



Teachers can sell communities on professional learning's value

Families and educators share the same goals for student success—high levels of academic, social, and emotional achievement. However, not all families have an understanding of how important it is for teachers to engage in continuous professional learning to achieve this shared goal. Community views of professional development often depend on how teachers and support staff talk about their professional learning and how school and district leaders and school boards characterize it.

Too often, some communities shy away from professional development because they view it as a cost versus an

investment. Viewed as a cost, professional development becomes a line item in the budget, much like maintenance and transportation. Once spent, a cost does not provide potential for additional income or profit. Viewed as an investment, though, effective professional learning increases results exponentially and builds capacity for achieving results for every student.

Teacher leaders have the potential to reframe professional learning for their colleagues and their communities. As leaders within their schools, they by default become leaders within their communities. Teacher leaders often have benefitted from professional development that contrib-

uted to improving their practice throughout their careers, and many facilitate professional learning for their colleagues. They understand from their own experiences how professional development is an investment in capacity building. Teacher leaders too infrequently receive training on leadership skills and influencing their communities, and fail to see their role as community activists who work to engage families and other community members in supporting teacher professional development.

Teachers' voices are potent. How they speak about their work creates a lasting impression. If we want to increase the amount of time for professional learning within the school-day schedule, for example, teacher leaders need to advocate for effective professional learning and be skillful in sharing positive messages about how their experiences in professional learning impact the quality of their teaching and student learning. When a school district recently proposed changing its schedule to provide weekly early release time for teacher collaborative professional learning, teachers were the ones who sold the idea to parents and community members by articulating how valuable professional learning is to their practice and their students' learning.

Teacher leaders might tap the resources mentioned in the box on p. 9 to help their colleagues understand how to talk about their professional

Powerful statements begin with the faculty

Use the steps below to engage teams of teachers or the whole faculty in generating the value of advocating for more effective, job-embedded professional learning.

1. Ask faculty to list the reasons supporting the need for effective professional learning, and then distinguish which of those statements are teacher-focused and which are student-focused. The intent behind professional learning is to improve student learning, but when articulated, the phrasing can often sound teacher-centered.
2. Identify from the statements generated those that are likely to be most powerful within your school community, and craft them into powerful statements that are succinct, student-focused, and results-based.
3. Invite teachers to identify the places that offer opportunities to engage in discussions with families and community members, such as churches, community centers, ball fields, grocery stores, parks, etc.
4. Provide opportunities at subsequent meetings for staff members to share their experiences in talking about professional learning with families or community members.



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learning experiences and how to advocate for opportunities for more job-embedded collaboration that include professional learning.

Additionally, teacher leaders might offer to facilitate a discussion on professional development at a parent meeting. Family members might be encouraged to read *Why Professional Development Matters* prior to or after the meeting to deepen their understanding. The teacher leader might meet with support staff in the school, who are often those most closely connected with the community, and engage in conversations about professional learning and its benefits. It would also be appropriate to explore opportunities support staff have for professional learning and how their experiences have contributed to their work skills and satisfaction as well as to their productivity and effectiveness.

Increased opportunities for professional learning, embedded within the


Resources

Advocating effective professional learning can increase teacher leaders' connections with communities and families. Use the resources below to better understand the community's perspective on professional learning and how to respond to it.

- The 2010 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll cites improving teaching quality through teacher preparation, professional development for current and prospective teachers, and retention of effective teachers as the top priority of Americans for public schools. Teacher leaders can learn about the public's views of schools and tap into it to connect with their communities.
www.pdkintl.org/kappan/docs/2010_Poll_highlights.pdf
- The recently published *Why Professional Development Matters* by Hayes Mizell is available in print or as a free PDF download. This brief document provides a community-friendly perspective on the importance of professional development for improving teaching and student learning.
www.learningforward.org/advancing/Why_PD_Matters_Web.pdf

workday to promote increased collaboration, are associated with multiple school improvement achievements. Research studies provide evidence that when teachers collaborate there is greater consistency in their teaching and expectations of students, improved student learning, and improved culture within the school. When teacher

leaders use their voice to advocate for what matters for their colleagues and students within their communities, everyone wins.

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