

Tools FOR SCHOOLS

Inside

- School's orientation to change, p. 4
- 6 considerations for delivering a change message, p. 5
- Encountering resistance, p. 6
- Scheduled maintenance, p. 7

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EVERY EDUCATOR ENGAGES IN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVERY DAY SO EVERY STUDENT ACHIEVES

4 KEY STRATEGIES

help educators
overcome resistance
to change

By Anthony Armstrong

When principals Dot Schoeller and Mike Starosky needed to make dramatic changes in their schools, they both had different goals to achieve, but used similar strategies to implement sustainable schoolwide change.

Schoeller, currently principal at Jenkins Elementary, Lawrenceville, Ga., had previously taken over another elementary school that hadn't made Adequate Yearly Progress and was recovering from the recent suicide of its principal. In addition to turning the school around while staff members were still in an emotionally sensitive state, she needed to implement an inclusive education model to end the isolation of individualized education plan (IEP) students and English language learners (ELL). Schoeller created a coaching model that brought IEP and ELL teachers into the general education classrooms to collaborate and co-teach.



Six years later, student scores almost doubled on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills from 38 to 71, the number of gifted students doubled, and 55% of the students exceeded the state standards. Schoeller's school was the only Title I school in the top seven of her county, and she attributes her success to the many smaller changes she made, including instructor collaboration, small student groups, and an inclusive education model applied to both IEP and gifted students.

Starosky's changes started with implementing high-quality professional learning communities (PLCs) at Whitman Middle School, Seattle, Wash. As a member of Learning Forward's Learning School Alliance, Starosky knew that professional learning communities would help improve students success as well as create a channel for other planned changes, such as implementing distributed leadership and overhauling how they handled IEP students. He began by transforming his school's professional learning system. "We had to look at how to conduct our professional

Continued on p. 2

Use the
tools on
pp. 4-7 to
implement
lasting
change.



is ...

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Continued from p. 1

learning, what the staff was currently doing, and what high-quality PLCs do,” said Starosky. “Now, our teachers see the benefits and they don’t like it when their PLC time is cut.”

ADDRESS RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Those who have tried to implement lasting change can attest that it is a complicated process. Numerous studies, theories, and books on the change process have flourished within the last 20 years. “Change is a science now,” said Shirley Hord, educational consultant and scholar laureate for Learning Forward. “We have studied it for over 40 years and know a great deal about it.”

While change itself is a complicated process, a review of change literature reveals four basic stages that help innovators preemptively reduce the amount of resistance encountered and provide ongoing frameworks for preventing and overcoming resistance: build trust, create a clear vision, ensure a strong and consistent implementation, and support the change with consistent follow-through.

BUILD TRUST

Educators and authors often cite trust as a critical ingredient for building cooperation and buy-in. For Starosky, giving others the opportunity to provide input is important for building trust. Staff meetings often begin with staff writing and reflecting individually, then discussing the topic within small groups, with someone from each group sharing their main ideas or concerns. Starosky gives staff “exit tickets” to write down opinions or concerns that help inform teams and committees; he also surveys the staff and local community to avoid becoming isolated. For example, when identifying new elective classes, Starosky used surveys to see which electives parents wanted. Starosky made changes based on parent input and ultimately encountered no resistance, a success he attributes to proactively reaching out to the community.

Other strategies for building trust include open communication, developing a coalition to help lead the changes (Kotter, 2010), avoiding manipulation, demonstrating a willingness to compromise, sharing ownership of the

change, and building a reputation for integrity (Bruckman, 2008, pp. 215-217).

CREATE A CLEAR CHANGE VISION

During this stage, innovators can establish a clear message that creates a sense of urgency and establishes a direction for the change (Kotter, 2010).

Schoeller likened her changes to an airplane headed for the ski slopes. “If anyone was on my plane and wanted to go to the beach, they were on the wrong plane,” Schoeller said. “I told them that if they didn’t want to teach using the inclusive collaborative model, they weren’t necessarily bad teachers, they were just going in a different direction.”

Reaching out to the community when developing a clear vision has become a regular part of Starosky’s planning cycle. Currently, Starosky and his staff are planning changes with school discipline policies. “We all have completely different views on discipline,” said Starosky of the faculty, parents, and community. “So we are reading the same book together to come up with answers.” Currently, he has four book-study meetings planned with the parent-teacher organization.

ENSURE A STRONG AND CONSISTENT IMPLEMENTATION

Once lead innovators and their teams have crafted a change vision, they disseminate their message consistently through multiple channels of communication and through their actions (Kotter, 2010). Delivery should also include specific strategies for implementing change (Fullan, 2001, p. 18). According to Hord, implementation strategies can include professional learning, how often it will be provided, and what resources, equipment, and materials will be available. “Implementers also need to know they will have plenty of time for the implementation,” added Hord. “They must be given time to make changes. Change doesn’t happen in a day, month, or even a year.”

Implementation of the vision may result in a loss of staff. Schoeller saw 68 teachers transfer out of her school the first two years; however, change leaders advise educators to not let a fear of loss or dissent stifle discussions of proposed changes. Often, resistant voices offer valuable insights and learning opportunities (Fullan, 2001, p.41; Kotter & Whitehead, 2010, p. 88).

Continued on p. 3



Principal Dot Schoeller:

“I told them that if they didn’t want to teach using the inclusive collaborative model, they weren’t necessarily bad teachers, they were just going in a different direction.”

Learning Forward BELIEF

Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.

Continued from p. 2

Starosky ensured consistent and clear implementation by communicating the change message to staff verbally and in newsletters. Change leaders also went to grade-level team meetings to address their concerns, talk about issues, model behaviors, develop teacher support, and problem-solve.

SUPPORT WITH FOLLOW-THROUGH

Once changes are under way, continue to use actions to build credibility and ensure the staff that change efforts are not temporary (Bruckman 2008, p. 216). Innovators can continue to make small, successful changes and celebrate those successes (Kotter, 2010).

To help ensure the ongoing stability of the changes, Schoeller modified the school's professional development program to reward teachers for working with coaches, demonstrating implementation, and raising test scores.

For Starosky, follow-up and ongoing support and problem solving were critical. "The idea of what the change is going to look like and the reality of the result can be very different," said Starosky. "So it is helpful to follow up regularly to see what unanticipated problems arise and collectively discuss the problem."

Starosky also uses a data-driven approach to drive a cycle of continuous improvement with the professional learning communities. "We use our PLCs and administration teams to look at students through lenses of equity to problem solve for specific students, grade levels, and content areas," said Starosky. "We can look at what works with the students and explore where teachers struggle."

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

The biggest challenges Schoeller and Starosky faced in implementing change both required internal reflection.

Schoeller recognized that she needed to work on making everyone comfortable with telling her the truth about the changes. "People wanted to please me so bad, they wouldn't tell me the truth," said Schoeller.

Starosky cited the need to remain open and trusting as a leader. "You can't assume you have all the right answers," he reflected. "Do your homework so you know as many sides of the issue as possible. Trust that people have the same end result in mind and want what's best for kids."


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Read more about

overcoming resistance to change using the stages of concern and the Concerns-Based Adoption Model in *Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Potholes* by Gene E. Hall & Shirley M. Hord (Pearson, 2011).

Learn more using Learning Forward's archives

When introducing a new change in your school, scholar laureate Shirley Hord offers these tips.

1. Use **data** to establish a need and create a sense of urgency. Be sure to first celebrate where students and teachers are doing well before scrutinizing where the results need improvement.
2. Use the **stages of concern** at the beginning of and throughout the change effort to read people's feeling on change and to provide support and assistance to help them address those feelings.
3. Use **Innovation Configurations** to illustrate what the change will look like. Principals, administrators, coaches, and teachers can use these to determine what the change will look like once it is put in place.

You can learn more about each of these tips by visiting Learning Forward's complete archive of publications (www.learningforward.org/news/journalsearch.cfm), or Learning Forward's bookstore at (www.learningforwardstore.org), and searching for the phrases in bold above.



School's orientation to change

Explore your school's openness to change by thinking about what you need to do to ensure success.

Time: 55 minutes total

INDIVIDUALS Time: 5 minutes	SMALL GROUPS Time: 25 minutes	WHOLE FACULTY Time: 25 minutes
<p>Recall a change the school has been involved in during your time on the staff. Write your responses to these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the change? • Who initiated it? • When did it occur? • Who led the change effort? • What happened with the change? • How long did the change last? • How successful was the change? • How did you feel about the change? • How successful do you think you were with making the change? • How many changes has the school undertaken in the last two years? • How does the staff generally respond to change? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share your notes about the change you recall. (2 minutes each) 2. As a group, describe the school's orientation to change. How well does the school respond to change? What kinds of change are more accepted? Who are the school's champions of change? How successful is the school in making changes? 3. Be ready to report your assessment of the school on this question: On a score of 1 to 10, with 10 being open, enthusiastic, and ready for changes that improve teaching quality and student learning to 1 being highly resistant and suspicious of anything new, where do you think the school is in its orientation to change? (10 minutes) 4. As you think about implementing or refining collaborative professional learning within the school, what challenges do you anticipate? What might be done to head off some of those challenges to ensure success from the outset? (10 minutes) 5. Identify a group spokesperson to share your group's response to Parts 2 and 3 with the whole group. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask each group spokesperson to share his or her group's response to questions 2 and 3 in no more than 2 minutes each. 2. Have staff share responses to these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you learn about the school's orientation to change? • What actions will you take as a whole staff to ensure that you are successful with this change?

Adapted from: Killion, J. & Roy, P. (2009). *Becoming a learning school*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.

6 considerations for delivering a change message

When crafting a change message, it may help to consider Robert Cialdini's six principles of persuasion and how they can strengthen your change efforts. These six principles are a result of Cialdini's three-year study on what moves people to change behavior.

Commitment and consistency: We tend to act consistently with commitments we made in the past. For example, if people commit early in the process to what is best for students, subsequent requests that are positioned as best for students will have more influential power. *What commitments can you get implementers to make early in the change process that align with your change efforts?*

Social proof: We often look to the actions of others for clues about how to behave. Be careful, though, to avoid appearing as if you are trying to jump on the latest bandwagon. *Who else, inside and outside your organization, is successfully implementing the change you desire and has the data to verify that success?*

Reciprocation: The need to repay even the simplest acts of kindness can greatly influence others. Compromise, concessions, and additional support fall within this category. *What types of compromises, concessions, and support are you willing to make to demonstrate your ability to collaborate and move change efforts forward?*

Authority: Persons of authority (by position or respected status) often carry a large amount of influence. Use caution not to rely upon this influencer too much as it can appear as a desperate tactic and damage your credibility as a leader. *Which persons of authority, in or outside your organization, will support your changes?*

Liking: We often like people who are similar to us, complement us, and assist us in achieving shared goals, and allow them greater influence over us. *What do you and your implementers have in common and how can you reinforce that you are willing to cooperate to reach your shared goals?*

Scarcity: Opportunities seem more valuable when they are difficult to find or easily missed. *How can you create a sense of urgency, or demonstrate that now is a critical time to act?*

Adapted from: Cialdini, R. (2007). *Influence: The psychology of persuasion*. New York: HarperCollins.

Encountering resistance

Some common types of resistance encountered by professional developers



Aggressive resistance. This is the easiest type to identify, because it's overt and no effort is made to disguise the refusal to change.

For example, a colleague confronts a lead teacher with: "Under no circumstances will I participate in another curriculum committee. Let someone else do the work."

Passive-aggressive resistance. In these cases, staff members appear willing to change, but change never materializes. It's common to hear people say, "I'll be glad to lend a hand as soon as I finish this paper work," or "I'll try clear my schedule so I can attend the conference."

Unfortunately, the paperwork never ends, the calendar is never cleared, and "try" never becomes "will." Meanwhile, support for an initiative slowly erodes.

Phantom obstacles are also common: For example,

teachers may express interest in working with a university professor to explore new math teaching strategies, but then back away from change by claiming that "parents don't like us experimenting with the way we teach."

Passive resistance. This looks like wholehearted acceptance until action fails to take place. Staff members willingly discuss change, and may in fact seem enthusiastic, but never follow through.

This is the most difficult form of resistance to detect because it's subtle and sounds supportive. All too often, staff developers hear exclamations of "sounds great," "count me in," and "let's do it" in meetings, only to discover weeks later that action failed to materialize.

Excerpted from: Janas, M. (1998, Spring). Shhhhh, the dragon is asleep and its name is Resistance. *Journal of Staff Development*, 19(3).

Scheduled maintenance

Every education innovation should include a maintenance plan. Sketch out ways to follow up on the innovation before you begin.

Decide who will determine teacher concerns. If the change was initiated outside the school, will the original facilitator address questions? Will the school-based leader address questions?

Will the initial leader/facilitator of the innovation be available for follow-up interviews? How often and how long? Or will someone else assist staff members? What support will he or she receive to lead this work?

Once a concern is identified, who will provide support? For example, if a teacher is concerned about getting proper equipment, who is responsible for ordering it and following through to see that it is received? Who will provide any necessary retraining?

Who will identify teachers who can help others? Who will provide the support and learning that those teachers need to be successful at this new task?

Will those teachers be given free time to aid others? How will this be arranged?

Are the resources — time, people, and money — available for ongoing evaluation and support of the change? How can they be found?

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Lights, camera, PD!

Learning Forward's Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh recently appeared on Lifetime Television's "The Balancing Act" to join show host Danielle Knox and Judith Baenen, educational consultant with the National Middle School Association, in the show's Parent-Teacher Corner. Hirsh discusses effective teaching and high-quality professional development. You can view the segments at www.learningforward.org/news/thebalancingact.cfm.

Please share the video with peers, parents, and community members with an interest in effective professional learning.



Photo by Sarah Lesko/Learning Forward

Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh, second from right, on the set of "The Balancing Act" with host Danielle Knox, seated at left, and Judith Baenen, right.

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