

THE LEARNING System

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

NEW EMPHASIS *on* NEW TEACHER SUPPORT

Texas district's pilot program aligns learning at all levels

BY TRACY CROW

Educators are as effective as they know how to be and as they are supported to be.

At least that's the districtwide belief in Austin (Texas) Independent School District, according to David Lussier. As the executive director of a brand-new administrative office — the office of educator quality — that brings together leadership development,

professional development, and strategic compensation, Lussier knows Austin is hoping to align professional learning in all corners.

As the district considered the question of strategic compensation, they eventually determined that a high-quality induction program would be critical to building a high-quality workforce. "We operated with a theory of action that if you expect new and different results from teachers, you must make the reciprocal investments in their knowledge and skills to achieve those results," said Lussier. "Putting more money out on the streets for performance alone is not going to get you those results. If you do that, you're saying that teachers already had the capacity to get results and were holding out for more money." So Austin set out to increase capacity. After years of studying new teacher support models and using a part-time mentor program for a year, Austin decided to pilot the New Teacher Center's professional development program for new teacher induction.

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Professional learning is not a quick fix for low-performing teachers

When education leaders talk about turning around persistently low-performing schools, sooner or later the talk turns to what to do about low-performing teachers. Proposals for how to address this problem may include closing schools, dismissing or reassigning teachers, and reopening the schools with a new, handpicked faculty. This is a relatively straightforward “solution,” but it is not always feasible. Some school districts have large numbers of ineffective or mediocre teachers; others are in sparsely populated areas without a ready supply of new hires.

Aware of these obstacles, some education officials propose professional development as an alternative to replacing teachers. The implication is that professional development is potentially so powerful that it can transform an ineffective teacher into one who can increase student achievement. It's a seductive vision, but difficult to achieve.

It isn't clear that education leaders who advocate professional development as a “fix” for low-performing teachers have carefully considered their proposal. There are many reasons why some teachers are not effective. The continuum of inadequate performance includes a wide range of pedagogical deficiencies and behavioral anomalies. It requires time and effort to understand why a teacher is not effective, whether professional development is a potential remedy, and how to organize a set of learning experiences that may significantly im-

prove the teacher's performance. Such a process should be serious and thoughtful; every teacher deserves that.

Yet, invoking “professional development” as an antidote to ineffective teaching may be little more than a throwaway line. It sounds like a reasonable approach, but implementing it is fraught with complications. Is a school system really committed, or able, to invest the money, time, and talent required to analyze the reasons for a teacher's lack of effectiveness? Does it have the expertise to craft professional development that is responsive to individual teachers' needs? Will a school system support a teacher's engagement in a process of continuous, iterative new learning over time? How will it assess the impact of professional development on a teacher, and what criteria will it use to determine whether the teacher is subsequently effective?

NSDC's purpose statement — every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves — outlines a vision where all teachers do build their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and aspirations, and they do it so students have successful learning experiences. More effective instruction is certainly an intended outcome. However, there are no quick fixes in that vision. Systems that make professional learning a quick fix will find it isn't up to the task.

There is no question that effective professional learning can help many teachers broaden and deepen their knowledge and skills. But professional development is not a broad-brush remedy school systems can easily or appropriately apply to all low-performing teachers. For professional development to have maximum impact, education leaders must understand what it can and cannot accomplish for specific teachers, with specific needs, working in specific contexts.

NSDC's purpose statement — every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves — outlines a vision where all teachers do build their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and aspirations, and they do it so students have successful learning experiences.

Read Hayes Mizell's collected columns at www.nsd.org/news/authors/mizell.cfm.



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

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Knowledge about change is key to success

The Quality Teaching standard seems straightforward — educators should acquire deep content knowledge, know and use research-based instructional strategies, and know and use a variety of classroom assessments. One of the major tasks of the superintendent and central office is to create systems that ensure school staffs can implement quality instruction (Roy & Hord, 2003; Marzano & Waters, 2009). This seemingly basic task has been difficult to accomplish, in part, because we have all been extremely naive about the change process.

Almost 40 years ago, Seymour Sarason observed that a major barrier to improvement initiatives was “the lack of systemic, comprehensive, and objective description of the natural history of the change process in schools” (p. 21). This finding is still as relevant today as it was decades ago.

Fullan’s book, *Motion Leadership*, distills for us the essence of being change savvy (2010). “Change-savvy leaders always know that you can’t directly make people change. But you can create a system where positive change is virtually inevitable” (p.62). One component of that system is *nonpunitive accountability* in which clear outcomes and results are described and monitored. “The first response to underperformance is to invest in capacity building and not to take punitive action” (p. 61). The underlying assumption operating is that low performance is a result of low capacity, not resistance, lack of motivation, or apathy. That strategy is reiterated in *Switch* (Heath, 2010).

Chip and Dan Heath state that “What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity” (2010, p. 17). That lack of clarity requires change leaders to provide “crystal-clear direction” to shape the path they want folks to take (p. 16). This

does not mean providing scripts but rather providing people with decision-making processes to make critical moves that lead them toward the desired change. The authors caution us that we can never assume that the new way of doing things is obvious.

The Heaths also remind us that mandates and commands will not suffice when the change will occur over a long period of time. In those situations, we also need to tap into attitudes. To bring about change, we need to inspire, not just appeal to analytical thought. This is true even in analytical and quantitative professions. Too many current educational change initiatives seem to rely solely on an analytic approach instead of tapping into educators’ attitudes

and aspirations. At the same time, guilt has been overused and does not inspire positive forward motion.

The new skill set for superintendents and central office staff should include becoming change savvy and studying how people change, how the structure of the organization and work shapes change efforts, and how to appeal to educators’ attitudes related to new classroom practices.

NSDC STANDARD

Quality Teaching:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators’ content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.

**Learn more about NSDC’s standards:
www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm**

WHAT A DISTRICT LEADER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT ...

Mentoring conversations



The collaborative assessment log on the next page is one of the New Teacher Center's basic protocols for ensuring productive conversations between mentors and new teachers. Beginning teachers typically dwell on what's not going well in their classrooms, rarely acknowledging their successes. They can easily become discouraged and overwhelmed. Mentoring conversations are important opportunities for beginning teachers to talk through their successes and challenges so mentors and new teachers can together prioritize and address their challenges in a constructive, collaborative manner.

The collaborative assessment log will help mentors assess beginning teachers' practice more easily to focus their support and expertise in response to teachers' specified needs.

HOW TO USE THE LOG

The top two quadrants of the log help mentors and beginning teachers collaboratively assess their current practice by identifying recent successes and challenges. After establishing a focus for the meeting from among the challenges, issues, and concerns, the mentor's work will shift towards helping to move the teacher's practice forward.

Mentoring might include co-developing lessons, problem-solving together, teaching new strategies, asking reflective questions, offering suggestions, or providing information and resources.

Agreed-upon ideas or next steps can be recorded in the bottom two quadrants and provide a level of accountability for both mentor and teacher. Other portions of the log help identify the purpose(s)

of the current meeting and set the focus and date for the next mentor conversation or visit.

The New Teacher Center uses state professional teaching standards to provide the instructional framework for their formative assessment system. Coding conversations by standard will help mentors and beginning teachers see patterns emerging in areas that are working, as well as in areas that remain as challenges.

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Collaborative Assessment Log

Name: _____ Mentor: _____ Date: _____
 Grade Level/Subject Area: _____

Check all that apply:

- Analyzing Student Work
- Communicating with Parents
- Discussing Content Standards
- Developing/Reviewing Professional Goals
- Discussing Case Study Student
- IEP Development/Meeting
- Modeling Lesson
- Observing Instruction
- Observing Veteran Teacher
- Planning Lesson
- Problem Solving
- Providing Resources
- Pre-Observation Conference
- Post-Observation Conference
- Reflecting
- Using Technology
- Other _____

What's Working:

Current Focus—Challenges—Concerns:

<p>Teacher's Next Steps:</p>	<p>Mentor's Next Steps:</p>
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<p>Next Meeting Date: _____</p>	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; padding: 5px; vertical-align: top;"> <p>EN=Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting students' prior knowledge, life experience, and interests with learning goals • Using a variety of instructional strategies and resources to respond to students' diverse needs • Facilitating learning experiences that promote autonomy, interaction, and choice • Engaging students in problem solving, critical thinking, and other activities that make subject matter meaningful • Promoting self-directed, reflective learning for all students </td> <td style="width: 25%; padding: 5px; vertical-align: top;"> <p>EE=Creating & Maintaining an Effective Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a physical environment that engages all students • Establishing a climate that promotes fairness and respect • Promoting social development and group responsibility • Establishing and maintaining standards for student behavior • Planning and implementing classroom procedures and routines that support student learning • Using instructional time effectively </td> <td style="width: 25%; padding: 5px; vertical-align: top;"> <p>SM=Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrating knowledge of subject matter content and student development • Organizing curriculum to support student understanding of subject matter • Interrelating ideas and information within and across subject matter areas • Developing student understanding through instructional strategies that are appropriate to the subject matter • Using materials, resources and technologies to make subject matter accessible to students </td> <td style="width: 25%; padding: 5px; vertical-align: top;"> <p>PL=Planning Instruction and Designing Learning Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing on and valuing students' backgrounds, interests, and developmental learning needs • Establishing and articulating goals for student learning • Developing and sequencing instructional activities and materials for student learning • Designing short-term and long-term plans to foster student learning • Modifying instructional plans to adjust for student needs </td> <td style="width: 25%; padding: 5px; vertical-align: top;"> <p>AS=Assessing Student Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing and communicating learning goals for all students • Collecting and using multiple sources of information to assess student learning • Involving and guiding all students in assessing their own learning • Using the results of assessment to guide instruction • Communicating with students, families, and other audiences about student progress </td> <td style="width: 25%; padding: 5px; vertical-align: top;"> <p>DP=Developing as a Professional Educator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting on teaching practices and planning professional development • Establishing professional goals and pursuing opportunities to grow professionally • Working with communities to improve professional practice • Working with families to improve professional practice • Working with colleagues to improve professional practice • Balancing professional responsibilities and maintaining motivation </td> </tr> </table>	<p>EN=Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting students' prior knowledge, life experience, and interests with learning goals • Using a variety of instructional strategies and resources to respond to students' diverse needs • Facilitating learning experiences that promote autonomy, interaction, and choice • Engaging students in problem solving, critical thinking, and other activities that make subject matter meaningful • Promoting self-directed, reflective learning for all students 	<p>EE=Creating & Maintaining an Effective Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a physical environment that engages all students • Establishing a climate that promotes fairness and respect • Promoting social development and group responsibility • Establishing and maintaining standards for student behavior • Planning and implementing classroom procedures and routines that support student learning • Using instructional time effectively 	<p>SM=Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrating knowledge of subject matter content and student development • Organizing curriculum to support student understanding of subject matter • Interrelating ideas and information within and across subject matter areas • Developing student understanding through instructional strategies that are appropriate to the subject matter • Using materials, resources and technologies to make subject matter accessible to students 	<p>PL=Planning Instruction and Designing Learning Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing on and valuing students' backgrounds, interests, and developmental learning needs • Establishing and articulating goals for student learning • Developing and sequencing instructional activities and materials for student learning • Designing short-term and long-term plans to foster student learning • Modifying instructional plans to adjust for student needs 	<p>AS=Assessing Student Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing and communicating learning goals for all students • Collecting and using multiple sources of information to assess student learning • Involving and guiding all students in assessing their own learning • Using the results of assessment to guide instruction • Communicating with students, families, and other audiences about student progress 	<p>DP=Developing as a Professional Educator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting on teaching practices and planning professional development • Establishing professional goals and pursuing opportunities to grow professionally • Working with communities to improve professional practice • Working with families to improve professional practice • Working with colleagues to improve professional practice • Balancing professional responsibilities and maintaining motivation
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New emphasis on new teacher support

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MENTOR LEARNING INTENSIFIED

Of 118 schools in Austin Independent School district, 13 campuses are included in the New Teacher Center pilot. These schools have 23 full-time mentors for their new teachers. Laura Baker, strategic compensation specialist within the office of educator quality, oversees the full-time mentors in Austin. She coordinates their training, observes them meeting with teachers, facilitates learning community meetings, and provides one-on-one coaching to the mentors. The mentors often observe one another at work with new teachers, and Baker has noticed a great openness among them.

This culture of collaboration is likely to be extremely valuable to the new teachers as well. In the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success* (2009), most teachers indicated they believe that their success is linked to that of their colleagues. This is particularly true for new teachers — 67% of new teachers strongly agreed with this statement compared to 48% of their more experienced colleagues.

The use of the New Teacher Center program is in its second year at Austin. The intensive mentor training the Center facilitates is designed to support and develop full-time mentors on a parallel track with the new teachers they are supporting. New mentors don't learn everything that they need to know for their first year in one intensive training. Before school begins, new mentors spend a lot of time learning how to build

effective relationships and establish appropriate expectations with new teachers. As the year goes on, Baker noticed, the New Teacher Center's just-in-time training model becomes evident. "Just as mentors are starting to call me and say hey, my new teachers and I are really thinking about working on X, then a week later we have a training scheduled and it will be on that very topic," she said. "They really know how new teachers progress and what they're going to need at what time of year."

As the year progresses, the professional development for mentors covers analyzing student work, assessment, how to have effective feedback conversations, and much more. The learning model is inquiry-oriented, with facilitators modeling teacher-mentor interactions and engaging mentors in role-play situations.

NETWORKING NATIONWIDE

To support their work at the system level, Austin participates in a nationwide network of districts working to implement the New Teacher Center induction model. The National Teacher Induction Network, supported in part by MetLife Foundation, is a collaboration that includes twice-yearly face-to-face meetings as well as ongoing online forums. The network calls for participating districts to "engage one another as accountable members" who learn from one another, gain new knowledge about strategies and protocols, and share data of the impact of their work, according to Janet Gless, associate director of the New Teacher Center.

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The collaborative assessment log on pp. 4-5 is one of many tools that the New Teacher Center provides for mentors to use in supporting new teachers.

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ABOUT THE NEW TEACHER CENTER

New Teacher Center seeks to reduce the achievement gap in our nation's schools by accelerating the effectiveness of new teachers through comprehensive mentoring and professional development programs. NTC partners with school districts, policy makers, and leaders in education to implement programs that build leadership capacity, enhance working conditions, improve teacher retention, and transform schools into vibrant learning communities. Founded in 1998, NTC headquarters are in Santa Cruz, Calif.

► Learn more about the New Teacher Center at www.newteachercenter.org.

New emphasis on new teacher support

Continued from p. 6

When the network meets in person, each district brings an induction leadership team, usually at least a lead mentor and a central office administrator. The learning includes whole-group sessions and meetings by topic or district size. Lussier noted how valuable it is to “have New Teacher Center there with us in the conversation, not just facilitating but advancing our thinking and pushing back on some things.”

Both Lussier and Baker appreciate most the peer-to-peer connection they have through the network. “The benefit to us is coming together with other districts, especially urban districts. Boston, Chicago, Houston, for example, are dealing with a lot of similar challenges to ours,” said Lussier. Peers from different cities talk about best practices and common challenges and consider how to leverage resources together.

ALIGNING THE LEARNING SYSTEMICALLY

“We’re trying to really nest this mentoring program into a much more comprehensive approach to new teacher induction,” said Lussier. As Austin moves away from the welcome wagon approach to new teacher support towards a longer-term, systemic learning process, Lussier recognizes the need to align support beyond the mentors. Austin is bringing the instructional coaches into the mentor training because what the New Teacher Center does is so effective in engaging adult learners and building peer connections and working relationships. “We’re working to create alignment between all those teachers in the schools whose job it is to support their colleagues,” said Lussier.

The New Teacher Center isn’t surprised to know that districts are approaching new teacher induction with long-term systemic goals. “We’re committed to helping districts envision induction as a catalyst for a comprehensive, high-quality human capital system,” said Gless.

The in-depth induction model isn’t yet the norm for many teachers; however, 71% of

teachers and 87% of principals indicate in a nationwide survey that beginning teachers have opportunities to work with more experienced teachers (MetLife, 2009). While many new teachers (74%) believe they have sufficient support and guidance to be more effective teachers, a higher percentage of principals (97%) believe their teachers do have effective support and guidance (MetLife, 2008).

RESULTS AND EXPECTATIONS

As Austin moves toward the end of its second year using the New Teacher Center program, Baker is pleased to see mentors changing before her eyes. “Every time I go out to see them, they’re changing their practice. They’re learning on a week-to-week basis,” she said.

An evaluation of Austin’s strategic compensation initiatives included data about the full-time mentoring program in the pilot schools. Discussion and surveys indicated that teachers appreciated the work of the mentors not only with novice teachers but with the whole school. In addition, instructional coaches described how mentors had joined them in strategically supporting teachers all year (Austin Independent School District, 2009).

While the district doesn’t yet have data that correlates this satisfaction and change in practice to student achievement, Austin will

continue to examine how the program is working. Lussier is convinced of its value already. “While the costs of such a program are high, the costs of not doing it are actually higher. We all pay a price, not just financially, but in terms of social and human capital on campuses when we continue to have high attrition rates,” he said. “We know that problem is most acute at our highest need schools, where kids are in most need of greater continuity and high-quality teachers getting high-quality support. We’re hoping to not just stem the tide of attrition, but get new teachers up to speed to be as effective as they can much sooner in their careers.” ■

NSDC’S BELIEF

Every student learns when every educator engages in effective professional learning.

As Austin moves toward the end of its second year using the New Teacher Center program, Baker is pleased to see mentors changing before her eyes. “Every time I go out to see them, they’re changing their practice. They’re learning on a week-to-week basis,” she said.

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More from the MetLife Surveys

What teachers and principals say about ...

Collaboration

The least common collaborative activity is teachers observing each other in the classroom and providing feedback. Just **22% of teachers** and **32% of principals** report it occurring always or often; however, **32% of new teachers** report this activity at their school (MetLife, 2009).

New teacher quality

Half of principals (51%) report that the quality of new teachers entering the profession today is better than in the past, with only **7%** describing new teacher quality as worse (MetLife, 2008).

The entire 26-year series of the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher is available online at www.metlife.com/teachersurvey/.

