

# 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-

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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

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