendar were dedicated to districtwide professional development for the communities. Included were three professional learning com-

munity support team sessions designed to build leadership capacity at each building.

### CENTRAL OFFICE AND DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS AS LEARNERS

Emphasizing the importance of quality instruction, all principals, assistant principals, and central office administrators whose duties included curriculum leadership were required to participate in walk-throughs. The district envisioned the instructional walk-through process as a tool to maximize the administrator's time in the classroom as an instructional leader, provide a vehicle to assess effectiveness of curricular and instructional initiatives, and help with monitoring the school's climate. For central office personnel in particular, walk-throughs were an opportunity to observe and examine data and see firsthand the needs of individual schools. Through this process, central office staff moved closer to the schools so new relationships could occur and participants could increase their capacity as instructional leaders (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006, p. 8). Furthermore, the district used walk-throughs as a vehicle to promote embedded professional development. This resulted in conversations with staff members about improvements in teaching and learning and practices in data gathering and reflective thinking.

Data from walk-throughs helped generate in-depth discussions with the building-level staff on instructional strategies. The data helped educators pinpoint instructional changes they needed to make. District administrators centered their instructional walk-through process on the three components of effective classroom teaching from *The Art and Science of Teaching* (Marzano, 2007). The district made student learning the priority by focusing on effective instructional, curriculum design, and management strategies.

To best support building-level learning priorities, central office staff strived to become a valuable resource for all school principals. District 61 developed a new administrator program to build capacity and provide direct support to all incoming administrators. Each administrator works with a mentor during his or her first year and attends monthly professional learning sessions designed to meet his or her needs. Principals found value in having support from colleagues who had experience as principals at the same school level as their own.

In addition, central office administrators learned new skills in order to be effective facilitators. As learners themselves, they have developed their knowledge and skills in collaborative planning and facilitation as well as their ability to conduct effective meetings.

### BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF ALL SCHOOL STAFF

The primary focus of the central office was promoting learning across the entire district — meaningful learning opportunities for students, teachers, building-level administrators, and central office staff. Central office staff worked in collaboration

#### Decatur School District #61

Decatur, Ill.

Grades: **Pre-K-12**

Enrollment: **8,558**

Staff: **926** certified, **318** support staff

Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	<b>44.9%</b>
Black:	<b>44.6%</b>
Hispanic:	<b>1.7%</b>
Asian/Pacific Islander:	<b>0.9%</b>
Native American:	<b>0.2%</b>
Other:	<b>7.7%</b>

Limited English proficient: **0.8%**

Languages spoken: **English, Spanish**

Free/reduced lunch: **65.7%**

Special education: **18%**

Contact: **Deanne Hillman**, director of teaching and learning

E-mail: **dhillman@dps61.org**

with each school’s professional learning communities to assure that each school identified, planned, and participated in professional development that increased its instructional capacity. With central office resource help and logistical assistance, each school’s faculty based professional learning decisions for all staff on individual school data. Each school developed a professional development plan that aligned with the district improvement plan and school improvement plan. Emphasis for professional learning concentrated on:

- Practicing differentiated instruction;
- Creating common assessments; and
- Implementing instructional interventions.

The central office served as a resource to individual buildings and customized professional development for specific building contexts and needs. Across the district, professional learning became job-embedded and ongoing rather than one-shot professional development workshops or sessions.

A range of leaders — consultants, instructional specialists, literacy coaches, administrators, and teacher leaders — facilitated the professional development.

#### COACHING MODEL

Central office staff supported coaching across the district. Literacy coaches worked in elementary buildings, while instructional specialists offered support to staff districtwide. Forty staff members participated in a five-day learning opportunity with NSDC on coaching in order to build capacity in district resource and support systems. They acquired the knowledge, skills, and practices to improve teaching strategies. Consultants followed up the initial training with school visits for three days to offer feedback and support. The coaching model placed particular emphasis on adult learning theory, data analysis, critical conversations, building relationships, providing research-based instructional strategies, coaching through differentiation, problem solving, and building positive school cultures.

- **Graduation rates were 73.3% in 2007, 87.9% in 2009.**
- **80% of graduating seniors go to college.**
- **13% of the schools are on the Illinois honor roll.**

#### LESSONS LEARNED

All school districts’ central offices face the challenge of how to provide consistent excellence in their approaches to supporting professional development. District 61 learned that its central office should:

- Build the capacity of central office administrators in facilitating new forms of professional development;
- Develop partnerships for collaboration between the central office and schools that reflect movement from a “working on” to a “working with” mentality;
- Explore ways to build the capacity of school staff at the local level to determine individual professional development needs

and designs so as not to do it “to” them, but rather “with” them; and

- Identify, recognize, and promote those schools where professional learning was producing success in terms of student achievement to share their best practices with other schools. The ultimate goal of the central office transformation was to build the capacity of all faculty and staff through professional development to offer a quality education and accept responsibility to meet the needs of a diverse population.

The district has experienced some early success through this transformation. Graduation rates have increased to 87.9% in 2009, up from 73.3% in 2007. Eighty percent of the graduating seniors are moving on to higher education. Thirteen percent of the Decatur Public Schools are on the Illinois Honor Roll, recognizing high-quality education for all students. Also, the Decatur Public School District 61 was recognized by the Illinois State Board of Education as third in the top 10 award-winning districts for student performance in the state of Illinois.

The key to District 61’s success was not to capitulate to pressures to return to the former modus operandi as a central office. Beginning at the superintendent’s level, the district continually reinforced efforts to transform the central office to become instrumental in creating a districtwide collaborative professional learning culture, one where educators were learning from and with one another, introducing ideas, sharing practices, and making decisions that benefit the students that pass through their doors each day.

#### REFERENCES

- **Agullard, K. & Goughnour, D.S. (2006).** *Central office inquiry: Assessing organization, roles, and functions to support school improvement.* San Francisco: WestEd.
- **Honig, M.I. & Copland, M.A. (2008, September).** *Reinventing district central offices to expand student learning (Issue Brief).* Washington, DC: Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement.
- **Hord, S.M. (2009, Winter).** Professional learning communities: Educators work together toward a shared purpose — improved student learning. *JSD*, 30(1), 40-43.
- **Killion, J. (2006).** *Collaborative professional learning in school and beyond: A tool kit for New Jersey educators* (pp. 249-253). Oxford, OH: New Jersey Department of Education and National Staff Development Council.
- **Marzano, R.J. (2007).** *The art and science of teaching: A comprehensive framework for effective instruction.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

• **Deanne Hillman (dhillman@dps61.org) is director of teaching and learning at Decatur (Ill.) Public School District No. 61. Donald S. Kachur (dskachu@ilstu.edu) is professor emeritus of education at Illinois State University, Bloomington, Ill. ■**



CENTRAL  
OFFICE

and  
SCHOOL  
LEADERS



# CREATE a CONVERSATION

By Sue McAdamis

“**B**efore there were meetings, planning processes, or any other techniques, there was conversation — people sitting around, interested in each other, talking together,” writes Margaret Wheatley (2002). It has been through simple conversations that authoritative leadership roles traditionally held by those at central office in Rockwood School District (Eureka, Mo.) have shifted to collaborative relationships between district-level staff and school-based leaders. This change happened through mutual dialogue about effective professional learning as it applied to classroom practice and student achievement.

Margaret Wheatley (2002) says, “Human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change — personal change, community and organizational change, planetary change. If

we can sit together and talk about what’s important to us, we begin to come alive.” Most conversations in schools take the form of discussion, debate, argument, or persuasion. But when educators speak about important educational topics in a way that causes them to examine each others’ beliefs and assumptions, they can and will transform teaching and learning. The dialogue-like conversations between central office personnel and school leaders that have taken place in Rockwood over the last 10 years have changed. The focus is now on results-driven, job-embedded, standards-based professional learning and how all educators, both central office and school-based staff, can work together to help all students realize their potential.

#### A SHIFT IN THE CONVERSATION

A decade ago, Rockwood educators knew their professional development practices were not improving schools or student learning. They had to rethink their traditional approach to professional development to one focused on a commitment to continuous improvement.

A force behind the change in practice was the Rockwood Board of Education, whose members questioned the time spent on professional development when students were sent home early.

A 1999 program evaluation found that most administrators and teachers did not know what constituted high-quality professional development. Administrators and teachers did not know how to use student achievement data to guide school improvement and professional development planning. District educators did not yet know the tenets of professional learning communities and collaboration.

In 2000, as a result of the 1999 program evaluation, the district's professional development committee, composed of teacher and principal representatives, insisted that guidelines be developed for what constitutes high-quality professional development at the school sites. The committee worked alongside central office staff to design the district's first set of guidelines for professional development and made certain the guidelines were aligned with NSDC's Standards for Staff Development. Their collaborative conversations resulted in *Guidelines for Site-Based Professional Development* (Rockwood School District, 2009), which were meant to provide a framework for results-driven, job-embedded, standards-based professional development in Rockwood School District.

The components at right were outlined in the newly developed guidelines.

The guidelines serve as the starting point for collaborative conversations about professional learning and student achievement between district administrators and school leaders. Professional learning is the driving force behind each building's school improvement plan and, as stated above, each school in Rockwood is required to outline how professional learning will guide student learning.

#### **DISTRICT SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

The executive directors for elementary and secondary education and the director of professional development monitor implementation of the schools' improvement plans. Dialogue between district personnel and school leaders about professional development and school improvement goals deepens understandings and strengthens relationships. As Roland Barth states, "Conversations have the capacity to promote reflection, to create and exchange craft knowledge, and to help improve the organization" (Sparks, 2007).

Eureka Elementary School Principal Brian Gentz recalls a rich conversation with Sue McAdamis, direc-

These guidelines are required by the school board and district superintendent to be present in each school's improvement/professional development plan:

- **Clearly stated** curricular goals and objectives aligned with the curriculum and instructional components of the school's improvement plan.
- **Explanation** of how student achievement data determined the focus of professional development activities and how it related to improved student achievement.
- **Description** of the processes and/or methods used to evaluate professional development activities both formatively and summatively.
- **Indication** of how time would be devoted to professional development each month.
- **Alignment** of professional development with SMART goals.
- **Implementation** of various models of professional development throughout the school year, such as professional learning communities, action research, examining student work, study groups, vertical teams, peer coaching, etc.

#### **Guidelines for site-based professional development**

tor of professional development, about how teachers and the administrator in his school could improve. Their self-evaluation, using Rockwood's guidelines, allowed teachers and the principal to have a conversation about "where we are, how we got there, and what we might do to improve during the next year," Gentz said.

Rockwood School District administered NSDC's Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) in 2005, 2007, and 2009. Survey results provided every school with a snapshot of the professional learning in that school as measured by teachers' perceptions of how their school implemented the 12 NSDC Standards. SAI data provided a starting point for goal setting and spurred further dialogue around current practice. These dialogue-like conversations served as another springboard for conversations about professional learning that have made an impact on teacher and student learning.

Principals and teacher leaders also used NSDC's Innovation Configurations (Roy & Hord, 2003) to identify their current level of practice and next steps for growth. The ICs were a useful tool because they described clearly and specifically the responsibilities of the

principal and teacher in regard to each of the NSDC standards. The ICs also defined roles for the superintendent, central office staff, school board, regional agencies, institutions of higher education, and state agencies, describing the role every educator has in making effective professional learning happen.

As a district, Rockwood identified five NSDC standards — Learning Communities, Leadership, Data-Driven, Evaluation, and Learning — that it believed would provide the most leverage for continuous school improvement. Principals regarded the ICs as an opportunity to reflect on current practice to see how they could make incremental changes towards more effective professional learning. The SAI results and ICs served as a compass to point the way.

John Shaughnessy admits that his high school didn't always plan professional development with student learning in mind. "We were sending teachers to conferences and workshops, but we weren't really doing anything with what they were learning," said Shaughnessy, principal of Lafayette High School. Shaughnessy's approach to overseeing professional development for his staff changed after he learned about the Innovation Configuration maps for NSDC's Standards for Staff Development. For Shaughnessy, the IC maps were a tool that enabled him to learn more about high-quality professional development and that showed him what a principal could do to move a school closer to having a quality professional development program.

#### FOCUS ON RESULTS

There is no doubt that the collaborative conversations focused on professional learning among central office personnel and school leaders have influenced student achievement in Rock-

wood School District. As the district completes the first decade of the 21st century and 10 years of a collaborative commitment to excellence in education, it's important to highlight Rockwood's accomplishments:

- All four Rockwood high schools placed on *Newsweek* magazine's list of 1,000 top U.S. high schools and are among only a few St. Louis schools on the list.
- Rockwood ranked first among the state's 523 school districts in the number of schools that placed on the state department's top 10 highest-performing schools based on MAP (state assessment) scores.
- Rockwood students continue to improve on every other traditional academic measure.
- The number of National Merit Scholars continues to increase.
- Students must earn a 31 or higher on their ACT college entrance exam, a score earned by only two percent of students nationwide, in order to qualify as a Missouri "Bright Flight Scholar," and Rockwood now has approximately 15% of its students meeting this challenge.
- Enrollment in high school AP classes continues to increase and the average student performance on AP tests is also improving.

#### THE POWER OF CONVERSATION

"It takes just one person to have the courage to begin a conversation," writes Wheatley (2002), "because everyone is eager to talk." The conversations that have taken place over the last 10 years between central office personnel and school leaders have made a positive impact on learning for the district's educators and students. As Rockwood School District educators know, deep sys-

temic change has resulted from collaborative conversations centered on what educators need to learn in order for students to realize their potential. Dialogue matters. Educators who have the opportunity to reflect and perfect their practices get better student results. The conversations around professional development at the building-level focus on context, process, and content.

We repeat our mantra continually: What is it that we want students to know, understand, and be able to do? What evidence will we collect to show that they are learning? What will we do when they are not learning, and/or if they have mastered the learning? What do we, as educators, need to learn to ensure that this happens?

We tend to accomplish what we commit to, what we are clear about, what we value, and what we create. Therefore, the more we engage educators in collaborative conversations around these topics, the more commitment they have to improved student growth. It is imperative that we challenge the status quo and, as Vygotsky (Moll, 1990) said, “We complete our thoughts when we speak them.” Our most conscious learning takes place when we dialogue about topics that may or may not be comfortable. Thus, improved student learning occurs when educators learn through collaborative conversations with others about their practice.

## REFERENCES

**Moll, L.C. (1990).** *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of socio-historical psychology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

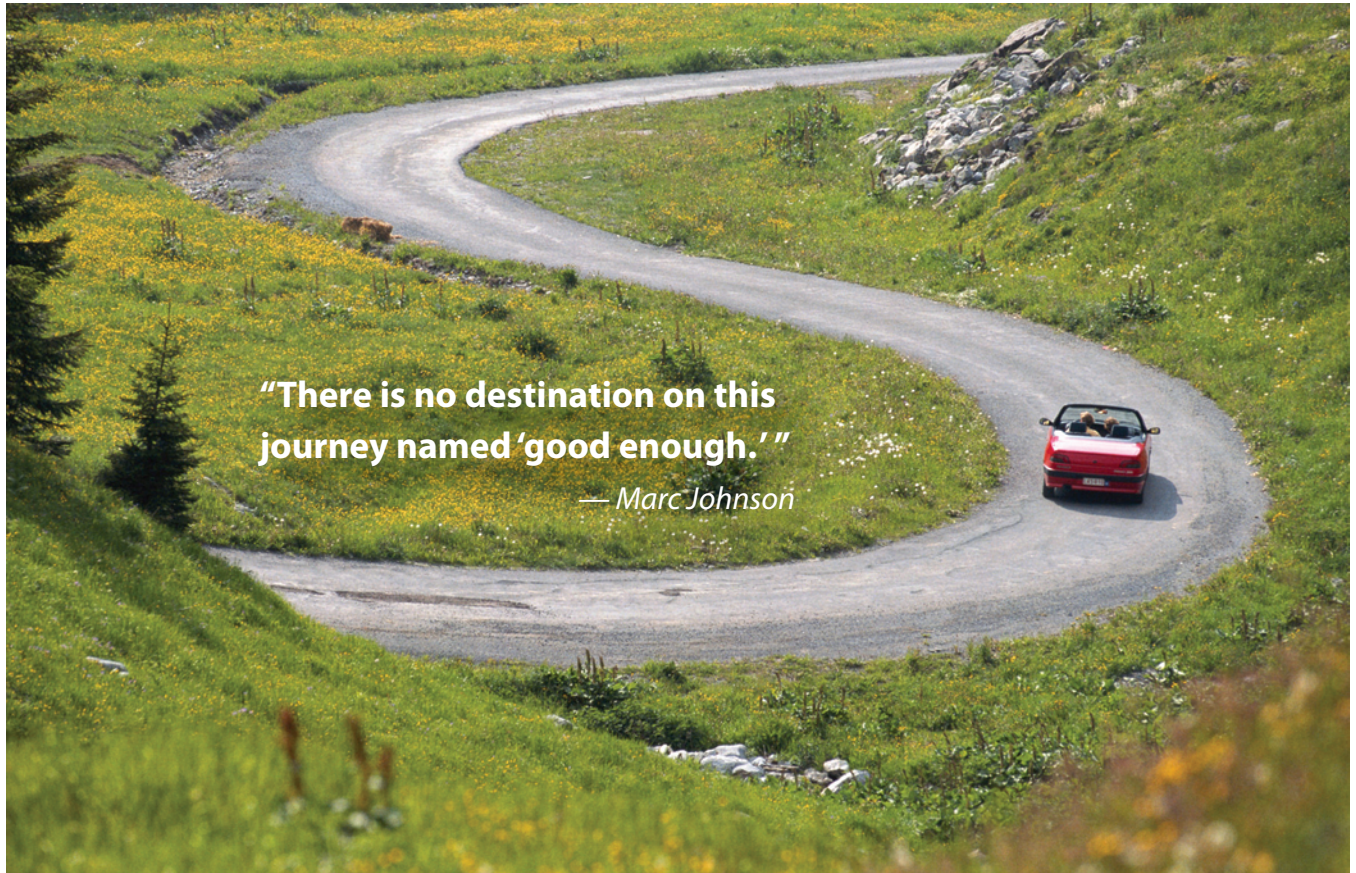
**Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003).** *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation Configurations*. Oxford, OH: NSDC & SEDL.

**Rockwood School District. (2009).** *Guidelines for site-based professional development*. Eureka, MO: Author.

**Sparks, D. (2007).** *Leading for results: Transforming teaching, learning, and relationships in schools* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

**Wheatley, M. (2002).** *Turning to one another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

•  
**Sue McAdamis (mcadamissue@rockwood.k12.mo.us) is director of professional development in the Rockwood School District, Eureka, Mo., and a former president of the NSDC Board of Trustees. ■**



# ROAD TRIP

JOURNEY TO IMPROVEMENT TAKES TWISTS AND TURNS

By Ellen S. Perconti

**M**arc Johnson of Sanger Unified School District in California made the statement above in a recent presentation to our district. His words hang in the back of my mind and push my thinking. As a curriculum director, my role is one of influence. The organizational lines from my position to others in the district are all dotted lines — none are solid. Thus, I have responsibility for, but not authority over, the district's professional learning journey. And there is no destination named "good enough."

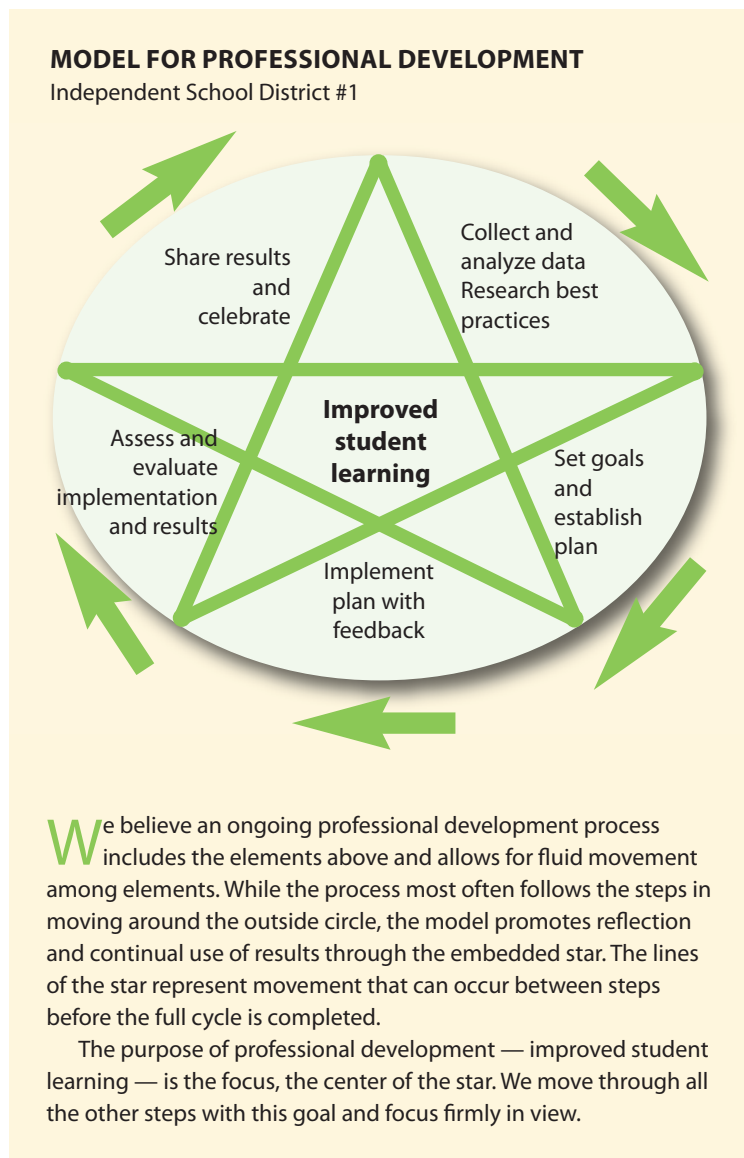
The Lewiston (Idaho) School District's picture of optimal professional learning is changing from one-shot, sit-and-get style workshops to learning with the expectation of implementation. The district, which serves approximately 4,950 students, has developed and is implementing a professional development model based on continuous improvement, professional learning communities, and NSDC's standards. The shift we are making is not without hurdles and temporary roadblocks. As a central office administrator, I am learning that influence makes a difference. Persistence, inquiry, capacity building, and clarifying of understandings and intentions all influence change.

During the 2007-08 school year, the superintendent asked that I facilitate an ad hoc committee to review and recommend to the board of directors a new model for professional development. The process provided 35 teachers and administrators the opportunity to review research regarding professional learning and to develop a model that would lead the district (see chart at right). As with any new model, the first year of implementation was a learning experience. For some in the district, questions of resources and logistics took precedence over questions of learning. Scheduling the time became more of an issue than the intended impact of the learning on student achievement. Overall, we saw that changing mindsets from a focus on attendance to a focus on implementation is an enormous challenge.

**PERSISTENCE**

DuFour (2008) indicates that a lack of persistence contributes to a “this too shall pass” mentality, and that persistence with a focus contributes to collective efficacy. One of the first hurdles we faced in implementing the professional development model was changing mental models from professional development as something done to us to professional learning designed to change instruction. We began by using Reeves’ (2008) advice of establishing a hypothesis to frame our learning. School staffs reviewed their data and identified their greatest area of need, then researched best practices to address the need. These two components led to a prediction statement, such as, “If we implement content literacy strategies across all content areas, then students’ language and writing skills will improve.” The first part of the statement became the professional learning goal; the second part was developed into a SMART goal.

Using persistence in influencing the connection between adult learning and student achievement came in many forms. At the central office, we worked to reiterate the connection. For example, the form for submitting the school professional development plan requires the framing hypothesis statement. In addition, several times during the year, the district asked for evidence of how the professional development was being implemented and for evidence of its impact. We also wove the connection into an opportunity for college credit in which teachers were asked to present what they had learned, what they had implemented from that learning, student work that provided evidence of learning, and teachers’ reflections and inferences. Listening to teachers talk about how their learning impacted instruction, and thus student learning, was one of the most rewarding evenings of the school year. Teachers articulated how they adjusted classroom routines, used their student data,



and created relationships with their students based on the learning they had done over the year.

As we move into the next school year, the message persists. We continue to influence the connection between what we are learning and doing and how that impacts student learning. Change doesn’t happen in one school year. We continue to struggle with the confines of schedules and limitations of understanding. It would be easy at this point to consider our efforts “good enough”; however, we want more than just good enough for students and adults in our system.

**INQUIRY**

The district’s professional development model was

approved by the board of directors. They expected that, as a district, we would align our contracted 19 hours of school improvement time during the 2008-09 school year with the model and that we would do the same with the collaboration time for teams that is built into the school day. As the contract was merged with the model, several issues arose: how to schedule time, where to fit itinerants in the model, how to establish the professional development focus, and what happened if teachers didn't attend. We began to ask more questions than any of us had answers for. The central office often had responsibility for the final decision. We established some basic parameters and then worked on learning



**“Each of us is still learning. We need to learn from our conversations, actions, and mistakes today so that we engage at a different level the next time.”**

— Ellen S. Perconti

the skills of inquiry. While the calendar school improvement time (first Thursday of October, the day before Thanksgiving, and the last contracted day for teachers) had been repeatedly

criticized, the flexibility in scheduling time for professional development created an equivalent stir across the district. As schools began to set time aside for educator learning, they encountered multiple barriers. Athletic and academic competitions, family schedules, and more stood in the way of schools scheduling the 19 hours of learning time.

Yet keeping the focus on learning was important. I learned that it was better to do this through inquiry than advocacy. Asking questions that helped the building administrator and leadership teams think through why they were dividing the time the way they were and how that structure would benefit both the teachers and students proved to be the most effective support I could give.

Flexibility of time has allowed each building to assess its learning needs and allocate time accordingly. Some schools found that providing learning time early in the school year supported implementation. Other schools found that providing shorter segments throughout the year allowed teachers to deepen their learning and implementation. We are finding that there really isn't one answer for every building. Each school has to determine the pace and distance for its journey.

We will continue to maintain the focus of professional development on student learning as we move forward. I've learned that inquiry means developing the skills to clarify and understand why a building is pursuing a specific path. Sometimes this process results in a shift for the building; other times it assists me in understanding the route they are taking.

### CAPACITY BUILDING

Phil Schlechty (2009) states that central office staff in a learning organization need to be capacity builders. Specifically, central office administrators are charged with building capacity to

focus on student learning in all aspects of the organization. Enabling and supporting rather than controlling is how Schlechty sees central office's role. The balance between maintaining a focus and providing support is one that creates tension. Building capacity through focused professional development that impacts student learning proved to be a rougher road than we anticipated.

When the professional development model was created, the committee struggled with how to keep student learning in the center. While theoretically we all agreed, in practice we grappled with how to put it into action. Our system had allowed individual teachers to choose professional development rather than a process that centered on the needs of students. Our model (plus the financial times we are in) forced us to focus resources on student need. Thus, we were not able to honor as many requests to attend various presentations and workshops. The political forces behind the requests were strong.

Anyone who has driven the back roads of Idaho learns that you have to hold on to the steering wheel firmly with both hands, but not too tightly in case you hit a deep rut. We knew that the more consistent we were in our responses to requests, the smoother the road would be in the future. To deny all requests would be detrimental to the system.

Support doesn't mean the absence of questioning, nor does it mean accepting outright all ideas. I have to repeatedly remind myself that not every leader in our system will walk the same path toward the goal. Each of us is still learning. We need to learn from our conversations, actions, and mistakes today so that we engage at a different level the next time.

### CLARIFYING

In the book *Influencer*, Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler (2008) state the need for identifying vital behaviors, those behaviors that set the best apart from the rest. As we researched professional learning, we found that one of those vital behaviors for principals is sharing facilitation and leadership of professional development. The more collaborative the process, the more engaged teachers are in the learning and, ultimately, more implementation occurs. Administrators see more implementation of learning in classrooms when they share professional development leadership with teachers. At the central office, we are celebrating with these administrators, teachers, and students.

Professional learning is a journey at all levels of the school district. None of us has reached our destination. We lead in the midst of learning. This is not a comfortable place to lead from, as it shows vulnerability. Sharing the load is easiest when each task is clearly defined. It is much more difficult to share when we are not clear as to what exactly will need to take place. The first level of support for principals then is modeling learning. I strive to model the connection between leading and learning. In addition to this modeling, I support principals by providing systemic support for leadership teams. As we reviewed our first year of implementation, one of the recommendations that came forward

was that we provide a refresher day on facilitation skills and background knowledge for professional learning. These skills are modeled and used in each administrator meeting. Our district was fortunate enough to be able to bring in Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman several years ago. Their work in our district provided a tool kit of collaboration that we tap into frequently. Revisiting and renewing these skills is essential to our implementation of the professional learning model. The skill of clarifying is one that I am still learning. Clarifying is a powerful tool in influencing the learning journey.

### **INFLUENCE**

The role of influence, while not powerless, provides a different skill set than the role of authority. As our district continues implementation of the professional development model, the central office role will be pivotal in igniting change. I will need to continue to hone my skills of persistence, inquiry, capacity building, and clarifying. It is a collective learning process, not one that can be done in isolation, nor one that is without missed turns

and potholes. It is definitely a journey.

### **REFERENCES**

**DuFour, R., DuFour, R., & Eaker, B. (2008).** *Revisiting professional learning communities at work: New insights for improving schools.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

**Patterson, K., Grenny, J., Maxfield, D., McMillan, R., & Switzler, A. (2008).** *Influencer: The power to change anything* New York: McGraw-Hill.

**Reeves, D. (2008).** *HISD PIM analysis.* Available at [www.leadandlearn.com/files/file/webinar/Webinar.HISD6.6.08.pdf](http://www.leadandlearn.com/files/file/webinar/Webinar.HISD6.6.08.pdf).

**Schlechty, P. (2009).** *Leading for learning: How to transform schools into learning organizations.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

**Ellen S. Perconti (eperconti@lewistonschools.net) is director of curriculum and assessment at Independent School District #1, Lewiston, Idaho. ■**



## LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

# ACCELERATE *into* HIGH SPEED



By Dori Novak, Marceta Reilly, and Diana Williams

**W**hat professional development will help you grow the skills you need as a central office leader?

Here's how central office staff in Howard County,

Md., answered that question three years ago:

1. Provide professional development for us that addresses our unique needs.
2. Help us learn to go beyond delegating tasks as the primary means to encourage growth of aspiring leaders and support succession planning.
3. Teach us to differentiate our supervision practices to meet the needs of staff with different levels of leadership skills and experiences.
4. Teach us to give specific, constructive feedback that will lead to desired changes and growth in employees.

Up to this time, central office leaders and school-based principals were treated pretty much the same in terms of performance evaluations and staff development support even though their job responsibilities, day-to-day challenges, and client groups differed greatly.

Both groups were held accountable for a set of standards that aligned with the ISLLC (Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium) standards and indicators. Their supervision was based on the same traditional, clinical model used with teachers and school-based principals. It had not changed significantly in more than 30 years.

#### A VISION FOR CHANGE

In fall 2006, the deputy superintendent asked a small leadership team to rethink leadership support for cen-

tral office leaders and to come up with an aligned three-point plan that would meet their unique needs. The leadership support system needed to take into account:

1. Leadership standards and indicators of success that reflect the actual job of central office leaders;
2. A performance evaluation system that fosters continuous learning; and
3. Professional development opportunities that align with the standards.

The team was excited to take on the challenge.

#### LEADERSHIP COACHING: A SURPRISE COMPONENT

For a couple of years, first-year principals in the district had been granted the support of a leadership coach for one year. The coaches were provided by an outside agency, Coaching for Results. The coaches were certified by the International Coach Federation. Principals who received coaching raved about their experience. They wanted to learn how to use coaching skills to offer the same support and nonjudgmental feedback that they had received from their coaches. Administrators at all levels were interested in coaching as a potential leadership skill to bring out the best in others through day-to-day conversations and performance evaluation.

Administrators clearly wanted to move beyond traditional workshops, courses, and conferences. Several leaders had experienced career-changing support from external leadership coaches. The concept intrigued others who not only wanted to experience individual coaching support but also wanted to learn coaching skills to provide those benefits to their employees.

**Administrators clearly wanted to move beyond traditional workshops, courses, and conferences.**

### A COACHING PILOT

The district wanted leaders to be collaborative in working with staff and to empower staff to be self-directed and fully engaged in making significant changes. The specific leadership model that emerged in Howard County stressed the use of coach-like behaviors as a key component in accomplishing these objectives. The district hired Coaching for Results to provide training with follow-up to central office leaders using International Coach Federation and NSDC frameworks to build a culture of coaching in the district.

The district model of coach-like leadership that evolved included coaching skills that adhere to competencies established by International Coach Federation.

In offering leadership training, the district also wanted the model to be consistent with high-quality professional learning as outlined in NSDC's Standards for Staff Development.

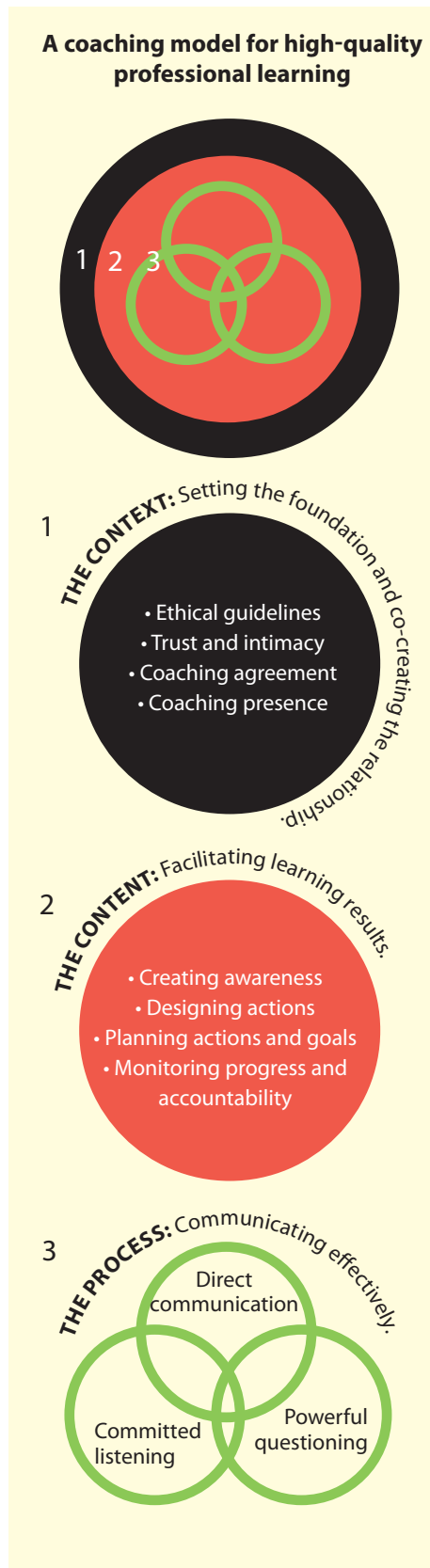
### A COACHING MODEL

The figure at right shows the relationship between coaching competencies and high-quality professional learning in context, process, and content.

#### The context

The first component of the learning set the foundation and context for the coaching as a district-supported leadership model.

In this component, leaders learned ways to develop powerful relationships with colleagues based on trust and being fully present. They learned the importance of setting ethical guidelines, establishing a co-creative presence, and setting agreements when interacting with colleagues. This component is based on one of the core coaching beliefs: The leader is not the problem solver or the primary idea-generator. The leader is the keeper of the vision and the one who helps build the capacity in others to successfully solve their own prob-



lems and generate multiple ideas and solutions.

#### The process

The processes used to teach leadership content included experiences that provided participants with a deeper understanding of their role in communicating effectively. Initially, many educators remarked that they had already received training in listening and giving feedback. However, after these coaching experiences, they agreed that listening with a coaching ear is different and effective. They used the strategies immediately and gave inspiring testimonies. These components included refining skills such as:

- **Committed listening:** Fully listening, avoiding judgments and negative criticism;
- **Powerful questioning:** Asking questions that reveal key information needed to maximize the coaching relationship;
- **Giving constructive feedback:** Matching feedback to a client's stage of readiness for learning; and
- **Differentiating** use of mentoring, advising, telling, and coaching based on a client's need.

#### The content

Content was the core of the learning and included coaching competencies that facilitate learning and results. The content helped leaders make significant and positive changes in their communications with others.

Leaders accomplished the following:

- Built awareness of their purpose and intentions to change;
  - Brainstormed actions and options;
  - Identified goals and strategies for implementing significant changes; and
  - Monitored progress and accountability for getting the desired results.
- The professional development model provided time and space for reflection on current practices, practicing new approaches, and sharing insights.

**LEADERSHIP PRACTICES CONTINUUM**

Supervising zone		Mentoring zone			Coaching zone co-creating the relationship, effective communication			
Give advice Give the answer	Give advice by asking loaded questions	Teach	Offer options	Create awareness	Design actions	Plan and set goals	Monitor progress	Celebrate success

**SUPERVISING ZONE**

- The leader gives advice, tells people what to do, solves people’s problems, or asks loaded questions like, “Have you thought about ... ?”
- The leader is directing by taking control of the situation and deciding the course of action or giving strong suggestions about best solutions.
- The leader is the expert and knows what to do.

**MENTORING ZONE:**

- This is a softer form of directing.
- The thinking is that if I teach others what I know, they will handle situations as well as I do.
- At its best, this approach teaches necessary skills and insights to people who are new to their roles or positions.

At its worst, this approach creates a clone of the mentor so that the other person will act the way the mentor wants.

- Mentor-leaders spend time teaching others and offering options.
- Mentors take on the role of “wise ones” who guide others to know what to do, based on the mentor’s thinking and experiences.
- This is appropriate for working with novices and is not the best way to work with experienced and/or highly motivated staff.

**COACHING ZONE**

- The leader gives up the mantle of being the expert or wise one and becomes an equal partner and collaborator with others involved in problem solving.

- The leader uses effective communication, such as listening for underlying themes or assumptions, asking questions, posing possibilities, and pushing thinking so that clear and creative ideas emerge. Decisions are therefore created by the group, not by any one individual, as they openly share information and thinking.
- The coaching zone should be the first option leaders use when they work with others. Only after they find that a person is a novice or lacks experience should they move back to the mentoring zone. The supervisory zone should be reserved for those few staff members who challenge authority or blatantly disregard policy.

Source: Marceta Reilly and Diana Williams, 2008.

Participants reported personal growth in relationships for themselves and those whom they supervised. For the first time, leaders reported that they understood how to differentiate their supervision practices to fit the needs of new employees versus troubled employees as well as keeping veteran employees fresh and inspired.

**LEADERSHIP COACHING VERSUS TYPICAL LEADER PRACTICES**

The model of leadership practices above emerged from the concept that leadership develops over time and typically follows a continuum of practice. In the training, leaders learned to differentiate their leadership based on the varying needs of the people with whom they work.

Leaders are often selected for leadership roles based on their individual success in problem solving and organizing. Yet as they

move up the career ladder, they need to learn new skills to build the capacity of others.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

This training component coupled with the district’s desired leadership model has enabled the Howard County Public School System to broaden its concept of performance evaluation. The district’s performance document now includes observable coach-like behaviors. (See pp. 36-37 for the complete standards.)

Consequently, the district is gradually moving away from traditional one-size-fits-all supervision practices to a more rigorous differentiated approach where goals are aligned to leadership standards and clear measures of success.

Leaders are eager to build their skills so they can bring out the best in others and supervise staff with strategies that match individual needs.

## LEADERSHIP STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE BEHAVIORS

### Standard 1

#### VISION

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by facilitating and supporting the development, articulation, and implementation of the school system's strategic plan.

#### OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

- a. Facilitates development of a shared vision regarding how his or her office or program contributes to the school system's mission.
- b. Ensures that the school system's strategic plan and vision are regularly communicated to staff and stakeholders.
- c. Keeps the school system's vision and goals at the forefront of decision making.
- d. Ensures that the short- and long-term plans for his or her office or program align with the school system's strategic plan.
- e. Develops the professional capacity of staff and stakeholders and ensures that staff members have opportunities to serve as leaders.
- f. Facilitates a process to monitor, evaluate, and revise programs and procedures to support the vision.
- g. Provides resources for continuous progress toward the realization of the vision.

### Standard 2

#### STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by creating and sustaining a culture of professional growth and high expectations that supports the school system's strategic plan.

#### OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

- a. Takes responsibility for creating a positive work culture that promotes respect for diversity and commonality.
- b. Uses a variety of data to develop action plans aligned with the district's master plan.
- c. Uses and promotes technology to make data-driven decisions and provides staff the assistance they need for improvement.
- d. Provides leadership for the design, implementation, and evaluation of effective professional development that addresses the needs of all employee groups.
- e. Ensures that office goals are achieved with a high level of customer/client satisfaction for both internal and external customers.
- f. Engages in succession planning by identifying and developing potential.
- g. Implements an ongoing program of performance evaluation based on individual development plans that ensure continuous growth and satisfaction of all staff.

### Standard 3

#### MANAGEMENT

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by ensuring the effective and efficient management of his or her office or program.

#### OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

- a. Demonstrates efficient management knowledge and skills necessary for his or her position.
- b. Manages resources to cultivate a safe and healthy work environment.
- c. Develops and supervises efficient management practices that produce quality services.
- d. Involves stakeholders in developing and managing a budget that supports the office or program goals and is aligned with the school system's strategic plan.
- e. Promotes the development of staff management skills as required for their job roles.
- f. Regularly utilizes the plan, do, study, act cycle to ensure continuous improvement of the office based on data.
- g. Ensures that the office produces the results outlined in the office plan.

### Standard 4

#### COLLABORATION

The central office leader collaborates effectively with stakeholder groups, including staff, schools, community members, business partners, and community agencies, to promote the success of all students and staff.

Coaching provides skills leaders need to enhance growth in this performance evaluation process.

### FUTURE IMPLICATIONS FOR A CULTURE OF COACHING

Requests for coach training continue to emerge throughout the district. To meet this need, Coaching for Results consultants have become sponsors and mentors of a district team of certified coaches. As a result of this partnership:

- The district has developed an in-house summer coaching

academy that will meet support staff needs.

- Principals have applied coaching to the work of their team leaders, department heads, and resource personnel.
- Staff members have made the connection between their coach-like behaviors and using these behaviors in the classroom to inspire students and build their capacity for higher performance.
- The district has made great inroads in creating a systemic approach to professional learning, application, and follow-up.

**OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:**

- a. Ensures collaboration by modeling and promoting a high-functioning, professional learning community.
- b. Establishes, nurtures, and maintains good relationships with all stakeholders.
- c. Communicates frequently and effectively with all stakeholders.
- d. Addresses staff, parent, and community concerns in a timely and effective manner.
- e. Uses public information and research-based knowledge of issues and trends to collaboratively work with all stakeholders.
- f. Recognizes and values the diversity of all stakeholders and treats them in an equitable manner.
- g. Seeks regular feedback on success of collaboration from multiple sources for continuous improvement and alignment of programs and services.

**Standard 5****INTEGRITY AND PROFESSIONALISM**

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by acting with integrity, fairness, and by modeling professionalism and continuous learning to create a positive work environment.

**OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:**

- a. Establishes trust and demonstrates openness and respect in all relationships and decision-making processes.
- b. Seeks and uses data and feedback regularly from multiple sources to understand and improve leadership and its impact on others.

We believe that leadership coaching provides ongoing, just-in-time professional support for staff. It acknowledges people's strengths, encourages professional stretch, and supports all colleagues in achieving their goals for teaching and learning throughout their careers.

**Dori Novak (denovak@comcast.net) is leadership facilitator for Howard County Public School System, Ellicott City, Md.**

- c. Demonstrates commitment to continuous improvement for self and others.
- d. Establishes and maintains procedures to protect the confidentiality and rights of students and staff.
- e. Establishes collaborative processes with diverse groups to develop and accomplish common goals.
- f. Demonstrates sensitivity and cultural proficiency when interacting with all stakeholders.
- g. Performs job duties with honesty and explains decisions based on ethical and legal considerations.

**Standard 6****GREATER POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT**

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural contexts of the school system.

**OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:**

- a. Advocates for policies and programs that promote equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, or disability.
- b. Participates in the development of policies, programs, budgets, and initiatives that reflect an understanding of the economic and cultural factors shaping the community.
- c. Implements policies and procedures of the Howard County Public School System.
- d. Represents the interests of the office and school system when engaging

with local, state, national, and governmental groups and agencies.

- e. Stays abreast of the external factors (political, economic, and social) in the community that impact the school system.
- f. Expands knowledge, skills, and attitudes to respond to changing conditions.
- g. Ensures that system programs and procedures comply with local, state, and federal regulations and policies.

**Standard 7****COMMUNICATION**

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by using effective and efficient listening, speaking, writing, and nonverbal communication skills.

**OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:**

- a. Practices active listening by focusing on the speaker's verbal and nonverbal communication.
- b. Chooses words that are professional, purposeful, and appropriate to the audience.
- c. Provides feedback that is respectful, honest, nonjudgmental, and promotes continuous improvement.
- d. Uses effective conflict resolution strategies.
- e. Values others and exemplifies customer service through communication.
- f. Engages the broader community by marketing the Howard County Public School System and its programs.
- g. Produces written communication that is clear, correct, and appropriate to the audience.

**Marceta Reilly (marcetar@coachingschoolresults.com) is a leadership coach at Coaching for Results, Hoyt, Kan. She is a co-author of *Coaching Conversations* (Corwin Press, 2010).**

**Diana Williams (DWilli1398@aol.com) is a leadership coach at Coaching for Results, Millersport, Ohio. She is a co-author of *The Elementary Principal's Personal Coach* (Corwin Press, 2010). ■**

A large, vibrant green leaf with prominent veins is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page. Below it, a pile of dark brown soil with some white perlite is visible. The background is a plain, light color.

# CENTRAL OFFICE PLANTS THE SEEDS,

By Valerie von Frank

**E**very April, the staff of Stilwell Junior High School (West Des Moines, Iowa) spend a day analyzing student data together. Staff members consider standardized tests scores, look at item-by-item results and trends, and consider how groups are performing. They also look at social data, gathered from students about how the youth view their school experience, such as whether they feel engaged in their lessons and feel someone in the school cares about them. From these data, teachers glean ideas for where they will focus attention and begin to form a year-long plan for professional learning at Stilwell.

In the West Des Moines Community Schools, the central office sets a vision and overarching goals, but individual schools develop their own plans for how to achieve those goals and for teachers' professional learning.

Tim Miller, the junior high's principal, said it's been that way for the decade he has been principal at Stilwell.

"That's what I'm familiar with," he said. "I've always felt strong support from central office. If I need something, I know they're going to be there. You get the direction, guidance, and support of central office. But they realize we are in our building day-to-day, we understand the needs of our students and staffs, and they allow us to make decisions that best meet those needs."

## A NEW ROLE FOR THE CENTRAL OFFICE

Central office staff have a new role, according to NSDC's definition of effective professional learning. The definition calls for the central office and schools to share responsibility for teachers' development, but to have teachers continue their learning in the school, their workplace, to make what happens more relevant to both teacher and student learning. Central office administrators no longer hand out catalogs of workshops and invite any teacher in the district to sign up. Teachers work together on site to analyze what their students need, determine what they need to learn to improve instruction in those areas, and then learn together, refining their practice. How decisions about professional learning are made has changed.

"There's more collaboration among staff and other administrators today," said Donna Wilkins, West Des Moines' associate superintendent. "There's more collaborative work with principals in terms of instruction. In the past, decisions were made with central office working in partnership with teachers. Now there's a triad of central office, principals, and teachers."



# SCHOOLS CULTIVATE THEIR OWN LEARNING

Pushing professional learning into the school building is the surest route to improved achievement, according to Superintendent Tom Narak.

“The best way we can work with school improvement is from the ground floor up,” Narak said. “If the central office, superintendent, the school board issue an edict, that doesn’t work very well in today’s environment. We need to plant the seeds and provide the help and support for people. Our job is to overall provide leadership. We need to be very careful we’re coming from the right direction, or the district is not going to go anywhere.”

The approach West Des Moines takes mirrors what researchers say about best practice. “Partnership relationships of this sort move beyond long-standing debates about whether schools or the central office should direct educational improvement efforts,” according to

Honig and Copland (2008). “Rather, these relationships rest on assumptions that each party — the central office and the schools — has knowledge essential to expanding stu-

ents’ opportunities to learn and that such distributed expertise should be shared and used.”

## SETTING DIRECTION

Narak said improvement in the district begins with a vision written nearly a decade ago. In a process that involved 900 constituents, from parents and community members to students and staff, the district asked, “What do we want to have happen?” The common themes that emerged were the basis for a statement: The West Des Moines Community School District will be a caring community of learners that knows and lifts every child. We will inspire joy in learning. Our schools will excel at preparing each student for his or her life journey.

In Iowa, the state requires that each school district and school develop a comprehensive five-year improvement plan based on four questions:

- What do data tell us about our student learning needs?
- What do/will we do to meet student learning needs?
- How do/will we know that student learning has changed (student data)?
- How will we evaluate our programs and services to ensure improved student learning (implementation data)?

With both the vision and the state requirement in mind, the central office sets goals for the district as a

## Key questions for district central office leadership

- Are we adequately investing in our people within the central office to forge the kinds of new school partnership relationships that seem fundamental to districtwide learning improvements?
- Are we reinforcing those partnership relationships with new work structures and accountability systems that promise to seed and grow learning improvements?
- Are we providing our central office administrators with the resources and freedom to invent new ways of participating in learning support?
- Are we engaged in strategic partnerships with external organizations, not only to provide knowledge and other resources to schools, but also to bolster the work of central office reinvention?

Source: Honig & Copland, 2008.



whole, and each school’s plan follows. The district set two broad goals: Close the gap between present practices and the shared vision; and improve student achievement through effective instructional and assessment practices. The nine strategies for meeting the first goal include an emphasis on closing an achievement gap. Narak said the districtwide data reveal achievement gaps for students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and for students of color, and closing those learning gaps has been his focus.

To assess the impact of the strategies under the first goal, the district set specific measures, including having all students in grades 3 through 8 gain 1.2 years of growth in reading, with grades 9 through 12 improving their reading scores on standardized exams; having 80% of students score above 80% on math and science benchmark tests; having all students in grades 3 through 11 on or above grade level; and having a 10% improvement in the percentage of students responding to two key questions on the student vision survey by May 2012.

To achieve its academic goals, Narak said the district also focuses on students’ relationship with school and monitors that through data from an annual survey of all students in grades 1 through 12 (see survey questions in box below). The focus for improvement is on those questions that might help with the achievement gap, he said: “I feel encouraged at school” and “I feel there’s an adult in my school who is an advocate for me.” The annual survey data are examined by building, grade level, and ethnicity.

The district’s action plan for each goal lays out the strategies; methods for implementation, including who will monitor each method and how frequently; how the impact will be assessed; a professional learning plan; and, finally, a communication strategy. Each school’s plan mirrors this format. But, Narak emphasized, each school’s plan is specific to its context.

“We have a shared vision, but schools have choices in how to meet it,” he said. “Our expectation is that everyone is working on

whatever aspect makes the most sense for his or her school. Do they have a choice on the shared vision? No. But they have choices in what they do in their buildings to achieve at the needed levels.”

### LEARNING AT STILWELL

Miller, Stilwell’s principal, said the data in his school clarify its direction. From the data, faculty are able to identify strands that fit easily within the district’s overall goals.

“We want to make sure there’s a correlation between what we’re trying to improve upon as a building and what the district is asking us to improve upon as a district,” he said. “We’ve been able to find those correlations. I don’t think the district is going to ask us to take on an improvement goal that isn’t something that all our buildings can work on. Some buildings may need (to emphasize one aspect) more than other buildings, but it’s matched well for us.”

Stilwell, for example, spent several years focusing on interpersonal relationships and the student vision survey. Its goals now are on achieving the district’s academic achievement measures, and Miller said the particular emphasis is on reading and the achievement gap.

Professional learning is focused on strategies to meet the needs of a growing Hispanic student population, Miller said, along with ways of working with youngsters on the autistic spectrum, in preparation for students who will be enrolling in the school in the near future. Special education and classroom teachers are working closely to plan joint lessons that meet all students’ needs — English language learners, gifted, and special needs students.

Classroom and special education teachers are learning to co-teach, Miller said. “There’s a lot of preparation, of working to understand each other,” he said, “a lot of time together to plan to take advantage of strengths of each teacher so that it’s not having one teacher just go around and help struggling students while the other teaches.”

One way the district makes sure schools can work toward their goals is by providing weekly collaborative time when students are dismissed 45 minutes early each Wednesday.

In addition, Miller said, teachers have developed sessions in their areas of expertise, such as integrating technology into lessons, teaching strategies for reading comprehension, or beginning Spanish to better communicate with families. The school improvement team ensures that the plans meet with school improvement and district goals. Teachers lead the sessions for peers after school or on Saturdays, and all participants and the lead teacher are compensated for the time through state funds for quality teaching. The state appropriated \$70 million in 2008 and \$75 million in 2009 for professional learning to improve teacher quality.

At least four times a year, Stilwell staff use the early release days to work with staff from the district’s second junior high school. Teachers work in department teams on two of those days, and in elective groups on two days.

Those collaborations have led to common rubrics for speak-

### West Des Moines Community Schools student vision survey questions

- I feel there is an adult in my school who is an advocate for me.
- I feel my school is preparing me for life after high school.
- I find joy in learning at school. (My school experiences motivate me to want to learn more; the learning is relevant.)
- I feel encouraged at school.
- I feel at least one adult at my school knows me well.
- I feel people at my school are caring.



ing and listening in language arts, along with coordinating 8th-grade reading assessments; the orchestra teachers discussing teaching models and the pitfalls of instruction for the junior high age group; and family consumer science teachers aligning the courses and assessments between the schools, among other outcomes.

Miller said central office support extends beyond the resources of setting weekly collaborative time and finding funding for teacher-led professional learning sessions. He draws on administrators' expertise regularly to lead professional learning at the school, to find resources that support the learning teachers have identified as needed, or to participate.

"It's not sink or swim," Miller said of the district's role in the school's professional learning. "It's a team, but not micromanaged."

### ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

The new central office is one where "leadership by knowledge replaces leadership by authority, collaborative decision making replaces bureaucratic directives, high expectations replace accountability, and interactive collegial cultures replace patterns of isolation," according to Tafel and Bertani (in SEDL, 1993).

Narak said preparing principals to be instructional leaders who take on leadership of professional learning also involves professional learning for administrators. In West Des Moines, the central office administrative team meets twice a month, and one meeting is for professional learning. Foci have included cultural proficiency, working with students in poverty, research from Robert Marzano, and skills and strategies for classroom teaching that leaders can take back to their buildings. This year's focus, he said, is on instructional design. The administrative meetings have a theme throughout the year, Narak said, so group members can share research, demonstration, and practice rather than having a one-time-only session.

Administrators also share their expertise directly with vertical groups of teachers, such as working with a social studies team on articulation or how to reach groups of students — for example, the highly able or struggling students. Each school building has a curriculum chair for each core subject area.

"The math director might call the math committee together to meet and make decisions, go back to buildings and share the information, then come back to the committee and give input," Narak said. Each committee includes a principal representative.

### A TRANSFORMATION UNDER WAY

What has changed about central office administrators' work?

Some of the same group work occurred 20 years ago, according to Wilkins, but there are key differences. "We had curriculum committees," she said, "but we did not have grade-level committees or professional development committees for administrators. Administrative meetings were more nuts-and-bolts rather than working on instructional professional development. Teachers and principals working with central office in decision making has im-

### 7 steps to improvement

A 2006 article from the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement points to seven actions that a school district can take for improvement:

1. Take a systemwide approach to improving instruction.
2. Create a district curriculum aligned with standards and assessments.
3. Make decisions based on data.
4. Redefine leadership.
5. Implement strong accountability systems.
6. Embed professional development.
7. Commit to sustaining reform.



**Source:** The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006.

proved over the years."

Narak said leadership has shifted to principals, who now are instructional leaders as well as managers; management responsibilities that were their focus 20 years ago now are just "a given."

"Today, we're doing a lot more shared leadership between central office and principals to see how all the pieces fit together," he said. "Before, folks in curriculum and instruction did (the instructional leadership). Now it's everybody's responsibility. The district is more open to collaboration and sharing responsibility. The more people involved, the better the decision."

### REFERENCES

**The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. (2006, November).** *7 actions that improve school district performance. ERIC Digest 494614.* Available online at [www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED494614.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED494614.pdf).

**Honig, M.I. & Copland, M.A. (2008, September).** *Reinventing district central offices to expand student learning (Issue Brief).* Washington, DC: The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement.

**SEDL. (1993).** 'Will our phones go dead?' The changing role of the central office. *Issues about Change*, 2(4). Available at [www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues24.html](http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues24.html).

•  
**Valerie von Frank (valerievonfrank@aol.com) is an education writer and editor of NSDC's books. ■**

# SEASIDE CULTURE SHIFT

FLORIDA DISTRICT CHANGES  
THE CENTRAL OFFICE  
TO SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

By Bette H. Zippin

It is not the redesign of the central office that will result in change in how professional development is perceived and implemented in a school district. School districts move departments from one division to another every few years or whenever upper administration changes. This can only result in superficial changes. In Broward County Public Schools, we have learned that only by changing the culture of the school district will we create real change in professional development.

## PROMPTED BY POLICY

Several factors came together to influence the redesign — the reculturing — of the Broward County Public Schools' (Fort Lauderdale, Florida) Human Resource Development Division, which in turn transformed how the district conceived, implemented, and evaluated professional development. The change began in 1999 with the passing of Florida Statute 231.600,



the School Community Professional Development Act. This act has since evolved into Florida Statute 1012.98 (2009) and provides structure and guidance to the 67 school districts in Florida for the development of a professional development system. The statute states, “The purpose of the professional development system is to increase student achievement, enhance classroom instructional strategies that promote rigor and relevance throughout the curriculum, and prepare students for continuing education and the workforce. The system of professional development must align to the standards adopted by the state and support the framework for standards adopted by the National Staff Development Council” (Fla. Stat. 1012.98).

Every year since 1999, Broward County Public Schools has submitted a Broward County Professional Development System, approved by the school board of Broward County, to the Florida Department of Education. Each year, the professional development department assigned to this task has refined the system to better align to the statute and the needs of the district,



Fort Lauderdale is the county seat of Broward County, Fla., where the school district is experiencing a culture shift.

following a model of continuous improvement.

Based on this statute, Florida established a set of standards for professional development called the Florida Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol, currently in its third cycle and aligned with the National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) Standards for Staff Development (see outline in box on p. 44). With a state statute and state standards in place, Broward County Public Schools did some restructuring, creating a separate human resource development division under the leadership of an assistant superintendent. In addition, in 2006 the district created the professional development support department, whose purpose is to support the implementation of the Florida Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol standards by all professional development providers in the district. Staff at this district-level office serve as consultants and advisors

on research-based strategies for providing quality professional development. We are not the primary providers of professional development; we leave that to the content experts of the various disciplines. We focus on changing the culture surrounding professional development.

The first task of the new department was to update the Professional Pathways Policy to align to the standards. This policy provides a structure for professional learning tied to student achievement and includes professional development standards, leadership standards, and an evaluation protocol. With an infrastructure in place, we have now turned our attention to changing the culture of the school district to value professional development as a major component of school improvement. The professional development support department divided its focus into two areas: school-based and district-based professional development.

In Broward County, district-based professional development is led by content experts from departments such as curriculum and instruction, exceptional student education, English for speakers of other languages, and career, technical, adult, and community education. The professional development support department serves as consultant and advisor to these content experts to ensure that the professional development they provide is aligned to policy and national and state standards. We provide a model and template for professional development that relies heavily on the model outlined in *Assessing Impact* (Killion, 2008) and requires a goal, program objectives, a theory of change, and a logic model with an evaluation framework for each program. Each program must designate a program manager who is well versed in the standards and program design. All courses offered under the program are documented in the district's professional development management system in order to offer credit for successful completion. Each course requires an implementation, or follow-up, component that includes job-embedded application of the new knowledge and skills. Every participant is required to complete an evaluation.

While these components are in place for quality district-based professional development, we still struggle to get the 108 program managers on board with truly infusing the standards into their work. We face challenges with administrators who want to rush to deliver, and skip over the essential components that research docu-

**With an infrastructure in place, we have now turned our attention to changing the culture of the school district to value professional development as a major component of school improvement.**

FLORIDA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM EVALUATION PROTOCOL (Third cycle)

The Florida standards, listed here, guide the planning, implementation, and evaluation of district professional development. The protocol standards are periodically updated to reflect current law and changes in the field of professional learning.

EDUCATOR LEVEL

**Planning**

- 1.1.1 Individual needs assessment
- 1.1.2 Administrator review
- 1.1.3 Individual professional development plan

**Learning**

- 1.2.1 Learning communities
- 1.2.2 Content focused
- 1.2.3 Learning strategies
- 1.2.4 Sustained professional learning
- 1.2.5 Use of technology
- 1.2.6 Time resources
- 1.2.7 Coordinated records

**Implementing**

- 1.3.1 Implementation of learning
- 1.3.2 Coaching and mentoring
- 1.3.3 Web-based resources and assistance

**Evaluating**

- 1.4.1 Implementing the plan
- 1.4.2 Changes in educator practice
- 1.4.3 Changes in students
- 1.4.4 Evaluation methods
- 1.4.5 Use of results

SCHOOL LEVEL

**Planning**

- 2.1.1 School needs assessment
- 2.1.2 Reviewing professional development plans
- 2.1.3 Reviewing annual performance appraisal data
- 2.1.4 Coordinating with school-wide professional development plan
- 2.1.5 Individual leadership development plan

**Learning**

- 2.2.1 Learning communities
- 2.2.2 Content focused
- 2.2.3 Learning strategies
- 2.2.4 Sustained professional learning
- 2.2.5 Use of technology
- 2.2.6 Time resources
- 2.2.7 Coordinated records

**Implementing**

- 2.3.1 Implementation of learning
- 2.3.2 Coaching and mentoring
- 2.3.3 Web-based resources and assistance

**Evaluating**

- 2.4.1 Implementing the plan
- 2.4.2 Changes in educator practice
- 2.4.3 Changes in students
- 2.4.4 Evaluation measures
- 2.4.5 Use of results

**Source:** Florida Department of Education. Learn more at [www.teachinflorida.com/ProfessionalDevelopment/ProtocolStandards/tabid/66/Default.aspx](http://www.teachinflorida.com/ProfessionalDevelopment/ProtocolStandards/tabid/66/Default.aspx).

DISTRICT LEVEL

**Planning**

- 3.1.1 District needs assessment
- 3.1.2 Generating a district-wide professional development system
- 3.1.3 Research/evidence basis
- 3.1.4 Content standards for student outcomes
- 3.1.5 Integration of initiatives
- 3.1.6 Leadership development
- 3.1.7 Non-instructional staff
- 3.1.8 Professional learning facilitators

**Learning**

- 3.2.1 Learning communities
- 3.2.2 Content focused
- 3.2.3 Learning strategies
- 3.2.4 Sustained professional learning
- 3.2.5 Use of technology
- 3.2.6 Time resources
- 3.2.7 Coordinated records
- 3.2.8 District support
- 3.2.9 Learning organization

**Implementing**

- 3.3.1 Implementation of learning
- 3.3.2 Coaching and mentoring
- 3.3.3 Web-based resources and assistance

**Evaluating**

- 3.4.1 Implementing the system
- 3.4.2 Implementation of learning
- 3.4.3 Changes in students
- 3.4.4 Evaluation measures
- 3.4.5 Use of results
- 3.4.6 Fiscal resources
- 3.4.7 Student gains

ments is necessary for reaching the intended outcomes. However, we have made great strides in our journey to change the district culture. We celebrate these changes. We have learned that having state and district laws and policy in place is the essential foundation for reaching the goal of quality professional development that results in improving student achievement.

Almost simultaneously, we used the same foundational laws and standards to change school-based professional development in our district. In Broward County, schools may choose to provide their own professional development based on their specific teacher and student needs and resident expertise. District-level staff members work with each school to serve as advisors and con-

sultants as schools develop their professional development plans for the year. Schools used to create separate professional development plans; now those plans are integrated into the school improvement plans. This transition ensures that professional development is aligned with student achievement data and focuses on what the teacher needs to know and be able to do to ensure all students achieve.

**SUPPORTING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING**

As district staff meet with school professional development teams — whose members represent the faculty, parents, and administration — we guide the school toward professional learn-

ing communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) as the main learning strategy, and away from isolated events and “training.” We support schools in finding the time and opportunity to participate in a professional learning community. We provide support through professional development for those who facilitate professional learning communities at their schools. We offer this learning through a traditional face-to-face session, with continued learning through periodic online sessions on various strategies and protocols that facilitators may find helpful. We also encourage collaboration through a wiki for all participants of the course as well as interested guests.

### CHALLENGES TO A NEW CULTURE

We still struggle with schools understanding the value of professional learning communities focused on teacher practice to improve student achievement, as opposed to meetings to discuss individual students or logistics. We also struggle with teachers who continue to work in silos, using isolated instructional practices in their classrooms. We also face antiquated school cultures that do not use the strategies of today’s societies to support the achievement of today’s students. And while we are challenged, we know we have come a long way in changing the culture of schools and how they use professional development to move student achievement in a positive direction. We have learned that schools need the support of a department dedicated to quality professional development for educators and support personnel in order for schools to accomplish everything they are expected to achieve.

### PUSHING SUCCESS FURTHER

Where do we go from here? The professional development support department is looking to work with upper administration to change the way they view professional development. We are now at the table when the district plans new initiatives. We strive to change the view that “slapping training” on individuals will lead to change in practice or behaviors. We share data on successful implementation of professional learning that included planning, learning, implementation with fidelity, and evaluation as the way to achieve intended results. We continue to better align all processes and procedures for professional development, especially the management system, to better support all district providers. We continue to ask for feedback from our district providers through the professional development coordinating council, a team of representatives of district departments who provide professional development (see information at [www.pdcc.pds-hrd.wikispaces.net](http://www.pdcc.pds-hrd.wikispaces.net)), to improve professional development for everyone. And we ask our participants if the professional development in which they participated made a difference in the teaching and learning in their classrooms.

In the near future, the professional development support department will strategize to increase collaboration with the leadership development department. We realize that administrators are crucial in changing how schools view and implement profes-

sional development. We strive to model examples of quality professional development so administrators experience the benefits of well-planned and well-implemented professional learning. We also strive to demonstrate that the collection of data on the impact of professional development is crucial in making decisions to continue or eliminate it.

### ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS TO TRANSFORMATION

In a time when all school districts are faced with limited funds, it is imperative that we look at the cost of providing quality professional development and the cost of not providing professional development to educators. We cannot expect to change student achievement if the most important dynamic to their achievement, the teacher, does not change his or her instructional practice to meet student needs. And in large urban school districts such as Broward County Public Schools, the change begins with a newly designed — and newly cultured — central office.

As I reflect upon the changes we’ve made to ensure quality professional learning in our district, I know one thing for sure: policy at the local, state, and national levels is essential to realizing the NSDC purpose: “Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.”

I learned that to change a culture, you need written support in policy upon which to build the foundation of change. I have witnessed how a common vocabulary can bring a district — and even a state — together through communication and collaboration.

I see the value of staying the course and doing whatever is necessary to support all those involved in the process to understand the value of quality professional learning for educators and all employees who impact our kids.

### REFERENCES

- DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998).** *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement.* Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.
- Florida Dept. of Education. (2010).** *Florida’s Professional Development Evaluation System Protocol*, Third cycle. Tallahassee, FL: Author. Available at [www.teachinflorida.com/ProfessionalDevelopment/ProtocolStandards/tabid/66/Default.aspx](http://www.teachinflorida.com/ProfessionalDevelopment/ProtocolStandards/tabid/66/Default.aspx).
- Fla. Stat. § 1012.98 (2009).**
- Fla. Stat. § 231.600 (1999).**
- Killion, J. (2008).** *Assessing impact: Evaluating staff development* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- National Staff Development Council. (2001).** *NSDC’s standards for staff development.* Oxford, OH: Author.

**Bette H. Zippin ([bzippin-hrd@browardschools.com](mailto:bzippin-hrd@browardschools.com)) is the director of professional development support in the Human Resource Development Division, Broward County Public Schools, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. ■**



Whether a building  
or a state of mind,

# THE CENTRAL OFFICE MUST EVOLVE

By Hayes Mizell

**T**he central office is both a physical place and a state of mind. In some school systems, the central office is a separate building located away from schools. In other communities, the office is housed in one of the school buildings. The central office may be where members of the school board meet and even have offices. It is where the superintendent works, as do administrators most directly accountable to him or her. It is a bureaucracy, regardless of its size, that is responsible for operating the school system.

When someone mentions “central office,” they may not be referring only to the building. They may also mean the tip of the hierarchal pyramid, the place where authority resides and decisions are made. To many people, educators as well as citizens, the central office is a

mystery. The label has become the shorthand for the entity that determines what is to be done and how it is to be done in a school system; many people don’t necessarily know which individuals are responsible for which decisions or actions.

The role of central offices looms large in efforts to reform school systems and schools. Are central offices the problem or the solution? Reformers continue to debate the answer, but only in rare cases have school boards made serious efforts to establish alternative structures for administering school systems.

Central offices vary in size, organization, and function, but they endure. For all the attention to site-based decision-making and management, no one advocates comprehensive site-based administration. Even public schools with a strong streak of independence do not seek responsibility for interacting with state and federal education agencies or administering payroll, human resources, contracts, construction, transportation, pur-

chasing, and accounting. As more than one charter school founder has learned, the trade-off for controlling education functions is accepting responsibility for administrative headaches that would otherwise be those of a central office.

School systems are complex organizations, and central offices generally perform well in carrying out functions that enable the systems to operate more or less efficiently. But there is a difference between operating a school system and operating it so all students perform proficiently. It is this latter challenge that has prompted calls for a new central office. Different experts and critics have different proposals for what the new central office should look like, and it would benefit any school board or superintendent to study these proposals. Many districts already operate with a new central office approach, thanks to forward-thinking leaders and innovative administrative teams. Because this magazine focuses tightly on professional learning, the following are thoughts about how that function of the new central office could increase student achievement.

#### **THE SUPERINTENDENT IS ESSENTIAL TO ESTABLISHING A NEW CENTRAL OFFICE**

A central office reflects the philosophy, management, and priorities of the superintendent. Some superintendents favor a command-and-control approach to administering the school system, perhaps realizing they may have only three years or less before they lose their jobs. They feel under pressure to demonstrate quickly that they can positively impact the school system and improve teaching and learning. This leads them to launch new, large-scale initiatives that require new learning by veteran school administrators and teachers. It is not easy for these initiatives to take root in schools and classrooms. Schools view such initiatives as only the latest in a series of mandates by previous superintendents. Some educators respond with “here we go again” and feign compliance. Others withhold their commitment, believing “this too shall pass.” Some enthusiastically join in with the hope of genuine reform. By the time a superintendent leaves the school system, the results of his or her initiatives are likely to be mixed, at best. The school system’s educators wait for the next superintendent, the next reorganization of the central office, and the next new initiative.

When this command-and-control approach characterizes superintendents’ leadership, there will be no deep learning among rank and file educators. New superintendents must convince their school boards that highly focused, sustained professional learning is the best strategy for developing the capacities of educators

to increase student performance. Achieving that result must drive the superintendent’s organization of the central office.

#### **THE NEW CENTRAL OFFICE PARTNERS WITH SCHOOLS RATHER THAN CONTROLS THEM**

In many school systems, there is psychological as well as physical distance between the central office and individual schools. The central office focuses on maintaining the system of schools; the schools focus on managing and teaching students. Each school has a unique culture, and the same is true of the central office. The result is an us-them mentality that causes central office staff to think of themselves as having interests and priorities that are different than those of schools. Likewise, school administrators and teachers believe their work is why the school system exists, and they experience the central office as more intrusive than helpful. As long as this disconnect exists, it is students who suffer most.

When student learning is a school system’s priority, then the central office and schools will partner to achieve that result. The two entities will share accountability and they will succeed or fail together. The superintendent and his or her cabinet must be tireless in developing a culture in which students’ interests are primary, and the interests of the central office and school staff are secondary. A central office will be new when every member of its staff comes to work each day determined to help schools increase student learning. A serious performance appraisal system that assesses central office staff based on their efforts to achieve that goal can change the central office culture.

#### **THE NEW CENTRAL OFFICE DEVELOPS SCHOOLS’ CAPACITIES TO ENGAGE EDUCATORS IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Slowly, too slowly, unproductive forms of staff development are fading away. There are central offices that still believe their role is to organize and provide professional development opportunities. With pride, some school systems compile these in a print or online catalog. A central office usually does not conceive these offerings in collaboration with a school’s administrators and teachers, though the office may conduct a survey or otherwise seek educators’ input. Instead, the professional development reflects the central office’s assessment of what school-based educators need to learn. Some educators choose to take advantage of professional

**Are central offices the problem or the solution? Reformers continue to debate the answer, but only in rare cases have school boards made serious efforts to establish alternative structures for administering school systems.**



development driven by the central office; others do not. In the end, the central office only knows how many educators from which schools attended each professional development session. It probably does not know whether the educators' on-the-job performance improved or increased student learning.

The National Staff Development Council's radical vision for a new kind of professional development challenges this traditional approach. NSDC calls for every educator at a school site to engage in professional learning every day. A school will organize teachers into small, collaborative teams, assign each team a skillful facilitator, and develop a new master schedule that provides time for teams to meet at least several times every week. Each team analyzes student performance data to determine what it reveals about common learning gaps that plague the team members' students. The team members then discuss what they should learn to address the students' learning needs more effectively. That will, in turn, lead the team to develop learning goals for itself, and in subsequent meetings the team will pursue the learning

**Until now, most central offices have taken a faith-based approach to professional development.**

necessary to meet its goals. Teams will be able to work with external consultants to provide guidance and expertise.

One of the advantages of this approach is that over time, schools will become responsible for professional learning that addresses the specific needs of their students and teachers. Because this will be a continuous process, it will strengthen teacher induction and provide the schools' educators with support as they seek to apply and assess new learning.

Though some schools will take the initiative to implement this approach to professional learning, most will not ask for either permission or forgiveness. When it comes to major changes, schools take their cues from the central office. Whether and how it embraces the new approach to professional learning and partners with schools in bringing it to fruition is the first test of how new the central office really is. The new central office will not mandate schools' wholesale adoption of the approach. It will not convene a meeting of principals and introduce them to the concept. It will not announce that it is eliminating instructional coaches and substituting this system of professional learning.

Instead, the new central office will nurture the organic development of this approach, devoting the time and effort to discussing it with a few school administrators and teacher leaders whose schools have the greatest potential readiness to put this professional learning to the test. These discussions may take a year or more. The new central office will then become an implementation partner with schools that demonstrate the greatest interest in growing the approach. The central office's role will be to assist in keeping the process moving, collaborating with the school to provide intensive support and ensure quality imple-

mentation. Converting to this new approach to professional learning will take patience and time, but it will also provide the crucible for forging a new, more productive relationship between the central office and schools.

### **THE NEW CENTRAL OFFICE INCREASES SCHOOLS' CAPACITIES TO ASSESS THE RESULTS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Until now, most central offices have taken a faith-based approach to professional development. They devote considerable financial and human resources to the process with the hope that the performance of administrators and teachers will improve and students will ultimately benefit. They proceed on faith. If students' test scores improve, a principal or superintendent may credit professional development as one of the contributing factors, but they really do not know the relationship between professional development and student performance. They cannot provide evidence of if or how the chain of experiences from professional development to teachers' application of their learning increased student achievement.

As the new approach to professional learning evolves, it will be important to assess its impact. This will not occur unless central offices take seriously the challenge of engaging schools in learning how to assess professional learning and its results. Again, the central office will have to take the lead and provide support because developing evaluation tools to assess professional development outcomes will require time and expertise schools do not have. Traditionally, central offices have not focused on this issue, and they are likely to be as mystified as schools about how to assess professional learning. That is no reason not to begin considering it; central offices have to learn too. There is not always a roadmap for learning, and it sometimes involves mucking around, a process of broad exploration, inquiry, consultation, and research. Joellen Killion's book, *Assessing Impact* (Corwin Press, 2008), is an essential resource, and the new central offices will use it to provoke thinking and discussion about how to develop practical evaluation approaches schools will find helpful.

Though there are powerful forces responsible for central offices as we have known them, and though they have proven to be durable institutions for organizing and operating school systems, they are overdue for reform. No one should be satisfied with a central office whose real-world performance reveals it has a priority other than improving the learning of all students — and all educators.

### **REFERENCE**

**Killion, J. (2008).** *Assessing impact: Evaluating staff development* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

**Hayes Mizell (hmizell@gmail.com) is NSDC's distinguished senior fellow. ■**

# 6 STEPS *to* LEARNING LEADERSHIP

By Cathy A. Toll

A generation of principals has heard the mantra that they should be instructional leaders, but rarely have they been encouraged to be learning leaders. While an instructional leader pays attention to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of instruction, a learning leader focuses on what is learned and how it is learned. These roles are not mutually exclusive, and they both have value. However, given the dearth of attention to learning leadership in the principalship, I'd like to focus on how that role relates to teacher learning.

Savvy principals support teacher learning by attending to six areas: expectations, demonstrations, hospitality, possibility, inquiry, and the whole learner, and they can practice strategies in all six areas.

## 1. EXPECTATIONS

Early in my years as a principal, I looked upon teachers as either learning or not learning. Some teachers seemed to be constantly growing, while others seemed stuck. The mental metaphor I carried with me was one in which the "stuck" teachers were represented as boulders, and I saw myself with my shoulder against each boulder, pushing with my entire body to get them to move. I saw it as my duty to get unlearning teachers to learn. Over the years, however, I have come to recognize that all people learn all the time, including teachers.



When one stops learning, one is either dead or in a coma!

I had failed to see the learning that some teachers were doing for several reasons: People learn at different rates, and it is more difficult to see learning that is developing slowly. Some people learn cognitively before they ever demonstrate it in their actions or words. Learning is sometimes occurring in an area where the observer is not looking. For instance, one of my teacher colleagues was learning about how to work with the inclusion of special needs students in her classroom while I was looking for learning in math and reading instruction in general.

When a principal believes that some teachers are stuck and not learning, she behaves differently than when she believes that all teachers are learning. The former belief leads to a deficiency view of the supposedly nonlearning teachers and impels the principal to do something to start the learning. The latter belief, that all teachers are learning, leads the principal to behave in a supportive rather than corrective manner, and it also compels the principal to pay closer attention in order to observe the learning that is taking place.

Such recognition ensures that principals tune in to what is being learned as well as to how they, as principals, can support learning that furthers the goals of the school.

**Savvy principals support teacher learning by attending to six areas, and they can practice strategies in all of them.**

## 2. DEMONSTRATIONS

One would think that it would be easy for everyone in a school to be a learner and to want to be a learner. However, consciously choosing to learn carries with it the admission of a lack. For instance, if I choose to learn how to cook an omelet, I am admitting that I don't know how to cook an omelet! Interestingly, some humans in some situations don't want others to know what they lack, and therefore these people are hesitant to openly place themselves in the role of learner (Bateson, 1995). Demonstrations, discussed in this section, and hospitality, discussed in the next section, are two conditions that make it easier for the learner to be a learner.

Principals demonstrate learning when they share information with teachers. However, despite principals' best intentions, such efforts more often convey the possession of knowledge — in other words, one possible result of learning — rather than the process of learning. Learning itself becomes more evident before or during the process. For instance, principals who engage in study groups with teachers, reading and discussing a piece of professional literature along with the rest of the group, may say more about themselves as learners than principals who tell teachers about a piece of professional literature that they read over a holiday break.

Principals demonstrate learning as well when they

appropriately share something that they do not yet understand. A negative example from my own experience is a time when a teacher asked me for help in understanding how to use geo boards in 1st-grade math instruction. My own work had focused on literacy and leadership for many years, so I was somewhat out of touch with specific instructional practices in math. I'm embarrassed to say that my response was a series of mumbling, stumbling attempts to think of how geo boards might be used and then a lame suggestion that we both look for ideas in our professional reading. Thus, I missed a great opportunity to be a learner, both for my own benefit in knowing more about geo boards in math instruction and also to enhance my relationship with the teacher. I wish I had said, "I'm not sure about using geo boards myself. Should we figure it out together?"

## 3. HOSPITALITY

When I was a university faculty member, I participated in a study group trying to bring social justice issues into our classrooms for preservice teachers. During one discussion, a colleague suggested that it was essential to make classrooms comfortable for students to challenge their long-held views about such matters as race, gender, and socioeconomic class. Another colleague brilliantly pointed out that it is always uncomfortable to challenge personal views, especially those about difficult topics. This conversation prompted me to puzzle over the tension between wanting students to be comfortable challenging their beliefs and knowing that such challenges were inherently uncomfortable.

My struggle ended when I reread Parker Palmer's description of spaces where learning takes place. Palmer says that such places are: open, meaning that there is "space" for learning; bounded, meaning that the learning space was protected from interruptions and detractors; and hospitable, meaning that they serve as comfortable spaces in which to do uncomfortable work (1993). Others have pointed to the need for the first two qualities in teachers learning spaces, when, for instance, they write about the need for uninterrupted time for teacher collaboration (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), but less attention has been paid to the notion of hospitality.

To some, hospitality implies food and beverages and a welcoming smile, but there are more essential elements. The core of hospitality in support of learning is friendliness toward new ideas and the exploration of the unfamiliar, and a welcoming spirit for those who struggle to question themselves and their learning. In a hospitable environment, teachers can be the learners they truly are, with no pretense to know what they don't know and no shame about what they bring to the learning. Thus, when

**While an instructional leader pays attention to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of instruction, a learning leader focuses on what is learned and how it is learned.**



**"Over the years, I have come to recognize that all people learn all the time, including teachers."**

— Cathy Toll

difficult examinations of past-held beliefs or current failed efforts take place, these struggles occur within a community that can reliably receive and honor that work.

Principals support hospitality by demonstrating acceptance of every person in the building and comfort with ideas that are different from their own. Acceptance of every person means that dignity and respect are accorded to each teacher, even those teachers who don't always behave how we wish or whose teaching is

**To some, hospitality implies food and beverages and a welcoming smile, but there are more essential elements.**

not as current as others. This acceptance occurs for the person, not the person's actions or popularity. This view aligns with the recognition that all teachers want to do well and, when they do not succeed as they might, it is not due to a flaw in character or a failure of intentions. Zander and Zander call this "giving an A" (2002), a term that refers to their approach to colleagues and students, when they give a mental grade of A to each person before working with them. In this manner, Zander and Zander approach their colleagues as strong and committed people whose mistakes

reflect problems but not failures. This produces a shift to problem solving, rather than judging.

Principals who "give an A" to teachers approach those teachers hospitably. In addition, principals set a tone for their entire staff when they show hospitality for ideas different from theirs. When disagreements occur in groups, many people pretend they do not exist, while others too quickly cede to others' viewpoints or to a compromise position. In environments that are hospitable to learning, divergent views are recognized and openly considered. In fact, the tension among competing views is recognized as a healthy source of growth for those involved (Achinstein, 2002). In mature learning communities, participants recognize that differences are a rich source of potential understanding and learning (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001).

To support the hospitable consideration of differing perspectives, principals can engage in one of more of these tactics:

- Point out to the group that competing perspectives exist.
- Remind participants that divergence provides opportunity for learning.
- Ask participants to give their colleagues an A and then consider why opposing viewpoints held by colleagues make sense to those colleagues.
- Ask participants to talk about why their perspectives matter to them. This often yields statements of common beliefs and values that everyone in the group shares.
- Invite participants to think ahead one month, one year, or five years, and consider the outcomes if they were to adopt the opposing position.
- Facilitate a process of elaborating exactly what differences do exist among competing perspectives. By putting these differences in writing, the differences may become clearer, sharper,

or less distinct, depending upon the content.

- Invite participants to reflect upon the discussion and revisit it at the next meeting. With a bit of time, competing perspectives often become less significant or the significance between the perspectives becomes clearer and thus easier to address.

One thing that a hospitable environment does not guarantee is a resolution to differences. This in itself may reassure participants, given that it may make them feel less pressured to either defend their views or give them up. However, the discussion of the group's differences will likely turn at some point to a question of how to resolve the matter. Principals may find it useful to help the group delineate its options before moving forward. Typically, those options include: resolving differences by selecting one perspective to "win"; maintaining the differences and choosing to go in two directions or with two plans; finding a compromise that includes a little bit of what everyone wants; or finding a new approach, a new possibility to everyone in the group. Typically, the idea of failing to reach a conclusion makes people uncomfortable, but they may need to consider it as a real possibility. However, by recognizing the limited options available and discussing them, group members will be able to recognize the choices they are making and, with hospitality, they will be able to live with those choices.

#### 4. POSSIBILITY

Learning can only occur when a learner sees possibility. For instance, a teacher struggling to create a productive learning environment in his classroom will only learn to do so if he believes he and his students can indeed create such an environment. Thus, creating possibility is a useful precursor to teacher learning.

Principals support possibility in two ways: providing new visions of what might be and encouraging new lenses for seeing what is. To provide new visions of what might be, principals can invite teachers to visit other schools or classrooms, share videos to highlight particular approaches to instruction or curriculum, organize a study group to read other educators' descriptions of their work, or invite teachers to share their own successes.

Support for possibility through new lenses occurs when teachers see the familiar in a new way. Principals offer such opportunities when they invite teachers to look at student products from an adjoining grade level and give feedback to the students' teachers; ask questions that probe the basis of teachers' claims about students — "How do you know?," asked in a neutral voice, can prompt great reflection; encourage teachers to think about how others might view student actions or work — for instance, how would the students' parents view their cooperative group work or how would a poet look at their writing?; or neutrally offer their own perspective.

#### 5. INQUIRY

The questions we ask often reveal what we value. Principals'

values are conveyed somewhat explicitly by the questions they ask in formal supervisory conversations and in faculty meetings, and somewhat less explicitly by what they look for on walk-throughs or on teacher-effectiveness checklists.

Principals might choose questions, then, that reflect their value of teacher professional learning. For example:

- What have you learned about your students since the start of the school year?
- How have you adjusted your work because of something you have learned?
- When you think about a struggling student, what would you like to learn about him/her?
- What new understanding has been most helpful to you this year?
- What information did you use to make that decision?
- How are you learning?
- How can I support your learning?

## 6. THE WHOLE LEARNER

The Ancora Imparo (AIM) Model of Teacher Learning (Toll, 2010) demonstrates the three aspects of identity that change due to learning: knowing, doing, and being. Too often in schools, an emphasis is placed upon learning new things to do. To an extent, this makes sense, because teachers are practical people and teaching has an aspect of performance to it. However, learning that emphasizes the doing aspect of teaching often fails to “stick.” This is

evident, for instance, in the myriad workshops, coaching programs, and supervisory meetings that discuss best practices for teachers. Teachers attend to certain best practices and implement them in their classrooms for a short time, but six months later, those practices are often nowhere to be seen. Practices last when they are consistent with teacher knowledge — for instance, when teachers see that the practices support what they know about students’ particular strengths and what they understand about learning the subject matter at hand — and when they cohere with teachers’ ways of being — in other words, when they match teachers’ beliefs, values, and perspectives.

Principals who are learning leaders support all three aspects of teacher learning. Certainly they recognize the value of teachers’ practices, but they emphasize the need for teachers to know why they are implementing those practices, when those practices are best used, and how they might evaluate the appropriateness of particular practices for particular students. Thus, savvy principals emphasize the need for teacher learning to focus upon their understanding as much as their behaviors.

Principals are less able to directly influence learning connected to teachers’ identity related to being. While a person’s beliefs, values, or perspectives shift all the time, often such shifts are not because of another person’s direct intervention. However, principals can support teacher learning in this area by recognizing it as an important aspect of teaching; Parker Palmer aptly says that “we teach who we are” (2007, p.1). Thus, helping teachers to get in touch with and honor their beliefs, values, and perspectives and teach according to them — in other words, encouraging teachers to learn about the being aspects of their identity as teachers — is of great importance.

Secondly, principals who are learning leaders can help teachers recognize that they are constantly learning in ways that shape their being. This kind of learning takes place subconsciously as educators interact with students, colleagues, the profession, and the larger community. By recognizing that this learning takes place all the time, principals call teachers’ attention to important aspects of themselves that they sometimes overlook. Third, principals can honor the completeness of teachers and their learning by posting announcements for teacher retreats, personal growth workshops, or health enhancement opportunities, all ways of recognizing that teachers are most effective when all aspects of their being are learning and engaged.

When they engage in creating hospitable learning spaces, demonstrating learning themselves, asking learning-oriented questions, honoring the entire learner, and offering possibilities, principals are likely to find even more ways to lead learning. Of course, such strategies are not for principals alone. They can be shared by teacher leaders, parent leaders, district leaders, and others. However, as a visible and influential part of every school, principals’ roles as learning leaders can greatly enhance the teacher professional learning that takes place.

### STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING LEADERSHIP

- Recognize that all teachers are learning.
- Engage in learning along with teachers, in study groups and inquiry projects.
- Speak openly about matters about which you need to learn.
- Partner with teachers in learning something new.
- Support hospitable environments in which divergent perspectives can be considered.
- “Give an A” to those with whom one disagrees.
- Demonstrate openness to divergent perspectives.
- Point out options for groups in which participants disagree.
- Offer opportunities for new visions of what might be.
- Ask questions that shift the lenses by which teachers see what is.
- Ask questions that emphasize learning as a value.
- Support learning that enhances knowing as well as doing.
- Honor learning that shifts teachers’ being to deeper values, perspectives, and beliefs.

REFERENCES

**Achinstein, B. (2002).** *Community diversity and conflict among schoolteachers: The ties that bind.* New York: Teachers College.

**Bateson, M.C. (1995).** *Peripheral visions: Learning along the way.* New York: Harper.

**DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998).** *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

**Grossman, P., Wineburg, S., & Woolworth, S. (2001).** Toward a theory of teacher community. *Teachers College Record*, 103, 942-1012.

**Palmer, P. (2007).** *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

**Palmer, P. (1993).** *To know as we are known: Education as a spiritual journey.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

**Toll, C.A. (2010).** *The Ancora Imparo Model of teacher professional learning.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Denver, CO.

**Zander, R.S. & Zander, B. (2002).** *The art of possibility: Transforming professional and personal life.* New York: Penguin.

•  
**Cathy A. Toll (cathy@partneringtolearn.com) is the lead consultant for Toll & Associates. She focuses on guidance for teacher learning, particularly coaching and small learning teams, and support for those who lead such learning. ■**

# CREATING NORMS

*This activity enables a team to develop a set of operating norms or ground rules.*

**Preparation:** Before the meeting, write the list of norms at the right on a sheet of chart paper and post on the meeting room wall. In addition, refer to the handout on p. 59 and create six more posters, one for each category:

- Time
- Decision making
- Listening
- Participation
- Confidentiality
- Expectations

Place these posters on the meeting room walls as well.

**Supplies:** Chart paper, sticky notes, pens/pencils.

**Time:** Two hours.



## DIRECTIONS

1. Indicate to the team that effective teams generally have a set of norms that governs individual behavior, facilitates the work of the team, and enables the team to accomplish its task.
2. Point out the sample norms that are posted in the room. Point out the other six posters and the questions that are posed on each poster. *Time: 15 minutes.*
3. Recommend to the team that it establish a set of norms:
  - To ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute in the meeting;
  - To increase productivity and effectiveness; and
  - To facilitate the achievement of its goals.
4. Place a pad of sticky notes on the table and give every person the same kind of writing tool. Ensure that all sticky notes are the same color.

## SAMPLE NORMS

*We agree to...*

**FEEL** responsible to express differing opinions within the meeting.

**MAINTAIN** confidentiality regarding disagreements expressed during the meeting.

**REACH** decisions by consensus.

**LISTEN** respectfully to all ideas.

**CONDUCT** group business in front of the group.

**CONDUCT** personal business outside of the meeting.

**SILENCE** all cell phones during meetings.

**AVOID** checking for or sending text messages or e-mail messages during meetings.



**AVOID** personal grooming (brushing hair, applying makeup, cleaning fingernails) during meetings.

**Creating norms** WHEN ESTABLISHING NORMS, CONSIDER:

**TIME**

- When do we meet?
- Will we set a beginning and ending time?
- Will we start and end on time?

Proposed norms:

---



---

**LISTENING**

- How will we encourage listening?
- How will we discourage interrupting?

Proposed norms:

---



---

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

- Will the meetings be open?
- Will what we say in the meeting be held in confidence?
- What can be said after the meeting?

Proposed norms:

---



---

**DECISION MAKING**

- How will we make decisions?
- Are we an advisory or a decision-making body?
- Will we reach decisions by consensus?
- How will we deal with conflicts?

Proposed norms:

---



---

**PARTICIPATION**

- How will we encourage everyone's participation?
- Will we have an attendance policy?

Proposed norms:

---



---

**EXPECTATIONS**

- What do we expect from members?
- Are there requirements for participation?

Proposed norms:

---



---

5. Ask each person to reflect on and record behaviors they consider ideal behaviors for a group. Ask them to write one idea on each sticky note. *Time: 10 minutes.*
6. Invite the team members to place their ideas on the charts at the front of the room. Ask them to refrain from discussion while doing so.
7. Read each norm that has been suggested. Allow time for group members to discuss each idea. As each recommended norm is read aloud, ask the group to determine if it is similar to another idea that already has been expressed. Sticky notes with similar ideas should be grouped together. *Time: 30-45 minutes.*
8. When all of the sticky notes have been organized, assign two individuals to work together to write the norms suggested under each heading. In some cases, there may be only one norm; in others, there could be several. Use the worksheet above to record these norms. *Time: 30 minutes.*
9. Read each of the proposed norms aloud to the group. Determine whether the group can support the norms before the group adopts them. You could ask for a thumbs-up to indicate support or find another way for each team member to indicate to the team his or her willingness to abide by these ground rules. *Time: 30 minutes.*
10. When the team agrees that it will abide by this norm, the facilitator writes the norm on a new sheet of chart paper with the label "\_\_\_\_\_ Team Norms." Leave that poster in the team's meeting room for future meetings.
11. The facilitator should also transcribe the norms onto an 8½-by-11 sheet of paper and make copies to distribute to all team members.
12. The facilitator should review the meeting norms at the beginning of each meeting to ensure that participants are regularly reminded about the agreements they have made to each other.





## A change in beliefs leads to a change in behavior — and improved student achievement

*Elaine Cash, superintendent of Riverdale School District in California, has participated in a dramatic turnaround in her district's performance. She describes how conversations transformed district culture and led to significant improvements in student proficiency in the core curriculum and a decrease in the achievement gap. With effective change, mind-set comes first: What you believe determines how you behave. And your behavior produces your results — the ones you like and the ones you're not so crazy about. Here is Cash's story about how a change in thinking led to an outcome worth celebrating in her school district. — Susan Scott*

### By Elaine Cash

I became superintendent in July 2001, succeeding a superintendent who had the confidence and respect of the district. He was wonderfully supportive of me, and we shared a common

**In each issue of *JSD*, Susan Scott (susan@fierceinc.com) explores aspects of communication that encourage meaningful collaboration. Scott, author of *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success At Work & In Life, One Conversation at a Time* (Penguin, 2002) and *Fierce Leadership: A Bold Alternative to the Worst "Best" Practices of Business Today* (Broadway Business, 2009), leads Fierce Inc. (www.fierceinc.com), which helps companies around the world transform the conversations that are central to their success. Fierce in the Schools carries this work into schools and higher education.**

Columns are available at [www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org).  
© Copyright, Fierce Inc., 2010.

devotion to our schools and students. A difference in our personalities was that he had a strong top-down leadership style.

With the accountability of No Child Left Behind, schools needed to shift more emphasis and energy to curriculum and instruction. The theme of my first year's state of the district speech was "Rolling Up Our Sleeves to Improve Student Learning," and it was my plan to keep working hard at minor changes and show necessary growth every year.

The reality was that only 20% of our students were proficient in the core curriculum. However, given our district's demographics — 80% of the students live below the poverty level and speak English as their second language — though we were not even close to achieving at the levels of neighboring suburban middle-class communities, we were making enough growth to be seen as "beating the odds." If anyone mentioned that we still were far below the national goals, I would offer my "yeah, buts": "Yeah, but we have children who are poor

and do not come to school with academic experience," and "Yeah, but many of our students do not speak English." And on and on and on. Sadly, for the next three years, the theme was "Continuing to Roll Up Our Sleeves." We were not meeting the needs of the majority of our students, and I told myself that it was the best we could do.

We all were working hard. I was running out of ideas within our traditional culture and could feel everyone waiting for me to tell them what to do next.

Fortunately, I had two amazing encounters that almost simultaneously changed my work, my district, and my life. First, I heard Kati Haycock, president of The Education Trust, provide disturbing statistics concerning low national expectations for minority students simply because they are children of color, an excuse without merit. She pointed out how educators often don't demonstrate confidence that these students can achieve. My spirit shaken, I contracted with Pivot Learning Partners, whose model for closing the achievement gap included coaching for school and district leadership. My coach brought to me a thoughtful package that was to be the second encounter of profound influence for me. She gave me the audiobook version of *Fierce*



Elaine Cash

*Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time.*

The principles of this book have not only transformed my leadership, they have transformed our district's culture. In essence, the concepts guided me to "master the courage to interrogate reality" and "come out from behind myself" and into my authentic self to do the work that our students so deserved.

As a district, we used the conversational model called "mineral rights" to ask those deep questions that expose the truth about any situation. Partners in a mineral rights conversation dig deep through a series of questions to



### Seven principles of *Fierce Conversations*

1. Master the courage to interrogate reality.
2. Come out from behind yourself into the conversation and make it real.
3. Be here, prepared to be nowhere else.
4. Tackle your toughest challenge today.
5. Obey your instincts.
6. Take responsibility for your emotional wake.
7. Let silence do the heavy lifting.

Source: Scott, 2002.

find clarity. Here is what I came to know.

1. I was quietly attracting a staff of bright people with excellent emotional intelligence because they recognized the "heart" in me and wanted to work next to me. And they were desperately waiting for me to "come out from behind myself" and lead with my truths and my heart;
2. As long as I was making excuses, I was sending the message to that wonderful majority of students that I didn't believe that they were able to achieve at the highest level; and
3. I recognized that it was people, not programs or special curriculums, who were the core of our work; thus, developing real, honest, and authentic relationships with each other must be a defining element of our culture.

A transforming concept is that the conversation IS the relationship. And so our district's culture began to transform, one conversation at a time. We began this culture transformation with a book study of *Fierce Conversations*, followed by a leadership retreat.

This retreat was different. Rather than coming guarded and trying to pretend that I was clearly the boss, with a definitive agenda and all the answers, I chose to invite the collective construction of a course of action. We spent time getting to know each other, sharing ideas, and building trust. We came away with improvement plans at every level.

We planned a new theme for the state of the district: "Believe It and You'll See It!" Essentially, we established a sense of urgency that our first order of business was to challenge all to believe that all students will achieve proficiency. We also called for a commitment to build relationships with our students as individuals known by their names and not just a statistical subgroup. This expectation included teachers, administrators, and office and support staff, including food services and maintenance.

That was just the beginning. From there, and with a lot of honest and wonderful, sometimes tough, and many failed conversations, there has been transformation. A few examples:

- We are a district committed to powerful learning, which includes rigorous and relevant course work for every student. This requires honest dialogue and support, both for students to achieve and for staff to maintain a high level of rigor. We believe that all students can learn at this level, and our actions demonstrate that belief.
- We are focused on hiring astute people with hearts open to our vision, people who are not afraid of building relationships with each other as well as with our students, an element so necessary to bring students to learning. We encourage them to take risks, to ask for resources, training, and equipment, and we hold them accountable, both students and staff.
- Last year, our elementary school was named a California Distinguished School, and our high school was one of three in the nation to receive the College Board's Inspirational Award for inspiring students to go on to college. Now 50% of our students are proficient in core subjects, our achievement gap has narrowed considerably, and less than 1% of our students drop out of school. More than 90% of our graduating high school students are enrolling in post-secondary education, with 35% enrolled in a four-year college.

We are not yet at the level where we want to be, but we are universally committed to getting there. And most importantly, we work, and our students learn, in an environment where people are valued and known.

Fierce conversations have become a way of life. It is clearly our attitude.

And it is definitely our way of leading. ■



Nelson



Guerra

## Eliminate inequities to transform the college prep process in elementary school

**B**usiness as usual should end once a school staff develops a measure of cultural proficiency. Such skills should not be shelved like the many programs adopted by schools each year. Rather, a culturally proficient outlook should function as the lens through which all school operations are conducted. Examine the implementation and impact of all practices, policies, and procedures disaggregated to identify those favoring some student groups, parents, and even staff over others. Once such practices are identified, begin work on transforming these inequities through

In each issue of *JSD*, Sarah W. Nelson and Patricia L. Guerra write about the importance of and strategies for developing cultural awareness in teachers and schools. Nelson (swnelson@txstate.edu) is an assistant professor in the Department of Education and Community Leadership and associate director of the International Center for Educational Leadership and Social Change at Texas State University-San Marcos, and co-founder of Transforming Schools for a Multicultural Society (TRANSFORMS). Guerra (pg16@txstate.edu) is an assistant professor in the Department of Education and Community Leadership at Texas State University-San Marcos and co-founder of Transforming Schools for a Multicultural Society (TRANSFORMS).

Columns are available at [www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org).

a culturally responsive approach. This means doing the business of schooling differently. Schools can no longer continue to implement traditional approaches year after year, void of any consideration of culture and language differences, and expect the achievement gap to close.

In this and upcoming columns, we present some common inequities found in schools and provide examples of culturally responsive practices as a way to help jump-start transformation efforts in your school. Persistent inequities, which are well-documented in the literature, contribute to the achievement gap due to educators' lack of understanding about the assets culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families bring to the educational process. This column is the first in a series of three that explores culturally responsive practices for college preparation at each level of schooling — elementary, middle, and high school.

### STATUS OF COLLEGE PREPARATION

Look at the college preparation track of high schools across the nation, and you will discover that, in many cases, enrollment in these courses is not demographically proportionate to the school's student population. Although many schools may have a large percentage of black and Latino students, the majority of students in college prep courses are white, middle- to upper-class students, with a few Asian-Americans, the "model minority." In response to this

data, culturally unaware educators are quick to point out that students in college prep courses come from families who value education and provide the necessary academic resources, guidance, and assistance, while, in their words, "disadvantaged students" have "no experiences" and "no parent support." Culturally unaware educators often suggest these problems are compounded as students go through school because "students are unmotivated to learn," "have too much responsibility at home," or live in conditions that are "too great to overcome," such as having a parent in jail or being homeless. Culturally unaware educators rarely understand that these deficit beliefs can become self-fulfilling prophecies that shape the fate of culturally, linguistically, and/or economically diverse students, or that schools have an obligation to adapt to meet the needs of communities they currently serve and not those of the past.



### BEGINNING AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

For many middle-class families, acquiring an education is an unstated expectation that begins in kindergarten and continues through college. Because one or both parents often have a college degree, they have implicit knowledge of

the operations of the educational system (i.e. parental rights, courses to take, involvement in extracurricular activities) or at least know from whom and where to obtain this information. Parents use this knowledge to guide their children through the K-12 system and on to college. Equally important, they have the necessary resources to purchase educational goods such as computers, software, musical instruments, or uniforms and services such as tutoring, summer camps, or music lessons needed throughout their children's educational career to ready them for college and maintain a competitive edge.

Culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families greatly value education, are involved in their children's schooling — although perhaps in ways educators do not recognize — and want to provide more academic assistance to children, but often do not know how. However, many educators believe such families have little to offer because of limited formal education, language differences, lack of knowledge of the educational system, and access to few resources. Rather than seeing culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse parents for what they don't have, tap their funds of knowledge to meet specific needs, which is similar to how schools work with middle-class families.

How might this transformation begin in elementary school? First, help educators who have developed cultural proficiency in theory transfer this knowledge to daily practice. It's one thing to demonstrate cultural understanding during professional development. It's quite another to actually apply this lens to daily practice. Examine policies, procedures, and practices for each aspect of schooling, such as instruction, curriculum, and family engagement. Guide staff through these investigations by openly discussing your thought process when analyzing data, examining impact on groups, identifying the causes behind culturally

biased policies or practices, making suggestions for transformation, and forecasting the possible future impact of the changed policies or practices. Repeat this metacognitive process until it becomes second nature for all staff.

As the staff considers suggestions for transformation, resist the urge to do more of the same. Doing what you've always done is not the answer. Identifying new and different approaches based on the needs and funds of knowledge of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families is essential for transformation. Educators typically do not use the funds of knowledge culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families bring, such as a second language, the cultural value of interdependence, and large networks of loyal extended family members and friends who are willing to help in response to a personal request. When educators take into account such funds of knowledge, they can use such information to design culturally responsive practices to facilitate parents' involvement in school.

The process of transforming a practice into a culturally responsive one is illustrated in the following example. At the beginning of each school year, an elementary principal in south Texas personally calls parents, many of whom are migrant workers, to invite them to a weekly "coffee klatch" held in Spanish. But before addressing school business, she purposely spends the first few sessions getting to know parents. Once trust is established and parents understand she has their best interests in mind, the work on schooling begins. However, she doesn't tell parents what they can do for the school or teach them how to be "better parents," as so often is done in these meetings. Rather, she asks parents about dreams and aspirations for their children, what the school, in collaboration with the family, can do to help accomplish these goals, and talks about ways in which parents can help. This approach has resulted in a number

of positive outcomes for the families and the school. First, as parents grow comfortable in these sessions and realize they will not be judged for their differences, they ask about all facets of schooling. This increased knowledge has not only resulted in more parent participation at school and in academic matters at home, but also leads to advocacy for children. Moreover, a desire for more knowledge on the part of parents has led to the development of an annual summer academy organized and coordinated by parents. In these sessions, parents, district staff, university personnel, and community members come together to explore parent-requested topics of interest.

Second, by engaging with the principal about how they might help their children, parents discover they do have knowledge, skills, and talents the school can use. When their funds of knowledge are valued, parents feel welcome in school and volunteer to share their gifts as part of classroom instruction and other services needed by the school.

Finally, during these coffee klatch discussions, parents repeatedly said, "I want my child to get an education and get a good job and have a better life than I do," but were unsure how they could best help their children. This sentiment provided the ideal opening for the principal to introduce the topic of college readiness. On the first session of this series of discussions, each parent was presented with a set of calendars, one for each academic year, from pre-K to 12.

Printed on the last calendar was their child's high school graduation date along with their first day in college. With the principal's guidance, these calendars have become concrete tools for visualizing and accomplishing parents' dreams. After children leave elementary school, the secondary principals will continue to meet regularly with parents and empower them with knowledge, guidance, and access to resources, always helping them to keep the end in mind throughout their children's education journeys. ■

## SHARE NSDC'S LATEST NEWSLETTERS

[www.nsdc.org/news/](http://www.nsdc.org/news/)

Continuing a multiyear collaboration, NSDC published four MetLife-supported newsletters on topics related to findings in the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success*. The newsletters are available in their entirety to all NSDC web site visitors.

Emphasizing the themes from this year's MetLife **MetLife Foundation** survey, the newsletters explore professional learning through several different collaborative lenses, highlighting the work and learning approaches of four innovative projects at organizations that also receive support from MetLife Foundation:

1. What Kids Can Do and its Practice Project;
2. The New Teacher Center and its National Teacher Induction Network;
3. The Asia Society's Partnership for Global Learning;
4. New Leaders for New Schools and its EPIC Knowledge System.



**KEEPING MEMBERS SAFE**

[www.nsdc.org](http://www.nsdc.org)

To ensure tighter security, NSDC recently changed how NSDC members log in to the members-only areas of the site. In these areas, members can update their contact information, browse all archived publications, and search the membership directory.

To log in, members use their NSDC member numbers; the password is the last name on the membership. The NSDC member number is included on NSDC mailings and publications.

All members, when they first log in to the new system, should update their passwords to something more secure.

## TWO MORE WAYS TO CONNECT

[www.facebook.com/nsdc1](http://www.facebook.com/nsdc1) [www.twitter.com/nsdce6/](http://www.twitter.com/nsdce6/)

If you're spending time on Facebook already, appreciate the convenience of reading NSDC's blog posts and announcements there and join others in sharing your thoughts on the latest news.

On Twitter, follow NSDC for quick updates from the field, from conferences, from the organization.



## FINDING TIME IS JUST THE FIRST STEP

[www.nsdc.org/learningblog/](http://www.nsdc.org/learningblog/)

*Stephanie Hirsh writes about making time for daily learning:*

The real issue is not about finding time. Many schools have crafted the kinds of daily and weekly

schedules we advocate.

Instead the question to ask is, what do you do with the time once you find it? Time is an

educator's most precious resource. Leaders who commit to ensuring each teacher has time to

participate in a learning team must also ensure that teachers use that time as it was intended."

Hirsh outlines three specific strategies for encouraging effective time use.

**What are your thoughts and experiences? Read her entry online and tell us.**



Stephanie Hirsh

## DOWNLOAD JSD TOOLS AND DISCUSSION GUIDES

[www.nsdc.org/news/jsd/](http://www.nsdc.org/news/jsd/)

For each issue of *JSD*, turn to the web for tools created specifically to support the use of the magazine with learning teams. Tools include discussion guides for specific themes and articles and reflection questions to deepen your learning.

## **theme** THE NEW CENTRAL OFFICE

### **A new definition in Atlanta:**

#### Q&A WITH BEVERLY HALL.

*By Tracy Crow*

During more than a decade leading Atlanta (Ga.) Public Schools, Superintendent Beverly Hall has sustained a focus on moving district leaders' attention to teaching and learning. As a result, the organization of the district's central office has undergone a transformation, and all educators work towards the strategic goals of the district. In her role, Hall continues to accelerate the push for better teachers, students exceeding standards, and a higher percentage of students graduating each year.

### **The can-do central office:**

#### WITH AN EYE ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT, ILLINOIS DISTRICT REDEFINES ITS ROLES AND GOALS.

*By Deanne Hillman and Donald S. Kachur*

Cultural changes contributed to a new relationship among school buildings and the central office in Decatur Public School District 61 (Ill.). When the district developed a service orientation and created professional learning communities, collaboration across buildings honed the district's focus on teaching and learning. Walk-throughs and a coaching model helped district leaders transition to roles as learning facilitators.

### **Central office and school leaders create a conversation.**

*By Sue McAdamis*

When a districtwide assessment of professional development helped educators in Rockwood School District (Eureka, Mo.) understand the need for change, they began with the fundamental process of holding meaningful conversations. Careful guidelines helped the district reshape professional learning to become results-driven, school-based, and job-embedded. Results indicate that students were the ultimate beneficiaries.

### **Road trip:**

#### JOURNEY TO IMPROVEMENT TAKES TWISTS AND TURNS.

*By Ellen S. Perconti*

It isn't enough to focus on attendance at professional learning experiences, as educators in the Lewiston (Idaho) School District learned. Shifting to expectations for implementation of learning was a difficult undertaking. Using persistence to underscore the connection between

adult and student learning, and inquiry to determine the optimal route, the district now focuses on continuous improvement.

### **Leadership practices accelerate into high speed.**

*By Dori Novak, Marceta Reilly, and Diana Williams*

When district leaders in Howard County, Md., recognized the need to differentiate professional learning for central office staff from that of school leaders, they turned to a coaching model. Participants learned a series of coach-like behaviors to use with educators and also investigated a continuum of leadership practices to use in tailoring their work with district educators.

### **Central office plants the seeds, schools cultivate their own learning.**

*By Valerie von Frank*

All schools in West Des Moines (Iowa) Community Schools share a common vision. Educators in each school, however, determine the best way to reach the district's goals, depending on their particular context and student needs. Collaboration among teachers, district leaders, and principals drives the district forward. Meanwhile, the district provides professional learning support through weekly collaborative time for schools and learning opportunities for principals and administrators.

### **Seaside culture change:**

#### FLORIDA DISTRICT CHANGES THE CENTRAL OFFICE TO SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING.

*By Bette H. Zippin*

State laws in Florida mandated changes to how districts plan, implement, and evaluate professional learning. With a detailed set of standards to guide them, district leaders in Broward County Public Schools overhauled the culture and the structure of the district office to provide relevant leadership and support.

### **Whether a building or a state of mind, the central office must evolve.**

*By Hayes Mizell*

A new conceptualization of the central office with a focus on effective professional learning calls for several key changes. The superintendent must lead differently, the central office must shift away from how it has organized professional development in the past, and evaluation of professional learning is no longer an optional element.

## feature

### 6 steps to learning leadership.

By *Cathy A. Toll*

Principals who exhibit learning leadership focus on what and how educators learn. A framework of six elements can help school leaders support the teachers in their schools. Learning leaders attend to their expectations about teacher learning, provide demonstrations, nurture learning hospitality, create possibilities for learning, ask questions, and support the whole learner.

## columns

### Collaborative culture:

A CHANGE IN BELIEFS LEADS TO A CHANGE IN BEHAVIOR — AND IMPROVED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT.

By *Susan Scott and Elaine Cash*

Making excuses for students who fall behind doesn't serve them — or their teachers. When a district leader engaged educators in honest conversation, she found that they could face reality together and move the district forward.

### Cultural proficiency:

ELIMINATE INEQUITIES TO TRANSFORM THE COLLEGE PREP PROCESS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

By *Sarah W. Nelson*

and *Patricia L. Guerra*

Several specific culturally responsive practices can help educators, beginning at the elementary level, as they work to support students from diverse backgrounds to join their peers in the college preparation track in high school.

### From the director:

THE NEW CENTRAL OFFICE PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN ENSURING EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING.

By *Stephanie Hirsh*

NSDC's purpose and definition call for new responsibilities for central offices, along with new opportunities.



## call for articles

**Theme:** Transforming professional learning:  
The journey

**Manuscript deadline:** Aug. 15, 2010

**Issue:** April 2011

**Theme:** Teacher leadership

**Manuscript deadline:** Oct. 15, 2010

**Issue:** June 2011

**Theme:** Standards for professional learning

**Manuscript deadline:** Dec. 15, 2010

**Issue:** Aug. 2011

• Please send manuscripts and questions to Rebecca Bender ([rebecca.bender@nsdc.org](mailto:rebecca.bender@nsdc.org)).

• Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are at [www.nsdc.org/news/jsd/guidelines.cfm](http://www.nsdc.org/news/jsd/guidelines.cfm)

• Themes for additional upcoming issues are available at [www.nsdc.org/news/jsd/themes.cfm](http://www.nsdc.org/news/jsd/themes.cfm).

### INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

American Federation of Teachers.....	15
Assessment Training Institute/ETS.....	13
Corwin.....	56
EdSteps, Led by the Council of Chief State School Officers .....	53
ETS .....	53
Heinemann.....	26
Johns Hopkins School of Education.....	16

Just ASK Publications & Professional Development .....	outside back cover
The Master Teacher .....	inside back cover, 27, 31
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards .....	55
National Education Association .....	17
National Institute for School Leadership .....	57
School Improvement Network .....	1
Solution Tree .....	inside front cover, 21
Success at the Core.....	23

## Foundation winners take the spotlight

The board of NSDC's foundation is proud to award the following grants and scholarships to outstanding NSDC members who work diligently each day to live NSDC's purpose.

The award categories and recipients for 2010 are:

### Lynne Chidley Scholarships

The Lynne Chidley Scholarships provide funding to support participation in the NSDC Academy. Winners are **Karla McAdam**, reading resource specialist for the Decatur Public (Ill.) Schools, and **Jill Brady**, professional development Title I grant coordinator for the Fort Wayne (Ind.) Community Schools.

### Bridge Builder

The Bridge Builder award supports leadership development for principals in high-priority schools. The winner is **Laurie Haynie**, principal of Calvert Elementary in Prince Frederick, Md.



IMPACTING *the*  
FUTURE NOW  
FOUNDATION

These grants and scholarships could not be possible without donations from our membership. Further NSDC's purpose by supporting these grants and scholarships with your donation. Learn more about the winners and donate to IFN today.

[www.nsd.org/getinvolved/foundation.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/getinvolved/foundation.cfm)

### E<sup>6</sup> Grant

The E<sup>6</sup> Grant supports a team's efforts to advance NSDC's purpose. The

E<sup>6</sup> Grant is awarded to **Marietta Middle School** in Marietta, Ga., for its project to develop peer coaching to support teacher job satisfaction and quality instruction.

### Carmen Nylund Memorial Fund Academy Scholarship

The new Carmen Nylund Memorial Fund Academy Scholarship provides opportunities to develop leaders in professional learning and is awarded to educators in specific counties in South Carolina. **Cynthia Cash-Greene**, superintendent of Orangeburg County School District #3, is the recipient and will enroll in next year's NSDC Academy class.

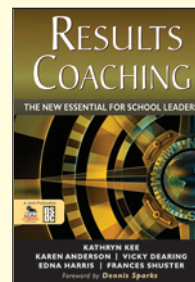
### NSDC Affiliate Grant

The new NSDC Affiliate Grant is awarded to the **Indiana Affiliate**, which is working to assist school board members to ensure NSDC's definition be implemented in policies across the state.

## book club

### RESULTS COACHING: THE NEW ESSENTIAL FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Learn about a leadership model based on building coaching relationships with staff members to help them develop as professionals. Becoming a coach-leader is a new identity that challenges leaders to walk the talk, continuously growing and improving themselves before leading and modeling for others. In the next NSDC Book Club selection, authors Kathryn Kee, Karen Anderson, Vicky Dearing, Edna Harris, and Frances Shuster build upon coaching standards and competencies to help leaders energize the potential of everyone they touch.



Use this blueprint to guide educators to create productive school cultures. The book covers language that builds trust and confidence, methods for effective communication, and strategies for conducting open and reflective conversations.

Through a partnership with Corwin Press, NSDC members can add the Book Club to their membership at any time and receive four books a year for \$49. To receive this book, add the NSDC Book Club to your membership before Sept. 15. It will be mailed in October. For more information about this or any membership package, call NSDC at 800-727-7288 or e-mail [NSDCoffice@nsdc.org](mailto:NSDCoffice@nsdc.org).





## Begin with the central office to transform schools into learning organizations that serve all students

School improvement that makes schools better places for all kids to learn and succeed is the goal of urban, suburban, and rural school districts. Many stakeholders share this goal — school boards, principals, parents, teachers, agencies at the federal, state, and local levels, educator unions and associations, university schools of education, philanthropic organizations, and policymakers. One step in the right direction is to structure central offices in a way to support each school's ability to effectively advance learning.

Like schools, central offices can advance when they have strong professional learning communities. Professional learning for all educators is the best chance we have to improve the skills of our workforce. Michael Fullan explains in his book, *Six Secrets of Change* (Jossey-Bass, 2008), that if we love our employees, and connect peers with purpose in ways that can best build their and their colleagues' capacity, the organization becomes a learning organization. Knowledge flows as people pursue and continuously learn what works best. The result is a district that provides better opportunities for every principal, teacher, and student to learn and grow.

Central offices play a key role in

**Ingrid Carney is president of the National Staff Development Council.**

### on board INGRID CARNEY

helping schools and districts become learning organizations.

Two ways in which central offices can advance this purpose are to:

1. Re-create the central office as a professional learning community; and
2. Model and support the development of schools as professional learning communities.

Alignment and coherence of purpose and work are important factors in helping school districts progress. Central office employees tend to work in silos, based on their department or function. Very often, departments in central offices are working on different aspects of the same problem, but they don't come together to align their work or to realize solutions to problems. Often, the result is duplication of efforts, inefficient use of time and people resources, and a lack of alignment and coherence in the work of the district.

When central office administrators organize themselves into professional learning communities, they, their schools, and their students derive many benefits. The central office professional learning community:

- Creates a common forum for district administrator learning and dialogue around common issues and concerns

in the schools;

- Builds a culture of universal responsibility and accountability for students and their success;
- Helps to create alignment and coherence in the district;
- Uses data to shine a spotlight on issues that need to be addressed; and
- Breaks down the silo effect and creates a community of practice.

Professional learning communities at the central office level can provide stronger leadership and support for the work that must be done by school leaders and

teachers in the district's schools. The professional learning community takes advantage of the strengths that each administrator brings to his or her work and amasses that knowledge in ways that better serve the schools and improve opportunities for all students to learn and succeed.

#### REFERENCE:

**Fullan, M. (2008).** *Six secrets of change: What the best leaders do to help their organizations survive and thrive.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. ■



**NSDC'S PURPOSE:**

Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.



**BUSINESS OFFICE**

504 S. Locust St.  
Oxford, OH 45056  
513-523-6029, 800-727-7288  
Fax: 513-523-0638  
NSDCoffice@nsdc.org  
www.nsd.org

**NSDC STAFF**

**Executive director**

Stephanie Hirsh  
stephanie.hirsh@nsdc.org

**Deputy executive director**

Joellen Killion  
joellen.killion@nsdc.org

**Director of business services**

Leslie Miller  
leslie.miller@nsdc.org

**Director of learning**

Carol François  
carol.francois@nsdc.org

**Director of strategy and development**

Frederick Brown  
frederick.brown@nsdc.org

**Associate director of publications**

Tracy Crow  
tracy.crow@nsdc.org

**Associate director of member experience**

Tom Manning  
tom.manning@nsdc.org

**Distinguished senior fellow**

Hayes Mizell  
hmizell@gmail.com

**Scholar laureate**

Shirley Hord  
shirley.hord@nsdc.org

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Ingrid Carney (2011)  
President

Mark Diaz (2012)  
President-elect

Sue Elliott (2011)  
Cheryl Love (2010)

Charles Mason (2010)  
Past president

Amanda Rivera (2012)  
Kenneth Salim (2012)  
Ed Wittchen (2010)

NSDC CALENDAR

<b>July 18-21</b>	NSDC's Summer Conference, Seattle, Wash.
<b>July</b>	Registration opens for NSDC's 42nd Annual Conference in Atlanta, Ga.
<b>Sept. 17</b>	Proposal deadline for NSDC 2011 Summer Conference in Indianapolis, Ind.
<b>Sept. 25</b>	Shirley Hord Learning Team Award submission deadline
<b>Oct. 15</b>	Last day to save \$50 on registration for NSDC's 42nd Annual Conference, Atlanta, Ga.
<b>Dec. 4-8</b>	NSDC's 42nd Annual Conference, Atlanta, Ga.

**NSDC supports Great Teachers for Great Schools Act**

Rep. Jared Polis (D-Colo.) has introduced the Great Teachers for Great Schools Act, a bill designed to “provide high-quality professional development to improve teacher quality and student achievement in our nation’s schools.” The proposed bill would transform educator professional learning in the U.S. by introducing NSDC’s definition of professional development into the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Help teams of educators understand NSDC’s definition of professional learning by using the video vignettes at [www.nsd.org/standfor/definition.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standfor/definition.cfm).

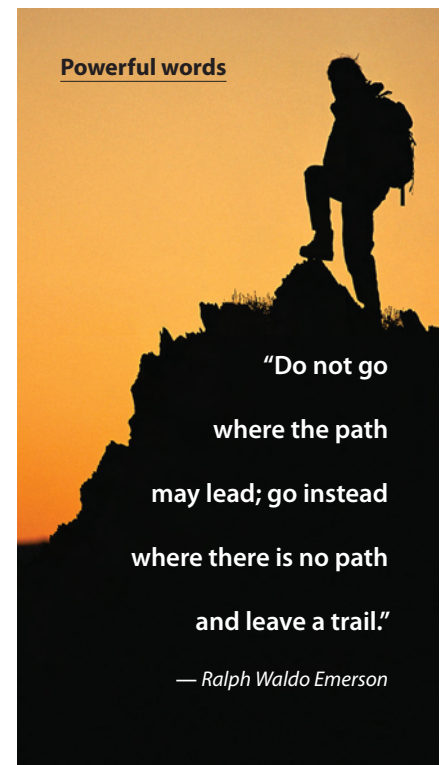
In a statement supporting Polis’ bill, NSDC Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh said the bill “recognizes quality professional development must directly address student learning needs, be led by instructional leaders and teachers, and be constantly evaluated for its impact on student achievement.”

**Race to Indy next summer**

NSDC is now seeking proposals for concurrent and roundtable sessions for NSDC’s 2011 Summer Conference on School-Based Professional Learning for Teacher Leaders and the Administrators Who Support Them. Plan to share your work next summer with teams of educators in Indianapolis July 17-20, 2011.

All sessions for this conference should include a teacher leader. Strands include teacher leadership, administrator development, learning communities, the learning gap, new teacher support, technology, and professional learning processes.

The proposal deadline is Sept. 17, 2010. NSDC provides discounted conference registration for presentation teams. Apply online ([www.nsd.org/summerconference11](http://www.nsd.org/summerconference11)) and encourage your peers to do the same.





## The new central office plays a key role in ensuring effective professional learning

At one time in my career, I became the first director of staff development in my school district. Before I filled that role, planning inservice was the responsibility of the assistant superintendent for instruction. I remember feeling honored when, as a second-year teacher, I was invited to serve on the committee that planned the two days set aside on the calendar for teacher inservice. We began our work by brainstorming topics we believed our colleagues would be interested in exploring. From there, we determined a slate of workshops that we would plan and host.

I remember my colleagues asking the assistant superintendent to consider alternatives. The assistant superintendent dismissed each suggestion.

Now, more and more central office administrators recognize the value of alternate learning approaches and the expertise that resides within schools as well as outside. NSDC's purpose calls for every educator learning every day. A primary responsibility of central office has shifted from planning inservice days to ensuring that sustained, intensive, and effective professional learning is available to every educator.

To achieve this purpose, central office staff members must attend to the

•  
**Stephanie Hirsh ([stephanie.hirsh@nsdc.org](mailto:stephanie.hirsh@nsdc.org)) is executive director of the National Staff Development Council.**

structures, the processes, and the content of educator professional learning. Continuous effective professional development begins with leaders' commitment and strategic allocation of resources, including regularly scheduled time and support for schoolwide and team-based professional learning. Today's central office arranges human resources so that teachers have access to the job-embedded support they need to translate new learning into the classroom. And central office personnel have the responsibility to ensure that teachers aren't the only school-based learners. School leaders must also engage in professional learning that supports their roles as instructional leader and chief staff developer.

NSDC's new definition for effective professional development indicates every educator participates as a member of at least one learning team that engages in an ongoing cycle of improvement to increase student learning. The success of this process depends on the quality of data the team uses to make decisions about student and teacher learning needs. Central office administrators assume responsibility for making meaningful data available to the principal, faculty, learning teams, and individuals. In addition, the new central office offers guidance and research to assist the learning team in choosing

improvement strategies. New and improved central office administrators also provide support to educators in developing classroom assessments to monitor impact. Finally, central office administrators provide access to technical assistance outside the school when the expertise cannot be found among the peers.

The cycle of improvement only produces higher levels of performance by students and staff if learning is targeted on the appropriate outcomes. Central office ensures that the curriculum,



instructional resources, and district assessments are aligned to state and local standards. They determine the appropriate application of teaching, leadership,

and professional development standards. They manage expectations for new teachers. They determine when it is appropriate to allocate resources to individual needs as opposed to a team or schoolwide need.

As expectations continue to rise for students and teachers, the most valuable central office recognizes new responsibilities and opportunities. In my view, the central office that partners with schools to achieve the NSDC purpose is the central office that will soon celebrate the contribution it makes to higher levels of student performance in all schools. ■