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APRIL 2011, VOLUME 32, NO. 2

theme PROFESSIONAL LEARNING JOURNEYS

Rx for learning leaders: Choose the strategy that works for *your* school

I recently read a blog post in *The New York Times* about the advances resulting from what medical professionals term evidence-based medicine. In evidence-based medicine, decisions about medical care are informed by the best available evidence about what works to treat a particular patient with a particular condition.

However, the article states, for all the effort expended on selecting proven treatments for patient care, "for many patients, evidence-based medicine isn't working" (Chen, 2011).

Why? Because when many patients leave the hospital or doctor's office, they no longer adhere to prescribed treatments. Evidence-based medicine "ignores the impact of the patient's life at home, and results in fractured and desultory care" (Chen, 2011). When they get home, patients may not have the money or the means, for example, to change their diets.

To respond to this problem, some are suggesting a broader approach — a turn to evidence-based health, blurring the lines between the doctor's office

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and the real world in which patients live. In such an approach, health care professionals would work more in the community, responding to the real-world needs of often-impoverished patients.

Acknowledging health care's abundant challenges, we can be encouraged that professional learning's journey has made great progress in moving toward an evidence-based environment. While we haven't reached the point where every instance of professional development is planned based on student needs and evaluated on results, we are certainly much farther down that road than in years past. The role of research-based learning strategies for students and adults has also increased significantly.

Articles in this issue also highlight many schools' and districts' progress toward something like what health care professionals term evidence-based health. That is, not only are educators implementing what they learn from research to improve student learning, they are taking an approach that responds to the on-the-ground needs of the people who learn and work in schools. It isn't enough to hand over a prescription for a treatment. Those who lead learning need support and tools to transform their learning lifestyle.

Such a transformation recognizes that all educators are at different stages. For some schools, external partners provide the necessary expertise and

support. For others, school-based coaches working day-to-day with learning teams advance achievement's progress. Still others find their learning enhanced by structural changes inspired by an innovative look into the future.

I'm excited that one of the members of Learning Forward's Learning School Alliance is featured in this issue. As you'll read in the article on p. 10, those who work in such schools open themselves up to difficult change processes and use a network of peers both within and beyond their schools to build knowledge and sustain growth. Read Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh's column on p. 68 to understand her dream of a learning school on every corner.

Again, we express our gratitude to our partner, The Wallace Foundation. Their sponsored article, "Think outside the clock: Planners link after-school programs to classroom curriculum" (p. 46), shares information from their years of research on the importance of out-of-school time learning and what makes such learning effective.

What are your reflections on these topics? Get in touch anytime.

REFERENCE
Chen, P.W. (2011, March 10). When doctor's advice is ignored at home. *New York Times* health blog. Available at http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/10/when-home-life-trumps-health-care/?ref=health. ■

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essentials

Building Professional Development to Support New Student Assessment Systems
Arabella Philanthropic Advisors, January 2011

Authored by Stephanie Hirsh, this white paper is one of several by noted authors on supporting development of comprehensive assessment systems for students and teachers. In her paper, Hirsh writes that new assessment systems will provide teachers with significant opportunities to guide all students toward college and career readiness. To benefit from such assessments, states will need to be more thoughtful than they have been in the past about conceiving, organizing, managing, implementing, and evaluating effective professional development. The paper offers eight recommendations to help rebuild professional development infrastructure to support these systems. Other papers in the series cover the Common Core State Standards, developing a strategy to communicate with all stakeholders, and meeting the needs of special education students.
www.acarseries.org

TURNAROUND LEADERS
Meeting the Challenge: The Role of School Leaders in Turning Around the Lowest-Performing High Schools
Alliance for Excellent Education, January 2011

As the national policy community has coalesced around the priority of graduating all students ready for college and careers, the challenge of improving the lowest-performing high schools serving the most challenged populations remains. This policy brief describes new approaches showing promise in producing substantive changes in secondary-level teaching and learning, highlighting the central role of school leaders and districts in creating learning environments that can engage and support students with widely divergent learning needs. The brief concludes with a set of policy recommendations for the design of coherent systems to build human capital and foster conditions for high school transformation.
www.all4ed.org/files/MeetingTheChallenge.pdf

PRINCIPALS AND POLICY
School Leadership: A Key to Teaching Quality
Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, 2011

This policy brief on the role of principals in strengthening classroom instruction is based on the proceedings of a forum of teachers, principals, superintendents, policy makers, and researchers. Forum members recommended that any policy initiatives or new programs targeted at strengthening school leadership recognize the importance of context and equity. They identified four high leverage points where policy makers could take action, including strengthening teacher evaluation, improving evaluation and support for principals, identifying models of effective school leadership teams, and building a comprehensive data system to guide policy and practice. The policy brief concludes with a research agenda for future work.
www.cftl.org/Spotlight_On.htm?prodid=10

STATES MAKING DATA PROGRESS
Data for Action 2010
Data Quality Campaign, February 2011

Each year, Data Quality Campaign analyzes states' progress in collecting and using data to transform education. The latest analysis reveals that states have made progress in collecting longitudinal information that follows individual students over time, such as what percentage of students graduate or require remediation in postsecondary institutions, which teachers consistently achieve the most student growth, and what professional development has the greatest impact on teacher effectiveness. However, states have not made as much progress in creating a culture of effective data use.
http://dataqualitycampaign.org/stateanalysis/

MOVING STANDARDS INTO ACTION
States' Progress and Challenges in Implementing Common Core State Standards
Center on Education Policy, January 2011

This report is based on responses to a survey of state officials about their work in adopting and implementing the Common Core State Standards. Officials cited several factors in their decision to adopt the standards, including the rigor of the standards and their potential to influence education improvement. Respondents expect it will take until 2013 or later to fully implement the many changes associated with standards implementation, though most states expect to accomplish changes in professional development by 2012 or earlier.
www.cep-dc.org

IMPACT OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES
STEM Teachers in Professional Learning Communities: A Knowledge Synthesis
National Commission on Teaching and America's Future in partnership with WestEd, November 2010

This report describes a comprehensive knowledge synthesis of professional learning communities and their impact on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teaching and learning in K-12 education. Three overarching questions guide this analysis: What do we know about learning communities involving STEM teachers? How robust is the research base about learning communities involving STEM teachers? What further research and development are needed? The study's guiding questions examine the current knowledge about the relationship of these and other professional learning community attributes to effects on the following: teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, implemented instructional practices, student achievement, and teacher job satisfaction and retention.
www.nctaf.org/resources/research_and_reports/nctaf_research_reports

BEST PRACTICES FOR ELLs
Language (Policy) Matters!
Equity Alliance at Arizona State University, January 2011

This research brief offers information and resources about school policies that support language access, research on best classroom practices for students who are English language learners, and effective teacher strategies. The brief recommends that data about every aspect of English learners' education experience be available and that educators carefully examine such data to inform inquiry, reflection, and planning. Specific steps in this process include engaging parents, educators, and students in learning communities about this topic and connecting with educators who are working across national boundaries to learn about their experiences with language learning.
http://ea.niusileadscape.org/lc/Record/1349

IN THIS ISSUE OF *JSD* **THE LEARNING STARTS HERE** ▼

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TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMATION

Past issues of Learning Forward's newsletters have emphasized strategies that help schools and systems on their journeys to improve teaching and learning. See several recent issues for valuable tools and examples.

Tools for Schools Winter 2011

In "4 key strategies help educators overcome resistance to change," learn how principals have succeeded in moving transformation efforts forward. Accompanying tools help educators communicate about change, assess a school's readiness for initiatives, understand resistance, and sustain change over time.

www.learningforward.org/news/issueDetails.cfm?issueID=318

Tools for Schools August/September 2009

Read "Leadership teams create lasting change" to understand how leaders bring educators together in community to sustain school improvement efforts. Tools include a leadership self-assessment and a force-field analysis to examine influences.

www.learningforward.org/news/issueDetails.cfm?issueID= 279

The Learning System March 2009

Explore how those willing to challenge their thinking, and the thinking of others, can make a difference in "Competing values form obstacles to change." Dig deeper with a tool that encourages leaders to identify their personal barriers to change.

www.learningforward.org/members/issueDetails.cfm?issueID=267

LEAPING INTO THE FEAR

"The job isn't to catch up to the status quo; the job is to invent the status quo."

— *Seth Godin*

Author Seth Godin writes in his new book, *Poke the Box* (2011, The Domino Project), about the importance of starting: starting that new initiative, taking the leap, getting going on your big, new idea. Having good ideas isn't enough. Starting them is essential.

In a free accompanying PDF, Godin asks a series of questions and provides prompts to help readers get going. He acknowledges that fear plays a big role in halting us from trying new ideas or taking a risk. As part of the reflection process to learn to start more often, he asks readers to consider:

- What is your biggest fear about starting?
- What would happen if that fear came true?
- Would it stop you from trying again?
- Consider what you aren't starting. What would it take to help you take a leap?

Source: Godin, S. (2011). *Start now (Poke the box: The workbook).* The Domino Project. Available at www.thedominoproject.com.

Free to succeed

idea

"We never know where the next great innovation will come from, but it is far more likely to come from people freed to do meaningful work within a commonly shared purpose than it is from a mandate or directive."

Source: "To tackle new problems, we're going to need new solutions," by Robert Davidovich, p. 42.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS ON THEIR JOURNEYS

According to the new *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Preparing Students for College and Careers,* a substantial majority of teachers, parents, and Fortune 1000 executives believe that one of the nation's highest priorities in education should be preparing secondary students for college and career success.

- Teachers believe that one of the highest priorities in education should be strengthening programs to help diverse learners with the highest needs meet college- and career-ready standards.

- Teachers in schools with more than two-thirds minority students are more likely than those in schools with one-third or fewer minority students to support common core standards (English: 68% vs. 55%; math: 69% vs. 52%).

- Both students and parents report that establishing a college-going school culture appears to make the most difference in predicting student success.

- In addition to setting expectations and providing appropriate information to students and parents, schools with such a culture also excel at preparing students in core subjects as well as the interdisciplinary areas that build global awareness.

- Unfortunately, most of the schools with college-going cultures serve students who traditionally are more successful. Schools with strong college-going cultures include fewer diverse and low-income students and English language learners.

Learn more in the complete survey.
Links for current reports and the entire MetLife Teacher Survey series are available at www.metlife.com/teachersurvey.

Power principles for promoting change

To increase the chances for success in change efforts, understand that:

1 Strategizing will help us evolve and reshape ideas and actions.

We need strategy and strategic ideas, but above all we need to think of the evolution of change plans as a process of shaping and reshaping ideas and actions.

2 Pressure means ambitious targets. Support involves developing new competencies.

Large-scale reform requires a careful balance and integration of pressure and support — systems include a great deal of inertia, which means they require new forces to change direction.

3 Knowledge of the implementation dip can reduce the awkwardness of the learning period.

Since new change involves grappling with new beliefs, skills, and understandings, changes will not go smoothly in the early stages of implementation, and all involved should know this is part of the process.

4 Mastering implementation is necessary to overcome the fear of change.

At the beginning of the change process, losses are tangible and gains are still theoretical. Implementation is necessary for gains, but that takes time.

5 It is necessary to identify the distinction between technical problems and adaptive challenges.

Existing knowledge is sufficient to solve technical problems, while adaptive challenges require a more complex response. Learn more about this on p. 42.

6 Engaging others in change requires persistence to overcome the inevitable challenges.

Because change is complex, difficult, and frustrating, the change process requires pushing ahead without being rigid, regrouping despite setbacks, and not being discouraged when progress is slow.

Source: Fullan, M., Cuttress, C., & Kilcher, A. (2005, Fall). 8 forces for leaders of change: Presence of the core concepts does not guarantee success, but their absence ensures failure. *JSD, 26*(4), 54-64. Available at www.learningforward.org/news/articleDetails.cfm?articleID=88.

SHARING UP, DOWN, *and* SIDEWAYS

Alliance is a driving force in reshaping New Jersey vocational school

By Valerie von Frank

In Essex County, N.J., whose county seat is Newark, students have the option of attending one of four vocational high schools. The Essex County Vocational School District draws students from the county seeking instruction in a multitude of career and technical areas.

The district — one of the oldest and largest in the state — serves a diverse population. More than 85% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and the population includes regular education and special education students, students with limited English proficiency, and adult learners who attend classes in the evenings.

North 13th Street Technical School is one of the four vocational options. The 600 to 700 students who choose this school receive occupational training in the areas of law and public safety, computer and information systems tech-

nology, hospitality/personal services, construction trades, and business technology. In the past, many have struggled to meet state academic standards, and the school was not making Adequate Yearly Progress as defined under the No Child Left Behind Act.

In the last few years, however, students' level of success has been rising.

In 2003, just 25% of students reached the standard on the mathematics portion of the state standardized exam, and 63% achieved the standard in language arts. In 2009, 70% reached the goal in math and 85% were at standard in language arts.

In 2010, scores again improved — the highest in the school's history — and, more significantly, North 13th Street Tech reached a milestone.

"We made AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) in a school that no one ever thought could make AYP," Principal Patricia Clark-Jeter said. She noted that the number of 10th

Photo by JOHAN ROJAS

Student success has been rising at North 13th Street Technical School in Newark, N.J.

and 11th graders on the honor roll increased, and more students than ever are being admitted to college. According to Candice Wells-Crudup, chairperson of the school-based professional development committee, the significant factor is that special needs students met the federal standards for improvement, a feat that "only could have happened because of teacher collaboration."

The change in the school may be at least partially attributed to a new approach teachers are taking to improve their professional learning — which affects their approach in the classroom. In the last several years, many have worked diligently to form professional learning communities, sharing best practices, attending national conferences, and ramping up what they understand about how best to

reach all students to help them achieve.

When visitors toured the school recently, they were greeted in a schoolwide assembly featuring students who articulated the changes they and the school have undergone. Students led tours of the building and told their guests how the chemistry teacher coplanned a lesson with the English teacher. "Classes are aligned," said Jan Herrera, a consultant working with the school.

North 13th Street Technical School
Newark, N.J.

Enrollment: **628**

Staff: **90**

Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	**less than 1%**
Black:	**44%**
Hispanic:	**52%**
Asian/Pacific Islander:	**3%**
Native American:	**0%**
Other:	**0%**

Limited English proficient: **0%**

Language spoken: **English**

Free/reduced lunch: **88.2%**

Special education: **19%**

Contact: **Patricia Clark-Jeter**, principal

E-mail: **pjeter@essextech.org**

Teacher-facilitators at North 13th Street Technical School include: (standing, from left) Mark Giles, Terrilisa Bauknight, Patricia Clark-Jeter, Gail Riccardi, Amir Ressaissi, Candice Wells-Crudup, and (seated, from left) Roxanne Gabriel, Rosa Goncalves, Maria Moura, Taaheeda Street-Conway, Myrna Velez, and Cathleen Smith.

"You could feel the energy, the push, the commitment," Herrera said of the visit. "There's an intensity you feel everywhere in the school, a driving force that we can't waste any time. There was a sense among the faculty that, 'Students need our best, and collaborating is how we do that.' "

BECOMING A LEARNING SCHOOL

Three years ago, New Jersey began requiring that schools have site-based professional development teams. As North 13th Street implemented the new requirement, Wells-Crudup also began organizing staff into voluntary professional learning communities.

Clark-Jeter said that when she became principal in 2008, she saw many areas that she felt needed attention and, initially, teacher collaboration was not her focus. She was working to change school culture, and first set out to establish different guidelines for student behavior. She said that in her second year, she began to get the concept of the power of collaborative learning to reshape this school.

"Ms. Wells-Crudup gave me a vision of what we could do with professional learning communities," Clark-Jeter said. "She kept that vision alive." In a teacher-driven move, the school applied to become a part of Learning Forward's Learning School Alliance (LSA).

North 13th Street became an LSA school in 2009. LSA is a network of schools committed to improving professional practice through helping educators in each school work collaboratively and communicate with other schools around the country and in Canada about ways to increase students' academic success.

Learning Forward provides LSA schools with tools and materials, including a Standards Assessment Inventory that helps a school determine where staff may need support to implement the standards of quality professional learning. The inventory yields data staff can use to set goals for improvement.

LSA schools' staff work together in their own school on the best principles and practices of professional learning and participate in regular monthly webinars on key topics, drawing on knowledge gained from live interaction with national experts such as Stephanie Hirsh, Joellen Killion, and Lois Easton. Each school also has a facilitator or coach to provide guidance.

Schools accepted into the network receive five Learning Forward organization memberships, four complimentary Summer Conference registrations, and four discounted Annual Conference registrations.

Networking is a key element of LSA membership. Staff take part in regular, facilitated conversations with like schools. In addition to virtual conversations on discussion boards and in cohort webinars, Herrera, who is North 13th Street's LSA facilitator, said school representatives meet together at Learning Forward conferences to discuss issues they would like help with. They also learn protocols for addressing issues, she said, and
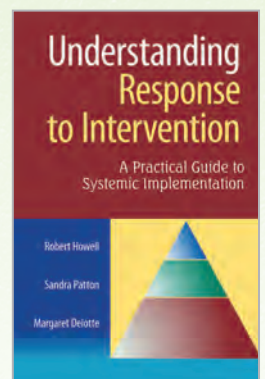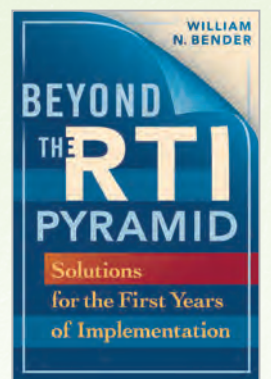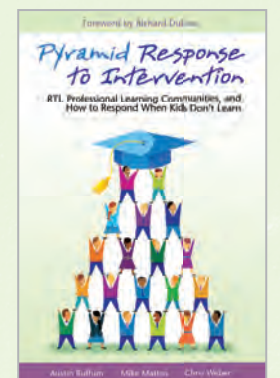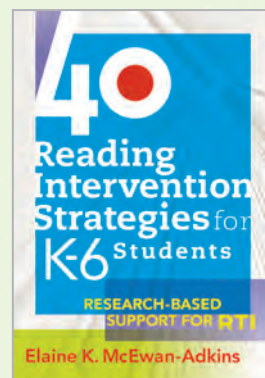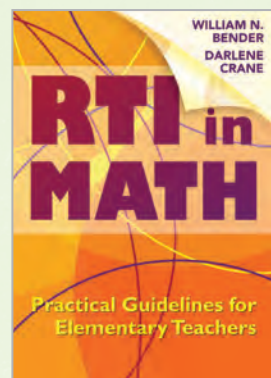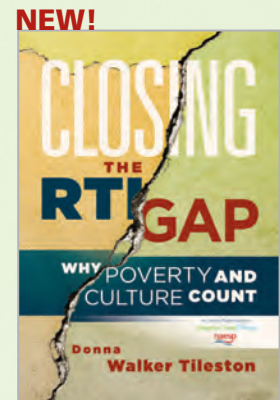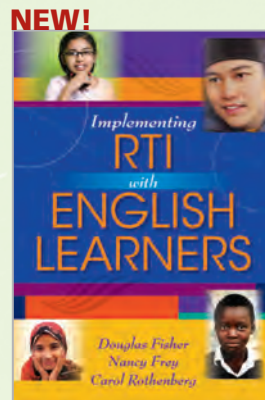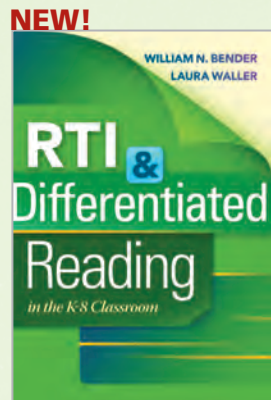
processes they can use back in their own schools. For example, North 13th Street staff attending a recent conference worked in a session to complete a planning template following the theory of change and to outline goals and actions for improvement, a learning process they can transfer to learning teams at the school.

"Collaboration is going to be the way schools do business," Herrera said, an idea that Wells-Crudup said teachers in her school are beginning to grasp as a result of being part of LSA.

"Teachers understood then that these ideas are not isolated to North 13th Street," Wells-Crudup said. "It is greater than them. This is a national movement."

And if teachers are struggling with ways to implement the new knowledge, she said, they can go outside the school and even the state for help.

COLLABORATION COMES TO THE FOREFRONT

Through the Learning School Alliance, both Wells-Crudup and Clark-Jeter participated in summer professional learning on how to create and support effective learning teams. They attended Learning Forward's Summer Conference, spent hours at one another's homes, and worked over the computer using Moodle.

"We learned about the effects of professional development and how to articulate that to the staff," Clark-Jeter said. The two coordinated a full-day session before the 2010-11 academic year with key faculty to help teachers understand what Wells-Crudup and Clark-Jeter had learned about professional collaboration. Those faculty members, lead teachers who would take their new understanding of what it means to collaborate back to individual learning teams, were paid for their time. Together with the LSA facilitator, administrators then organized the whole-school faculty into learning teams with a lead teacher for each.

Student comments on www.trulia.com

"I think this school is an excellent school! Last year, this school was going down, but thanks to our wonderful new principal, our school is going from good to great. She does not let any student go down. This school now offers free tutoring for help. She awards honor roll, and she helps the others achieve it. This school is a five-star school because the classes are made to help students learn."

"I think that this school is overall nice in many ways. … Our new principal is turning our school into a really fun learning environment, and she's really striving for us to become something. She really cares for her students, and that's a great characteristic for a principal. I'm not going to say our school is the best, but it's not the worst in many ways now. This year our school has been much, much more fun and a school that we would want to attend."

"It's one person tapping another and that person tapping another," Wells-Crudup said.

Then Clark-Jeter moved from a system of voluntary, unscheduled collaboration to mapping out time for teams to meet. In the current school year, teams are meeting twice a month during teachers' preparation time in content areas — with teams of technical education teachers, hospitality (cosmetology and culinary arts) teachers, law and public safety teachers, and grade-level content teams in language arts and math. Some teachers also find ways to meet additionally in smaller groups during other planning periods.

"And the lead teachers exchange ideas," Wells-Crudup noted. "The sharing goes up, down, and sideways."

"If students can tell that the teachers are coordinated and well-planned, it's easier for them to buy into the lessons," said Herrera. "Activities are coordinated with teachers planning together how to push students to the next level."

That push has paid off. Clark-Jeter said when she became school leader, it was obvious some change was needed.

"We had been at a point where we had a cultural divide," Clark-Jeter said, a divide that was keeping the school from moving forward and achieving more.

"Before, we used two different curricula," said Wells-Crudup, one for special needs students and another for general education. Working together, she said, staff have incorporated more inclusive techniques and strategies to improve student learning for all. "The level of expectation has gone up."

Howard Weshnak, a vocational technology teacher, said he is using more differentiated instruction strategies now, knowing he can call on colleagues to help him with any questions about students who have different needs.

"I'm not as rote as I was five years ago," he said. "I'm much more open, and open to discussion."

Weshnak meets twice a month with his vocational professional learning community. A trained facilitator helps set an agenda for the meeting, with input from members who have communicated through e-mail. One member has the role of record keeper, another keeps time to help the group stay on track. The teachers spend 40 minutes together and document their progress for the school administration. Currently, their focus is on vocational certifications and coordinating how many certificates individual students may earn during their high school tenure. They are investigating industry standards and working to broaden students' experiences to make them more successful in the job market.

Weshnak also is part of a learning community that includes two English teachers and a history teacher, atypical of other teams at the school. Students have to be prepared for a new level of work, he said, and vocational students can no longer expect not to use academic skills on the job, from writing bills to reading and comprehending complex materials related to their jobs. Working in the learning community has led him to incorporate

more critical reading and writing into his vocational courses.

"The students are very surprised we're talking," he said. "It used to be they could be one way with teacher A and another with teacher B and another with teacher C. Now all three teachers are talking about curriculum, student behavior, classroom management, and students are seeing a continuity of rules and more consistent homework."

A PROCESS THAT DOESN'T END

The process has required a significant commitment, Clark-Jeter said. North 13th Street Tech has a strong union presence. On the staff of about 70 teachers are the teachers association president, acting vice president, treasurer, and building representative.

Clark-Jeter said working with the association and within contractual guidelines was a necessity. She and association leadership worked together to find collaborative time within the existing contract day and to do so without having to renegotiate the district teachers' contract.

That's not to say that all teachers are participating actively in effective learning teams at the school, the leaders stress. They say their journey is in the beginning stages.

Weshnak said some teachers were not in favor of the change. He said some commented, "Why do we have to add something else?" "We talk all the time already!" "This is a waste of time," and, "This is just another thing that will come and go." Not all of that talk has abated, but, as Wells-Crudup pointed out, it's a part of the journey.

"Through the Learning School Alliance," Wells-Crudup said, "we have learned that change is difficult. We need to be consistent and things will work out."

"I'm not just someone who speaks about collaboration," Clark-Jeter added. "I've lived it, and I believe wholeheartedly in it.

"Being an LSA school gave us a responsibility as a model school," she continued. "We have to demonstrate that we're a model. … When you have others working with you, though, the possibilities are limitless."

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

ARCHDIOCESE PUTS ITS FAITH IN EXTERNAL COACHES

By Carol Cary and Maria Lamattina

In today's workplace, the ability to solve complex problems, think critically, and engage in continuous, self-directed learning is essential. Recognizing that providing the kind of education that fosters such abilities necessitated considerable change in its schools, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Office of Catholic Education developed a strategic plan focusing on the 21st-century learner.

The plan focuses on three areas for growth: Catholic identity, academic excellence, and sustainability. Within academic excellence, the plan targets transforming classroom practice, emphasizing rigorous and relevant instruction, interdisciplinary learning, and the use of data to inform instruction. Teachers are the linchpins to the plan's success.

Over the years, the Office of Catholic Education has been intentional about its approach to professional development, regularly hosting universal staff development sessions for all of its almost 1,000 secondary school educators. Although such large-scale development efforts are typical and offered with the best intentions, "good intentions are insufficient to lead to worthwhile professional learning" (Reeves, 2010, p. 2). Recently, for example, professional development for secondary teachers focused on the International Center for Leadership in Education's rigor and relevance model. Presentations described the concepts of the rigor and relevance framework. However, these presentations didn't change classroom instruction.

Data obtained using an online classroom walk-through instrument indicated that traditional, 20th-century instructional strategies prevailed in almost all of the secondary classrooms, which serve 16,000 students in the five-county Philadelphia region. The Office of Catholic Education, along with local administrators, analyzed the classroom walk-through data and established goals designed to transform classrooms into 21st-century learning centers. With enrollment trends in decline and tuition costs increasing, the Office of Catholic Education set out to reaffirm its reputation of educating students for college, work, and life.

Additional data obtained from teacher surveys indicated the need for dialogue between teachers and administrators on creating a common vision, collaborative decision making, expectations for student achievement, and teacher accountability. To become centers of academic excellence, the schools would have to build professional learning communities that would support such dialogue.

High-quality, focused, ongoing, embedded professional development and the establishment of professional learning communities both within and among the schools were identified as keys to bringing about the desired change.

To align professional development with the strategic plan, the Office of Catholic Education partnered with Catapult Learning, a professional development services provider, to design a comprehensive, three-year plan to support teachers and administrators as they learned new approaches and put their learning into action. The initial plan called for combining large-group professional learning institutes and on-site, one-on-one, instructional coaching. If the desired outcome was to transform classroom practice and improve student learning, then a long-term approach was clearly necessary.

Each element provided distinct benefits that would further the archdiocese's goal. The institutes would give teachers an opportunity to gain new knowledge while also serving as a means for networking across schools and dis-

ciplines, thus setting the stage for building professional learning communities. The instructional coaching would support teachers as they worked to incorporate innovative teaching techniques into their daily classroom practice. Five of the archdiocese's eight urban high schools were selected to participate in the first year of the plan.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

According to Douglas Reeves, "a vision represents a compelling picture of the ideal state" (2010, p. 59). Early in the school year, principals and assistant principals involved in the initiative participated in a visioning exercise. Individually, they were asked to write statements describing what they were seeing as they walked through the classrooms in their buildings. Each descriptor was written on a sticky note that they then placed on a chart labeled "as is." Working together, they read the descriptors and clustered them into categories, creating charts for each.

Next, the Catapult Learning facilitator asked the group to picture a "flawless future," to write descriptions of what they would ideally see in classrooms on sticky notes, and place them on a chart labeled "to be." As before, the administrators read through the descriptors and clustered them into categories.

The group examined the differences between the two states, and identified steps needed to close the gaps between "as is" and "to be." For example, principals wanted to see things like a move from teacher-centered to student-centered classrooms, and a move from a textbook-driven curriculum toward an inquiry-based curriculum. This exercise helped initiative leaders outline the broad themes for the first formal institute day.

IDENTIFYING TEACHER NEEDS

Using the themes established by the visioning exercise, the external facilitator designed a needs analysis survey that was sent to all teachers who would be attending the first institute. The survey asked teachers to indicate the extent to which they wanted to learn more about various strategies, such as formative assessment, adapting instruction to

Archdiocese of Philadelphia Secondary School System
Philadelphia, Pa.
(System includes Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties)

Number of schools: **17**

Enrollment: **16,507**

Staff: **800**

Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	**76%**
* Minority:	**24%**

* Limited English proficient: **NA**

* Languages spoken: **NA**

* Free/reduced lunch: **NA**

* Special education: **NA**

Contact: **Carol Cary**, director of secondary curriculum and instruction

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* The Archdiocese of Philadelphia collects a limited portion of the data typically available for schools and districts featured in *JSD*.

accommodate different learning styles, strategies to help students develop critical thinking skills, and integrating the use of technology.

In addition to teacher surveys, principals participated in individual meetings with Catapult Learning, whose representatives asked:

- What measurable instructional goals would you like to set for this year?
- What professional development do you believe will support these goals?
- To what level of accountability will you hold teachers?

These questions were not only intended to provide input for the design of the institute, but also to raise awareness of the importance of establishing and maintaining accountability for the success of any change effort.

Based on these two data points — the teacher needs analysis survey and the individual meetings with administrators — the first institute focused on student-centered learning. The keynote speaker addressed why individual teachers should invest time and effort in changing their professional practice. Breakout sessions revolved around designing inquiry-based units of study, active learning and questioning strategies, and using data to inform instruction.

EMBEDDING THE LEARNING

The plan included coaching as a means of embedding what would be learned from the institute into teachers' daily practice. To underscore this, learning facilitators asked principals who attended the visioning session about the types of feedback they receive from teachers after they attend a district-mandated workshop, as well as what they observe in terms of instructional changes. It became clear that the impact of such events was minimal, and those participating in the learning initiatives discussed the hallmarks of effective professional development, the general benefits of coaching, as well as the specifics of how it would work for the archdiocese.

Shortly after the first institute, coaches met with principals of the various schools to identify specific goals and to determine how teachers would be selected for coaching. There was little variation in goals from one school to the other, as the initial visioning exercise and subsequent institute content drove the focus. In general, the effort began with teachers who volunteered. Only a small group of teachers at each school was involved, and each of these teachers worked with a coach to prioritize his or her own learning needs relative to the school's goals. Various disciplines were represented, and, whenever possible, coaches made themselves available for department meetings or informal discussions with teachers who were not part of their assigned group.

Catapult Learning provided the coaches who worked with teachers, on-site, spending considerable time co-planning units and lessons, working side-by-side with teachers in their class-rooms, and engaging them in the kinds of reflective conversations that encourage teachers to think about what they do, why they do it, the results they get, and what else they might do.

THE RESULTS

As intended, the initial institute created a feeling of connectedness within individual schools as well as across the five urban high schools. Catapult Learning representatives solicited feedback immediately, through written surveys, and, later, through informal conversations with teachers and administrators. The institute had hit the mark — teachers realized they had the support of their administrators and colleagues, and a sense of collegiality was the descriptor most often used by teachers as they discussed their experience that day.

The coaching was also well-received. While there is much discussion about the role of coaching in professional development, leveraging coaching as an instrument of change in classroom practice and philosophy is no small challenge. Adult learning theory indicates that choice is a positive motivator (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2009) and the coaching model that these schools adopted provided teachers with choices that motivated them to try new strategies in their classrooms.

These teachers were excited to work one-on-one with a coach and reported that any initial anxieties they had vanished quickly as coaches and teachers developed open, supportive lines of communication.

The changes were tangible. Teachers who had never considered implementing differentiated instruction strategies began to do so without reluctance. Teachers who had always arranged the physical environment of their classrooms in teacher-directed or even theater-style seating tried new arrangements conducive to small-group instruction and discussion. Teachers commented on how they collaborated with their coaches, discussing new approaches, co-planning lessons and assessments, conferencing on results, and reflecting on new experiences. To quote one teacher's feedback, "The one thing I will take away is the importance of reflecting. I was reminded … to look back on my lesson and evaluate it." That teacher's principal emphasized the fact that the coach had made it safe for her teachers to take risks — and to fail.

Building-level administrators received positive feedback from all teachers involved in the coaching process. Several administrators commented how teachers who were not in the official coaching program inquired about having access to the coaching at some point.

The coaching experience had done exactly what it was supposed to do — envelop teachers in a risk-free, collaborative process that would transform classrooms and empower teachers to make professional decisions to improve their practice. While coaching provided teachers with an intimate experience, it also helped the teachers view themselves as part of the bigger picture, of a large urban constituency.

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The Office of Catholic Education, in collaboration with local administrators, continues to evaluate classroom walkthrough data to determine changes in instructional practice. Observations reveal an increase in student-directed lessons, small-group and paired-group assignments, and use of technology by teachers and students, all leading to the desired outcome — increased student engagement.

MOVING FORWARD

After the great success that the program achieved initially, the effort continues this year in the five initial schools, and has been expanded — the three remaining urban high schools in the archdiocese have become part of the process. Teachers who worked with coaches in the first year are building on what they learned and continuing the transformation of their classrooms and their respective schools.

Noticing the positive changes in their colleagues' classrooms, many teachers who were reluctant to work with a coach last year are now seeking out the coaches, creating the need for establishing cohorts of teachers at some schools. In addition, some teachers who are still not part of the regular coaching program are taking advantage of the coaches' expertise during prep periods, lunch breaks, and before and after school.

Committed to the goal of transforming its schools, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Office of Catholic Education remains steadfast in its pursuit of focused professional development that supports teachers as leaders and learners within a professional learning community, and where the journey from "as is" is essential to the dream of "to be."

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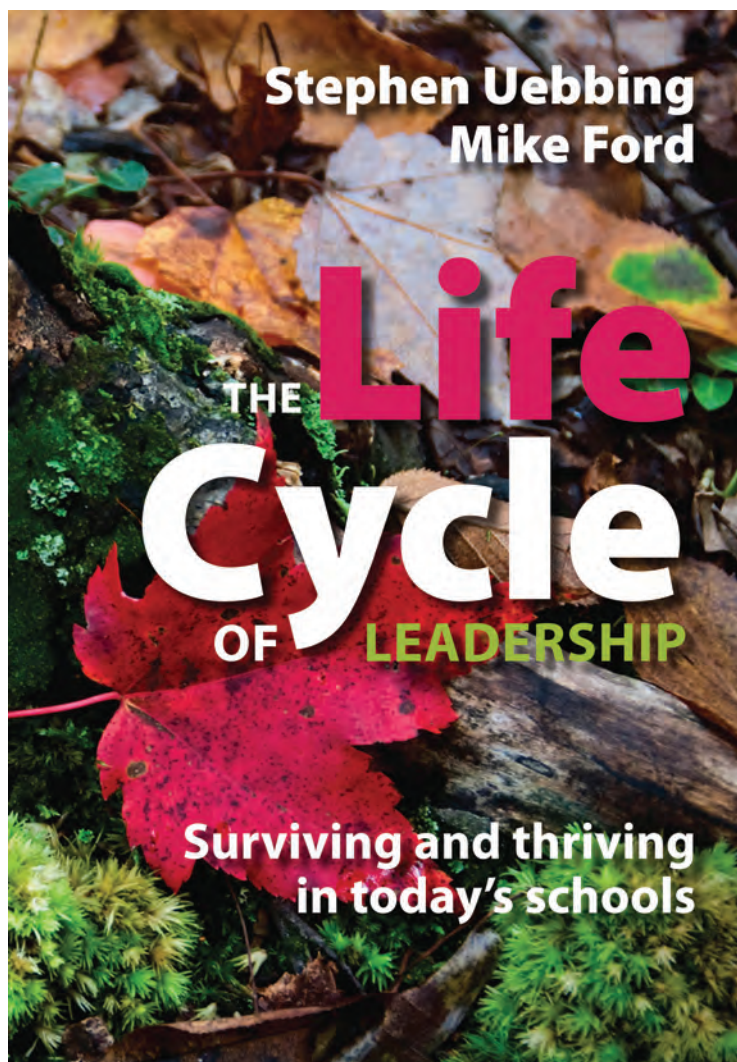
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DESPITE ROUGH SEAS, TEACHERS IN RURAL MAINE SWIM TOGETHER

By Kyle Rhoads

When I became principal of Acton Elementary School in Acton, Maine, in 2003, I spent the summer interviewing staff members. Staff in this small, rural elementary school overwhelmingly expressed a desire for opportunities to learn collaboratively. The teachers described a school culture where staff did not work together but instead worked in isolation or small cliques.

As schools throughout the country attempt to improve student achievement by developing professional learning communities, administrators are placing teachers into collaborative groups. This has often has led to schools "doing" professional learning communities, yet doing little to develop a culture of professional learning. The staff and I set out to shift educators' attitudes and beliefs about professional development and create a collaborative culture with positive results for teaching and learning.

I began reading articles about teacher collaboration using resources from Learning Forward and ASCD. I used this information to consider possible activities and grant funding resources to develop a professional learning community. I shared articles with the staff. Worried that "professional learning communities" had become a buzzword and would be viewed as another quick fix, I never uttered the words "professional learning community" until much later, when the staff had identified for themselves that collaboration was creating a professional learning community.

Kyle Rhoads

When the staff returned to school in the fall, we began to develop a vision of how we wanted to operate as a staff, and the theme of collaboration came up again. Random groupings of teachers drew pictures on butcher paper of how they envisioned staff members working together. Some drawings displayed analogies for future change. For example, one group drew all the teachers and administration in one boat working

towards a common goal while the boat was floating along the ocean. The teachers also participated in a learning organization assessment in the book *Ten Steps to a Learning Organization* (Kline & Saunders, 1998) that measures an organization's ability to adapt, learn, and collaborate. We used the data collected to help plan a collaborative learning culture.

Acton Elementary School in Acton, Maine.

Before my arrival at the school, the staff had made minimal progress at developing a state-mandated local assessment system. The mandate was an opportunity for staff to produce results while learning how to collaborate. Federal grants funded several teachers in the position of coaches. These teacher coaches facilitated teacher meetings for developing common assessments. And, much like an athletic coach, they encouraged teacher teamwork and learning inside and outside of the classroom.

The coaches and I met monthly. I modeled how to facilitate meetings and used problem-solving and discussion-based approaches to lead the meetings. A grant-funded consultant trained the coaches on facilitation and team building. The teacher coaches learned about sound assessment practice, developing professional learning communities, and building productive teams. As a result of the meetings, coaches built trust in the reform and committed to produce team results. The coaches developed and exhibited leadership in ways previously not evident at the school.

TEAM LEARNING

Coaches met regularly with their teams at either a common meeting time during the school day by creatively scheduling or during a paid after-school meeting time. We carefully designed the new meeting structure keeping in mind the need to value teachers' time. We used Schmoker's keys to effective teamwork to build structured agendas helped to effectively manage meetings (Schmoker, 2001). Teachers created grade-level expectations for students in language arts and mathematics. They shared and critiqued the assessments they developed to measure the grade-level expectations. Finally, they used the assessments to collect data on which students were not meeting the expectations so they could plan to better meet their learning needs.

The coaches facilitated teachers learning from each other. Teachers acquired professional knowledge and skills in assessment literacy, reflective practice, goal setting, collaborative problem solving, collegial discussions, and effective teaching practices. For example, teachers learned to use assessments to inform their teaching and to improve student learning. As part of meetings, teachers read Rick Stiggins' book on sound assessment practices (2001). Coaches led discussions and exercises about how to implement assessments for learning. Teams used their new knowledge and skills to build, pilot, and revise assessments to monitor student progress and inform future instruction.

The teams learned how to set goals that focused their teaching on improving student achievement. Coaches and I developed and guided teachers to use a process for creating team SMART goals (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004). Teams created norms, protocols, and meeting agendas to hold themselves accountable to their action plans and to use meeting time wisely. Teachers demonstrated knowledge of how to set SMART goals by setting achievement goals for their own classes.

We empowered meeting members to make decisions and create a shared vision. They set measurable and attainable goals to meet the legislative timeline. Elmore (2002) noted that when teams exercised authority and were given the right to develop a program that can substantially improve, change should occur, and it did.

As a school, we monitored and reflected on our progress to create a professional learning culture. Teachers responded to questionnaires, and at open forums, teachers expressed personal assessments of the progress and provided suggestions to improve our collaborative work. At meetings, teachers completed short, reflection-evaluation forms that allowed them to provide feedback on the effectiveness of meetings and team productivity. The routine of reflecting on each meeting permitted teachers to experience the power of reflective practice. Coaches, administrators, and teams used the information to plan future professional development, revise team processes, and set team goals.

BUMPS ON OUR JOURNEY

We certainly encountered obstacles on our learning journey. Teachers were unable to claim individual identity for all of their work, and this created some dissension. Tschannen-Moran, Uline, Hoy, & Mackley (2000) wrote that it is not easy to change the teacher norms of autonomy and equality or to change the beliefs and practices that go with the norms, but that positive change occurs in teaching practice and student learning from collaboration. "My unit" and "my project" now were replaced with products such as "Grade 2 Common Writing Assessment."

Teachers' attitude to change itself presented challenges. The initial object of change as identified by Sarason (1995) is the change of attitudes and conceptions. Not all teachers viewed the meetings as productive. Teachers demonstrated resistance to changing operational structure. For example, a new teacher

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THE LEADER'S ROLE

For fellow leaders embarking in similar reform efforts, here are several suggestions for your learning journey:

1 Plan to address the emotional aspects of change, and include in the plan a way for staff members' emotions to be assessed and addressed.

2 Be cognizant that teachers may experience what Reeves calls "initiative fatigue." Help alleviate the fatigue by attempting to understand teachers' individual needs and by clarifying and narrowing the focus for the professional learning.

3 Be prepared to make and support structural changes within the school to sustain the reform, even though you may experience the "That is the way we have always done it" attitude.

4 Do not attempt to do all the work alone. By increasing leadership capacity, you may let go of some of the work and move a staff closer to a shared vision by having more people understand and work towards the vision.

5 Finally, be aware that many teachers will only trust you and commit to the reform when they see the benefit in the work for themselves or their students.

suggested to two veteran staff members to schedule recess at a time closer to their common lunchtime as a way to increase instructional time. They responded that they had always had recess at that time and that they could not move it.

The emotional and relational aspects of the school culture at times impeded reform and presented unexpected difficulties. Teachers felt overwhelmed by the amount of effort needed to complete the work. They did not want to expend any more energy or time to take risks or attempt a new activity. Reeves (2010) labeled this "initiative fatigue" — when the number of initiatives increases but the time, resources, and emotional energy are constant. Even with opportunities and coaches' encouragement to experiment, adapt, or reflect on their practice, some teachers were slow to exhibit these behaviors.

Coaches, some of the teachers, and I acknowledged and addressed teachers' emotional needs. Some teams added five- to 10-minute gripe sessions to agendas at the beginning or the end of meetings. Coaches listened to teachers' concerns and, when appropriate, included their ideas in future team plans. They reiterated team goals and encouraged peers to remain involved in the team's collaboration. Coaches refocused team meeting agendas to include creating team products and identify purposes for meetings. At open forums, teachers aired concerns and asked questions to better understand the reform efforts and their roles. I learned it was important for me to be visible and accessible in hallways, in team meetings, and in my office and to listen to teachers when they had something to say. I used these conversations to help communicate the vision for change and expectations for teachers to actively participate in team meetings and work toward team goals.

REFOCUSING ON STUDENTS

Just as we were making progress, another challenge arose when the state mandate to create the local assessment system was placed on a moratorium. The vision for collaboration became unclear, and confusion flourished. Teachers wondered why they should continue meeting. Even without the state mandate, we kept the newly created structures and dedicated our efforts on using meeting time to improve student achievement. I created urgency by talking with teachers about how we were supporting students who didn't meet grade-level expectations. We finally began to use collaboration, the essential element of DuFour's work, as a means to improve student achievement (2004). This refocus for the teamwork reaffirmed Elmore's statement that, "coherence emerges from the practice of learning with a shared purpose" (2002, p. 24).

With the meeting time now focused on student outcomes, teacher learning had a greater emphasis on successful teaching practices. Team analysis of student assessment data was not only used to determine goals, such as 95% of 1st-grade students reading on grade level, but to determine what practices were effective in helping students achieve grade-level expectations.

DANCING TO CREATE TIME FOR LEARNING

A team of primary grade teachers struggled to find common meeting time during the school day. At the same time, the librarian, music teacher, art teacher, and guidance counselor struggled to implement their respective curricula within the constraints of their weekly lessons.

The librarian proposed mixing the students by grades and teaching integrated lessons for a 45-minute period each week. The specialists would design and implement the integrated curricula lessons with the help of paraprofessionals.

Students experienced highly engaging lessons with a different group of peers and teacher each week. Meanwhile, classroom teachers met to address ways to support academically struggling students. This program became known as "Word Dance," because the learning often centered on learning the vocabulary of the curricula as students created, sang, performed, and danced.

Scheduled meeting time focused on uninterrupted, collegial discussions. By having a common language about achievement results and practice, teachers developed problem-solving skills. As some teams faced challenges in using their time effectively, coaches modeled problem solving by collectively developing tools to resolve issues. For example, sending agendas ahead of time to participants provided a structured framework for guiding their time together. Analyzing student information and the discussions that followed resulted in teams creatively determining how to intervene for struggling students. From this tight process, teachers left meetings learning from each other about

techniques and strategies to use with students in their classrooms.

Many of the obstacles disappeared once teachers experienced positive results from the reform. Team members had to trust the genuineness of the established participatory structures. During the early phases of the reform, a teacher coach commented, "We have difficulty agreeing on a time to meet."

As they began to implement changes, teachers' comments and actions reflected looking forward instead of dwelling on past actions and attitudes. For example, after a staff meeting to provide feedback about a piloted mathematics assessment, some team members met for an additional hour after a scheduled meeting to create a plan to use the assessment for the foreseeable future. During a two-hour team meeting, a teacher who had expressed displeasure with the collaborative learning process in the past exclaimed, "We are having fun!" The unified-arts teachers collaborated to solve problems. They created a schoolwide positive behavior program and implemented an integrated curricula program called "Word Dance," which allowed a team of classroom teachers to meet during the school day (see box on p. 25).

The collaborative learning process continues to improve student achievement. Last year, every grade (grades 2-8) except one reported greater student growth in mathematics and language arts than the nationally normed targeted growth. The greatest result has been the improvement in student reading performance. Over a four-year period, the percentage of students in kindergarten reading on or above grade level jumped from 59% to 100%; in 1st grade, the increase was from 73% to 89%; and in 2nd grade, the increase was from 73% to 89%. Anecdotal evidence from teachers and administrators confirms the improved test scores are due to our reform efforts, specifically creating collaborative learning teams.

I learned valuable lessons for future reform initiatives with teachers. Teachers could not "do" professional learning communities. Teachers needed to develop a collaborative process and have scheduled and uninterrupted time to work together on improving teaching and learning. Routine staff reflection permitted teachers to question the initiatives, the actions, attitudes, and goals of the staff and administrators. A shared vision, as Senge (1990) wrote, transpired during the change process. Staff members were confused at first about the purpose for collaborating, and research confirms the likelihood of confusion

Acton Elementary School
Acton, Maine
Enrollment: **230**
Staff: **18**
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	**99%**
Black:	less than **1%**
Hispanic:	less than **1%**
Asian/Pacific Islander:	less than **1%**
Native American:	**0%**
Other:	**0%**

Limited English proficient: **0%**
Language spoken: **English**
Free/reduced lunch: **53%**
Special education: **19%**
Contact: **Tricia Halliday**, principal
E-mail: **thalliday@acton.k12.me.us**

existing with change. I also learned the importance of creating structures, supports, and leadership to address the roadblocks and build the capacity to sustain the change. (See box on p. 24 for several suggestions for leaders implementing new changes.)

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004) wrote that when educators begin to work collaboratively and focus on three critical questions, they begin to function as a professional learning community. They ask: "Exactly what is it we want all students to learn?" "How will we know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills?" "What happens in our school when a student does not learn?" This last question is now the focus for the teamwork that occurs and drives the ongoing work to improve student achievement. Teachers are still not doing professional learning communities, but teachers understand they "do" professional learning when collaboration is about student achievement.

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2 LANES TO LEADERSHIP

**CLASSROOM VISITS AND GRADE-LEVEL MEETINGS
BUILD TEACHER CAPACITY**

By Denise N. Morgan, Jeff L. Williams, and Katie Plesec

Like many school districts across the nation, Solon (Ohio) City Schools is committed to improving the quality and depth of student learning while simultaneously fostering the growth of leadership in the district. To achieve these goals, the district is investing in sustained professional learning designed to build leadership among faculty and to promote meaningful collaboration among teachers within a school and across the district. Two specific professional development approaches demonstrate how one district continues its journey to accomplish these goals.

QUARTERLY CLASSROOM VISITATIONS

On a cold February morning, Jessica Kobe, a first-year teacher, demonstrates a writing minilesson for her eager kindergarteners but also for a host of others. Ten teachers from within the district, her building teacher leader, several principals, the district literacy coach, and the assistant superintendant for curriculum are also present to watch her teach. As she confers with students later, some visitors lean in to listen to conversations, some examine writing charts on the walls around the room, and others have whispered conversations with young

authors working diligently at their tables. Meanwhile, another group of teacher observers moves into another classroom, this time visiting Marsha Blankson, a 1st-grade teacher with 38 years of experience. Following both observations, the visitors share their experiences with one another and meet with the observed teachers for a debriefing, where the teachers answer questions and provide further context about their lessons. Jeff Williams, the district literacy teacher leader, leads the group in a discussion, guiding teachers to consider how their observations match the school-based discussions they have been having during their own grade-level meetings. The half-day session concludes, and group members return to their respective schools, taking with them valuable insights and understandings about how the work within their own classrooms is the same throughout the district.

Teachers from the district's five schools serving grades K-6 had quarterly half-day release days in October, December,

Jeff Williams, district literacy teacher leader, and Katie Plesec, school teacher leader.

March, and May to observe in-district classroom instruction. Teachers from each grade level were divided into two smaller learning teams. For example, 4th-grade teachers from two buildings formed one team, while the remaining 4th-grade teachers formed a second team. This was done intentionally to increase the level of participation and to capitalize on cultures established in building-level teams over time. Administrators from the respective buildings also attended visitations.

During the periods teachers observed other classrooms across the district, they deepened their content understanding and expanded their pedagogical knowledge. Additionally, because classroom teachers showcased their craft by allowing others to observe them, the district was simultaneously developing the leadership of those classroom teachers who hosted visitors. Through these visitations, host teach-

ers became ad hoc district leaders as they provided other teachers with concrete models of strong practice and then co-led discussions, sharing personal stories about their literacy teaching and classrooms. During the past two years, the district has conducted more than160 K-6 classroom visitations. Every teacher has observed in eight different classrooms and nearly every teacher has hosted other district teachers.

To support this risk taking, the district established clear expectations for these visits to help teachers feel comfortable sharing their practices with one another and becoming instructional leaders in doing so. Host teachers had to have deep trust that evaluation was not at play. The district developed a protocol for observers to review at the beginning of each visitation session (see list at right). Principals, other district administrators, and teacher leaders were reminded to refrain from any evaluative comments to reinforce this important condition during the debriefing.

In most cases, teacher leaders built on existing relation-

> **VISITATION PROTOCOL**
>
> - Absolutely no talking or writing during visitations.
> - Limit your movements during visitations.
> - We can only engage in self-evaluation — how is our own practice the same or different from the host teacher's.
> - What happens in Vegas …

ships and past collaborations to approach potential host teachers to offer support and help with planning visitations. This fostered increased leadership in teacher leader roles by providing opportunities to coach and refine the instruction of host teachers. Because host teachers were vested in providing colleagues with quality experiences, they were more open to coaching or collaboration with teacher leaders. By engaging in questioning, demonstration, and guided discovery, teacher leaders built host teachers' strengths and addressed potential issues. Teacher leaders felt more effective because they could see changes that host teachers made because of coaching and were energized to replicate these efforts with other staff. After visitations, many teachers requested additional time to plan collaboratively to change existing teaching structures or to request additional visitations. Principals also reported increased fidelity in the implementation of instructional practices because of visitations. Classroom teachers, who were surveyed quarterly, reported that the visitations represented some of the most rewarding professional development of their careers.

Classroom visitations are one way that the district central office supports thoughtful, meaningful interaction and collaboration among teachers. Smaller, more frequent grade-level meetings at each building are another way that the district supports teacher growth and leadership.

MONTHLY GRADE-LEVEL MEETINGS

Beginning in September, 3rd-grade teachers meet to examine students' reading data. Led by Katie Plesec, the school's teacher leader, teachers share results from reading assessments collected earlier in the month. Together, the group examines patterns of need and collectively begins thinking about the instruction students will need to move them forward. They examine state reading indicators for first quarter within their pacing guide and plan for instruction in the upcoming weeks. Wherever data indicate that students have a need, the group teases out what it means to teach that indicator and the kinds of experiences students would need to fully understand the concept. The group plans possible minilessons for each need and creates a formative assessment so that teachers can determine how well students understand the concept. Time goes by quickly in the two-hour meeting, and before teachers leave, Plesec, acting as a facilitator, summarizes the group's accomplishments and expectations and ensures that all teachers

Solon City Schools
Solon, Ohio

Number of schools: **7**
Enrollment: **5,087**
Staff: **335** full-time teachers
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	**69.2%**
Black:	**14.1%**
Hispanic:	**1%**
Asian/Pacific Islander:	**12.3%**
Native American:	**0%**
Other:	**3.3%**

Limited English proficient: **3.9%**
Languages spoken: **40**
Free/reduced lunch: **8.3%**
Special education: **9.7%**
Contact: **Jeff L. Williams**, district literacy teacher leader
E-mail: **jeffwilliams@solonboe.org**

> Since all teacher leaders are teachers and cannot engage in evaluation, these professional development experiences and the coaching conversations within them serve as the primary vehicle for improving instruction and student learning.

have the necessary lessons and materials to carry out the collaborative plans.

As part of the teacher contract in the district, teachers engage in 20 hours of professional development per year outside the school day. The district surveyed teachers and principals to determine their needs. Because the survey results indicated unique and diverse needs across the district, the district shifted the professional development hours from district-based to building-based. Each K-6 grade-level team selected a different area of reading or writing for study, and the district created a calendar to allow teams to meet from 3 to 5 p.m. on 10 afternoons across the school year, each facilitated by the school's teacher leader. Teacher leaders worked with grade-level teams on specific needs while also sharing a consistent district message to ensure equal access to learning and best practice for all students.

To prepare for this professional development, teacher leaders planned the meetings in collaboration with the district literacy teacher leader and the assistant superintendent so that they addressed district initiatives along with specific teacher needs. In planning agendas, teacher leaders focused on two major components for each meeting: the content, or the what, and the pedagogy, or the how. While teachers had attended in-service sessions on best practices in the past, they didn't always implement the practices successfully. The grade-level meetings were an opportunity for teachers to uncover misperceptions and construct concrete examples of implementation.

The monthly grade-level meetings had a deliberate structure. In the first hour, teachers engaged in new or deeper learning about one aspect of reading or writing instruction. They read, had conversations about their thinking, and reflected on their learning and the implications for classroom instruction. The meetings included adequate time for talk and reflection because "human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change," (Wheatley, 2002, p. 3). During the second hour, teachers planned collaboratively around a particular student performance indicator. This planning time was invaluable. By delving into the meaning of a particular performance indicator, teachers often realized that their instruction had been about only one aspect of the indicator, and they logically concluded that the neglected part of the indicator needed emphasis. Once teachers agreed upon

these important distinctions, they also became clearer on how to measure student progress, often creating common formative assessment items that were open-ended enough to allow for variety in materials. This collaboration fostered shared leadership as team members realized that they each had specialized content knowledge and instructional strategies to share, which, in turn, built interdependence. As one teacher commented:

"I believe the grade-level meetings are a unique avenue for teachers to grow and learn. We have time to think critically about writing or reading and discuss effective researched-based techniques to move all of our children forward. We try those techniques and decide what works and what may not be the best fit for our students. The grade-level meetings offer a regular time where we can be reflective as individuals and as a collaborative learning team."

Grade-level meetings are an effective vehicle to improve classroom instruction because they promote open conversations about the relationship between teaching and student learning. Because the teacher leader works at a particular school, carryover conversations into the next day or week are common. There is no expert coming in, sharing ideas, and leaving without providing follow-up support. Instead, teachers become experts for one another as they regularly work to offer thoughtful instruction to their students.

A DISTRICTWIDE VISION

Grade-level meetings and classroom visitations are part of the district's two-pronged approach to developing leadership and fostering collaboration within the district. Over the past few years, Solon's district leaders have worked to change organizational structures to promote shared leadership among faculty. They established teacher leader positions — teachers who serve as instructional coaches in individual schools. The district's intent was to create these roles to honor Solon's commitment to provide instructional support closest to the point of implementation — individual teacher's classrooms. All teacher leaders were former classroom teachers who had demonstrated high levels of instructional success in the classroom, had content expertise, and had demonstrated leadership skills. Each K-4 building has one teacher leader and the 5-6 building has two. Central office also wanted to provide time for professional learning and involve faculty in designing and implementing professional development in the district, and thus developed the plan for quarterly classroom visitations and monthly grade-level meetings. Since all teacher leaders are teachers and cannot engage in evaluation, these professional development experiences and the coaching conversations within them serve as the primary vehicle for improving instruction and student learning.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Solon's central office believes its decision to develop the leadership capacity of teacher leaders who are housed in individual schools and who support their colleagues' growth as leaders is moving the district forward. This restructuring moves the work of professional learning away from the central office and relies more on the capacity of teacher leaders and teachers in the district to develop and support learning for one another around district expectations and structures. Solon City Schools is developing instructional leaders who do more than smile and wave at one another in passing (Roy, 2009). And the district's school improvement efforts are paying off for students: Solon City Schools' performance index score has improved each year, ranking it as one of the top two districts of Ohio's 611 districts for the past several years.

In most districts, teacher knowledge and talents remain untapped (Barth, 2001; Lambert, 2002; Sparks, 2002). Yet leadership is an essential aspect of an educator's life (Lambert, 2002, p. 38). To honor this essential need, Solon turned to its teachers to share responsibility and leadership for the direction of the district. In reflecting upon this shift, assistant superintendent Debbie Siegel says, "For us, it is about all children having access to high-quality instruction every day. Such a commitment is monumental and requires synchronized efforts and resources. We needed to build a culture of shared leadership and collaboration in order to realize our goal. And, although we have seen success in many ways with our endeavors, our learning culture is always evolving and is something we continue to work at every day."

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THE WAY UP, DOWN UNDER

INNOVATIONS SHAPE LEARNING AT SCIENCE AND MATH SCHOOL

By Kerry Bissaker, Jim Davies, and Jayne Heath

Professor John Rice, a pioneer of the Australian Science and Mathematics School (ASMS), posed the question: "How does teaching and learning in schools today speak to students about satellite navigation, biomimetics, laser tweezers, intelligent polymers, quantum computers, or artificial photosynthesis?" He recognized that schools' curricula were at odds with the kind of science and mathematics driving the new economy. In addition to curriculum that lacked relevance to contemporary life, negative student attitudes and a shortage of qualified science and mathematics teachers were creating a crisis in the field that required a total transformation of existing models of senior science and mathematics education (Masters, 2006; Tytler, 2007).

In 2002, a partnership between the South Australian Department of Education and Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, responded to the crisis by building a purpose-designed school on the university's grounds to provide a state-of-the-art learning environment. The mission of the school was to re-engage senior secondary school students in the disciplines of science and mathematics through innovative and authentic curriculum, pedagogies that promoted group inquiry, and self-directed learning

Photos by SOUTH AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Jim Davies is interviewed by students Victoria Haar and Shaun Plumtree at Australian Science and Mathematics School.

and capabilities to engage with and contribute to the 21st-century world.

The journey of transformation began with generating contextual and organizational conditions that prioritized teacher learning. The school's vision to provide leader-

ship of innovation and reformed science and mathematics teaching and learning was based on the recognition that students' learning environment would be derived from, and a reflection of, teachers' learning environment. To create such an environment, the school's founders created a professional learning strategy built around a license to innovate, powerful and sustained professional partnerships, interdisciplinary teams of teachers, multidimensional leadership, and a constant focus on what it means to be a learner in the 21st century.

For seven years, university researchers and school leaders tracked teachers' professional learning journeys in an environment that recognized they were the key to successful transformation. Their stories helped to identify which factors they perceived made a significant difference to their learning and enhanced outcomes for students. A major outcome was the recognition that different teachers needed different learning opportunities, and this was pos-

sible when the school's conditions and resources aligned with specific teacher needs. The school often intentionally created the enabling conditions, for example, by partnering university scientists with teachers to develop innovative curriculum. At other times, teachers' learning occurred in incidental ways as an outcome of the open space learning environment and collaborative learning culture that developed in the school.

INTENTIONAL LEARNING AS AN OUTCOME OF PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

"It's the structures that aren't in place. You know you don't have a textbook to work with, you do not have a program to follow. You've got to start from scratch again, and as soon as you do that, then you get the freedom to do different things. We managed this because we worked in teams." — *ASMS teacher*

Keeping teachers in touch with developments in sci-

Australian Science and Mathematics School in Adelaide provides a state-of-the-art learning environment.

"This school is not new for the sake of being new but new because it matters."

— *Jim Davies*

ence was essential to their work at the school. Partnering teachers with scientists from the university provided opportunities for teachers to develop new content knowledge and insight into the changing ways scientists work. The emergence of cross-discipline fields of science such as nanoscience and biotechnology involves teams with discipline expertise in physics, biology, and chemistry. The school mirrored this model through cross-discipline teaching teams planning and teaching semester-long courses referred to as the central studies curriculum. The diagram below illustrates how educators interacted. The school also redesigned students' schedules so they had extended learning sessions around topical themes, such as sustainable futures and biotechnology. The thoughtfully designed model re-engaged teachers as well. One teacher noted:

> "I felt so enthused by working with others in cross-discipline ways and seeing how the connections between disciplines generated some fantastic learning opportunities for students. This is the kind of science teaching I had wanted to be involved in, but it wasn't possible in the way other schools are structured."

University academics supported the teaching teams, and the cross-discipline knowledge at the weekly planning sessions created rich dialogue and many challenges. Creative endeavour and innovation emerges when people interact, share ideas, argue points of view, challenge orthodoxy, and shape each other's thinking. University staff brought deep content knowledge of the new sciences, while teachers contributed knowledge of adolescent learners and the state's requirement for achieving the standards required for high school completion. The lively curriculum writing sessions were built on respect for team members' content and pedagogical knowledge and a strong desire to shape innovative learning opportunities for students.

Beyond weekly curriculum planning meetings, university academics were also involved in designing and delivering eight-week modules in areas such as cryptography, robotics, and politics, oil, and terror. These modules were delivered as 100-minute weekly sessions, and teachers participated along with the students. This gave students direct access to university scientists and mathematics and was also designed to provide teachers with rich professional learning. An outcome of the model was that much of the content of the university modules was ultimately embedded in the central studies courses and taught by the teachers. The university academics then developed new modules, and the

> **"It's the environment. I haven't really invited other teachers into my classroom in the past, so even though I had good relationships with them, we didn't look towards team teaching and really working together. It just seems the natural thing to do here."**
>
> — ASMS teacher

cycle of teacher learning and the generation of new curriculum possibilities were sustained over time.

One teacher reflected on the outcome of the university modules experience and highlighted that they were not only opportunities to learn about new content but provided time to reflect on the pedagogical practices as well:

> "The university modules have been of interest to me. Initially, I wondered whether they would seem like elective programs in other schools and that the students would not take them that seriously and that I might even have time off, too. They proved to be very different. The university staff were keen to put on a good show and so there were lots of interesting things for the students to engage in. Some were more popular than others, and, at times, I think this had more to do with the teaching styles rather than the content, but it certainly highlighted to me the power of good teaching."

Teachers and academics intentionally focused on good teaching through constant attention to what it means to be a successful learner in the 21st century. University academics also specialized in teaching and learning and partnered with teachers around this topic. Jayne Heath, assistant principal in charge of professional learning, ensured that teachers engaged in action research teams in collaboration with academics to reflect on pedagogical practices that would support students to become successful 21st-century citizens. She said:

> "We provided a lot of time for teams to work on central studies development, but we also needed to keep our underpinning principles about effective learning in the forefront of everyone's mind — meta-cognition and demonstration of learning

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM MODEL
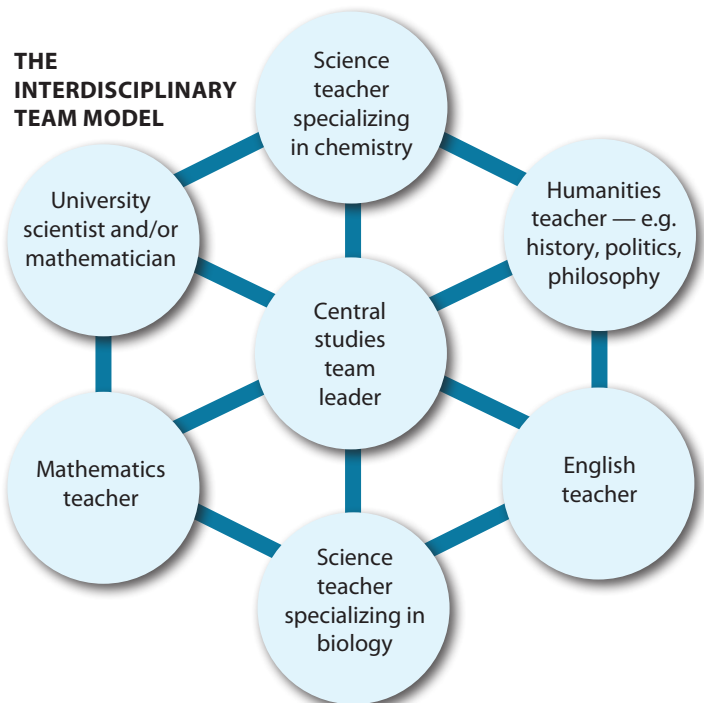
in a variety of ways, just to name a couple. Teachers can get all bound up in 'what lesson am I teaching tomorrow?' We wanted to challenge people to think about the key features of our school — understanding what effective learning and teaching looks like."

Action research teams supported teachers' examining and reflecting on practice. The teachers' most important question — "What did I do that helped students learn?" — drove the examination of practice. Such questions didn't inform a formal evaluation of a teacher's practice but were a means of establishing a dialogue between teacher and student. Teachers were encouraged to view students as their professional partners as well. Teacher-student dialogue created opportunity for teachers to reflect on practice and for student to reflect on learning. The process created mutual understanding that was at the heart of the teacher-student relationship. One teacher reflected:

"I've learned to listen to the students. Collaboration was something I had given lip service to in the past, but I really understand the power of it now, between teachers, students and teachers learning with and from students and other teachers."

The box above illustrates the transformation of teacher and student roles.

INCIDENTAL LEARNING AS AN OUTCOME OF THE PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

"I think this building has been one of the biggest contributors to my learning purely because you can't escape. It's the open nature. I can just sit at my desk, and someone will walk past and I'll think, 'What's he doing? Oh, that is interesting. I never thought about doing it like that'— even if it's just a small idea or activity."

— *ASMS teacher*

As a key design element of the school, teachers were not tucked away in staff rooms or offices. Their workstations were part of the open space learning commons, and teaching was occurring around them when they had nonteaching time. Teaching practice became completely deprivatized. Because teachers had worked in curriculum design teams, they could observe each other teaching material that they may have designed. Teachers were often surprised by how others interpreted their ideas, and many highly experienced teachers gained significant insight into their teaching practices through reflecting with colleagues on teaching sessions. A teacher's story encapsulates the powerful outcomes of learning with and from peers in incidental ways.

"He [a teaching colleague] was impressed by my mathematics and curriculum designs, and I was impressed by his teaching. I'd watch him work with students and thought, 'This is the essence of constructivism. What is he doing that feels different?' We'd talk about that. He encouraged me to be less of a control freak, without using those words. I think as a team we achieved

PEDAGOGICAL SHIFTS	
Teacher-directed ➔	**Student-directed**
Teacher	Teacher
• Knows. • Tells. • Examines.	• Facilitates learning. • Coaches. • Challenges. • Verifies learning.
Student	Student
• Boundaries to learning defined for student. • Learning quantified by others.	• No boundaries to learning. • Demonstrates learning — verified by others.

some significant shifts in the way we taught, and the students' reactions were interesting. I don't know whether it's because I've been around for too long, but in any school I have every been in, I've always heard kids say, 'Oh, no, not maths again.' You don't hear it here because of what we do, whether it's the maths or the teaching. Probably both, but kids seem to do better when they connect with teachers."

The teacher acknowledged the power of positive student-teacher relationships, but his story also captures the power of trusting teacher relationships that enabled colleagues to constantly provide critical and constructive feedback to each other. Working with teacher colleagues became a primary form of professional learning embedded in the daily work of the school. The plan for teachers to work together in teams provided the foundation for building relationships, respect, and knowledge, while the nature of the physical and cultural environment that emerged over time generated easily accessible and powerful incidental teacher learning opportunities.

> **"My learning has been supported by participatory observation of learning in action. As a mentor teacher, I learn and help other teachers to learn. It's an ongoing cycle."**
>
> — *ASMS teacher*

LEARNING AS AN OUTCOME OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL LEADERSHIP

"There is an important culture here. Learning is an expectation, and everyone is a leader of learning. That, in itself, is fundamental because what it provides opportunity to search for new ideas and not be constrained by seeing the world as being known or as black-and-white."

— *ASMS teacher*

Quality leadership is an essential ingredient in all transformative activity, and this was fundamental at the Australian Science and Mathematics School. School leaders continually reinforced a message to all teachers in the school that profes-

sional learning was their most important work priority. The principal of the school commented:

"It's critical that the school as a whole maintains a high profile and professional learning approach, a learning culture that is articulated frequently by its leaders, and that these leaders show that they value learning in everything that they do, and that not engaging in that is not acceptable as a professional. It's not about toeing the line. It's about a belief that when visitors come to our school and interact with us about our knowledge and professionalism or ask us questions that challenge us, we can all show that, even if we don't have the answers, it's evident we have thought very deeply about and understand what it means to be an effective teacher and a learner. Getting to this stage requires an ongoing belief and valuing of professional learning by the leadership team."

Defining and shaping leadership was a significant aspect of the school's professional learning journey, and the leaders of the school shaped their thinking practices around Nelson Mandela's perceptive understanding that "leadership is about liberating cleverness." Its evolution at the school involved the leadership team in creating circumstances where all teachers accepted responsibility to contribute as leaders through their ideas and contribution to others' learning. Leadership was multidimensional and collaborative; it ultimately generated a respectfulness and recognition of others' cleverness. Through the many intentional and incidental learning opportunities provided by the school, teachers began to redefine their sense of professional identity. One teacher commented:

This article is based in part on Kerry Bissaker's 2010 doctoral thesis entitled "The processes and outcomes of professional learning in an innovative school: The construction of an explanatory model."

"I came to the school as a teacher of visual literacy but now view myself as a supporter of innovations in science and mathematics teaching. What I look for in professional learning now is peers examining the work we've done in curriculum and information and communications technology to improve my practice. This can all happen within the school because we are developing our own areas of expertise and sharing them."

Leadership emerged as powerful and pervasive, a joint endeavor to achieving the vision of truly transforming senior secondary science and mathematics. As one teacher noted:

"Change is more rapid and ongoing when there is support for these beliefs from leadership. I am also able to operate with a high degree of autonomy and be recognized as a professional,

Andrew Downing, professor of electronics and engineering, describes a stepper motor to students Kane Elson and Becky Hartman at Australian Science and Mathematics School.

able to make good decisions in relation to my sphere of control."

The professional learning journey for all members of the school continues and shapes and reshapes experiences for teachers and students.

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A monk lights incense during a traditional Marchang ceremony at Wangduechhoeling Lower Secondary School in Bumthang, Bhutan. The ceremony at the beginning of the teacher workshop is to secure blessings and remove obstacles for a successful outcome.

LESSONS
from BHUTAN

EMBRACE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES TO EFFECT CHANGE

By Laurie Levine, Alison Telsey, and Kim McCormack

Nestled in the Himalayan Mountains, Bhutan, a Buddhist country, is one of the most isolated nations in the world. After spending a month there, we all agreed it deserved its title of "The Last Shangri-La." Our team of professional development specialists spent the summer of 2010 providing professional development in the basic principles of special education to teachers, administrators, and government officials. At the end of our visit, we left with a new appreciation of the need for all professional developers to become more aware of cultural differences both overt and subtle. In the process, we sharpened our skills, increased our cultural sensitivities, and came back to the United States as more effective and more broadly engaged staff developers.

Before the Special Education Project began in Bhutan, there were limited services for children with disabilities, with the exception of the blind and deaf population. Our challenge was formidable: How do we train teachers and administrators to expand special education in a country with few services, a lack of required resource materials, and a dearth of basic infrastructure?

BACKGROUND

The Special Education Project was launched by an American family, Ruedi and Alix Laager. They are raising a child with special needs and have a long-standing relationship with the people of Bhutan. Thanks to their interest and generosity, combined with a request for assistance from the Bhutanese government, the project began in 2008. The Laagers forged a working collaboration with the Bhutan Foundation, the Ministry of Education, and the Youth Development Fund. The family also formed a U.S. advisory committee to assist in further developing special education priorities and suggested practices. Since the project's inception, there have been many activities to promote special education, including visits from Bhutanese officials to the U.S. to observe special education programs, training and on-site coaching by volunteers, and guidance in developing special education policies. During the summer of 2010, our team provided a three-day workshop for teachers, principals, and officials on best practices, a two-day stakeholders meeting with representatives from the government and nonprofit organizations, and on-site coaching in two of the designated pilot schools. The Bhutanese have welcomed and embraced the expertise and technical assistance from the American specialists and are committed to continue working together.

> **We quickly learned that we needed to revise and adapt our styles to be culturally responsive.**

PRINCIPLES OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

As we began to do our work in the country, we realized that the principles of staff development that guide our work in America also apply to Bhutan. One of the most important principles of effective professional develop-

ment, engaging the learner, was critical for Bhutanese educators. Similar to their American counterparts, Bhutan's teachers and administrators enjoyed hands-on learning strategies that encouraged active participation and the opportunity to dialogue with each other (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). It was particularly important for us to engage the Bhutanese in active learning for several reasons. Initially, teachers and administrators were reluctant to ask questions. In Bhutan, we were considered the "experts from the U.S." Consequently, there

> **We came to realize that, in Bhutan, we were both teachers and learners. The overall experience encouraged us to be reflective in our work, resulting in tremendous growth professionally and personally.**

was a cultural value placed on maintaining a certain level of reservation and quiet respect. The Bhutanese did not feel comfortable challenging the "experts," and their willingness to speak out publicly in a large group was limited. However, when we changed the workshop format to include activities that fostered interaction and small-group discussion, the level of participation changed dramatically. The strategies we modeled in learning sessions were techniques for teachers to incorporate into future lessons to engage and reach all learners. The favorite culminating activity introduced by our team was the "aha" strategy. The activity required participants to write a significant summary point that resonated with them and then to share their "aha" with at least five others. Audience members had an opportunity to get up and move, reflect upon their own learning, and discuss important points with their colleagues. We became the "aha" professionals from America.

Additional principles of adult learning common to both cultures included the need to make connections and practice new learning (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998). Overall, the Bhutanese educators needed to know why presenters were highlighting certain information and were generally

Educators in Bhutan involved with the 2010 training in Thimphu, Bhutan, include (front row, from left) Kristin Berman, Alison Telsey, Laurie Levine, Chimi Lhamo, Kim McCormack, and (back row, from left), Jigme Dorji, Sangay Lhamo, and Yoten (no second name).

more enthusiastic when facilitators made connections explicit. Most workshop participants retained and applied new learning when they were provided opportunities to see strategies modeled, followed by time to practice in small groups (Mitchell, Hoyle, & Martin, 1993). The Bhutanese educators responded very positively when we did a simulation of a testing session and then gave them time to test each other using a learning disabilities screening tool. Providing ample opportunities for Bhutanese educators to process, reflect, and question enabled them to integrate new information, assimilate it, and see the relevance to their work.

As professional developers, we were delighted that certain principles of effective professional development worked successfully with participants from diverse backgrounds. However, the differences we encountered in our work in Bhutan challenged us professionally. We quickly learned that we needed to revise and adapt our styles to be culturally responsive. We came to realize that, in Bhutan, we were both teachers and learners. The overall experience encouraged us to be reflective in our work, resulting in tremendous growth professionally and personally.

UNIQUENESS OF THE AUDIENCE

The Bhutanese audience was quite different from the typical American audience. English is their language of instruction and Dzongkha (of Tibetan origin) is their national language, with many other dialects spoken throughout the country. Therefore, as presenters, we needed to be conscious of presenting information to English language learners incorporating familiar, basic vocabulary. More often than we had initially anticipated, we needed to scaffold the information and use visuals to present difficult concepts. For example, during the keynote address and other PowerPoint presentations, we used images and universal symbols to highlight key points. Pairing the visual with the oral presentation seemed to enhance meaning and drive home major concepts. In addition, the audience needed information presented in a sequential manner with extra time to process and reflect. Repetition of key ideas was essential to understanding. We quickly recognized that we prepared much more material than we were able to address in the time allotted, and we often needed to abandon our original plans. Flexibility was key, and we had to abandon the notion that more was better. Over time, we began to acknowledge that the workshops were not designed solely to impart our professional agenda, but rather to know our audience and empower them to make changes that would benefit their special education children. Throughout the workshops, we shared how we adapted our materials and presentation to meet participants' needs. As a result, teachers left the workshop more confident in their abilities to be flexible and adapt their curriculum to accommodate students with a range of abilities.

The role of ritual and tradition took on a different meaning in Bhutan. Before most workshops, there was an opening religious "Marchang" ceremony at which monks would light

Teachers and administrators attend a professional development workshop in Bhutan. Initially, participants were reluctant to ask questions.

incense, make offerings, and recite Buddhist prayers to welcome participants. Following this ceremony, high-ranking government and educational leaders gave opening speeches. As Americans, we didn't understand the need to spend so much time on ceremonies because it conflicted with our goal-oriented, time-efficient American values. Although we never fully comprehended the ceremonies' symbolic importance, the longer we were in Bhutan, the more we began to acknowledge and respect their importance to the Bhutanese. The experience provided us an opportunity to recognize that people are not one-dimensional. As professional developers from a different culture, we needed to integrate the nonprofessional and professional self to encourage buy-in by our participants and to create trusting relationships. When we embraced Bhutanese traditions, the audience became more comfortable and communicative. As a consequence of our acceptance and appreciation of their ceremonies, the Bhutanese felt valued, and we were able to mobilize their hearts and minds to enhance learning (Wheatley & Frieze, 2011).

FORGING RELATIONSHIPS

An additional cultural difference was the bonding and friendship among school personnel. In Bhutan, the team of teachers and administrators traveled together to the workshop and stayed in a guest house. They slept five to six in a room, brought cooking supplies from home to cook communal meals for the three days, and spent free time visiting important ritual sites. They used the conference as an opportunity to fortify relationships to work better as teams and support each other in their work at the schools. All of their future action plans included mandatory turnkey training so that teachers who did not attend the workshops would learn from their peers. The Bhutanese workshop participants were engaged in a learning community, and therefore were in a good position to bring positive change to their schools. By contrast, it has been our experience in the U.S. that principals do not usually accompany teachers attending workshops or conferences. Teachers from the U.S. often feel frustrated because their administrators are not hearing the same information, resulting in a lack of leadership to support future change. It was an important reminder that we need to be more proactive in the U.S. in assuring that administrators and faculty attend workshops together to ensure positive outcomes for students.
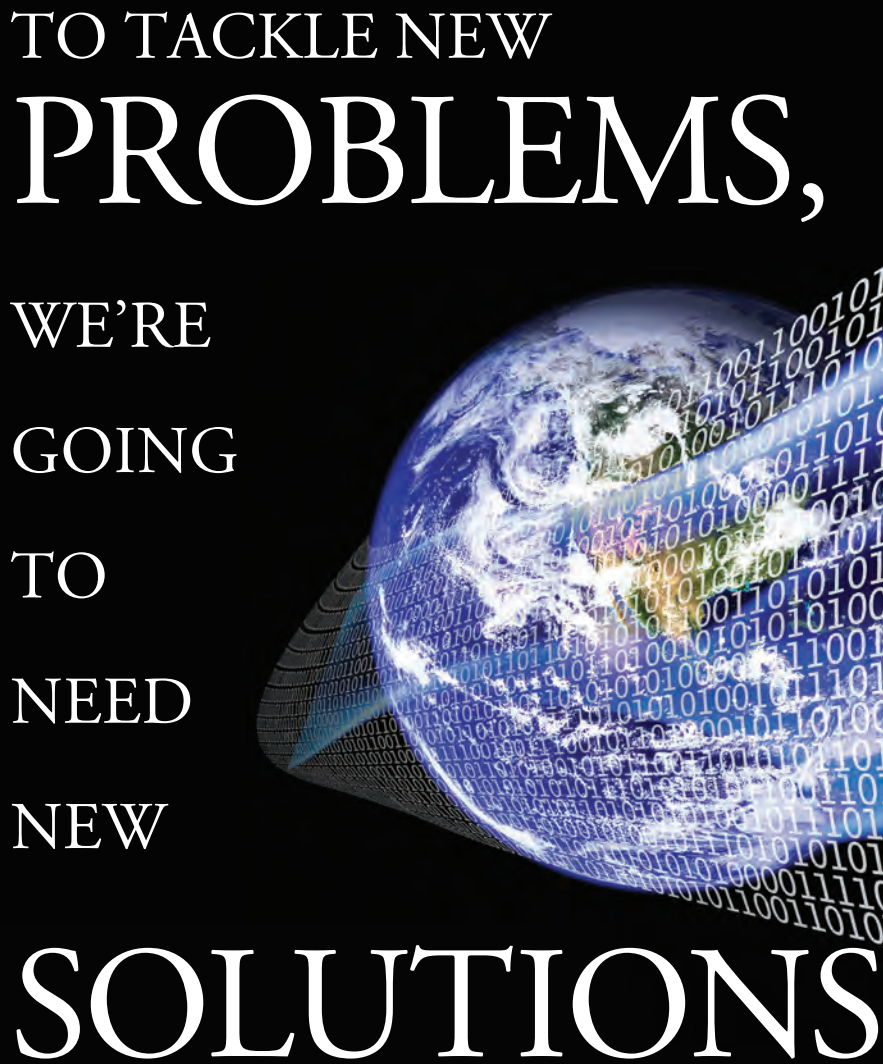
> **Although we never fully comprehended the ceremonies' symbolic importance, the longer we were in Bhutan, the more we began to acknowledge and respect their importance to the Bhutanese.**

WHAT WE LEARNED AND HOW WE CHANGED

After spending the summer training teachers in a vastly different and unique culture, we asked ourselves, "What were the lessons we learned to make us more effective professional

TO TACKLE NEW
PROBLEMS,
WE'RE
GOING
TO
NEED
NEW
SOLUTIONS

By Robert Davidovich

More and more, the educators I work with recognize that schools will need to become different, not just better, to help students meet the challenges of the future. These educators are trying to respond to an imperative to innovate as well as improve. The depth of change required to move from creating improvement to fostering innovation is great. District leaders have found that a change in perspective about professional learning can help their schools shift the focus from improvement to innovation. The good news is that a similar shift already happening in our daily lives can guide us all. A synergistic combination of three concepts — information, identity, and networked relationships — is reshaping how things get done today. A better understanding of the dynamics created by these concepts can have a profound impact on transforming professional learning and, as a result, student achievement.

EVOLUTION OF NEEDS

Many educators I speak with understand that the Industrial Age model of schooling is not well-suited to today's challenges. The model's intent was to prepare students for a very structured work environment that didn't necessarily call for independent thinking or complex behavior. Today's workplaces and employers value people with abilities to solve complex problems, adapt their learning to untested situations, and collaborate productively with others. This need creates an increasing sense of urgency to transform our current design of schooling to better meet 21st-century demands. As we consider how to nurture these characteristics in students, shouldn't we also expect our system to foster the same for its professionals?

Across the country, districts are trying new education approaches to help students be better prepared. These are thoughtful, well-intended attempts to respond to the challenges all schools face. Some of them will make a difference for some students. However, the aim of transformation and innovation is not just to do something new. Pockets of new things will not change the fundamental thinking at the root of our system. The true outcome of transformation and innovation is to build the capacity to do things in new ways — the capacity for ongoing, adaptive change.

THE CHALLENGE

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) describe two categories of challenges that leaders face: technical problems and adaptive challenges. To solve technical problems, people apply current knowledge to develop solutions. In schools, for example, educators may look to apply what are termed "best practices." In these circumstances, educators attempt to understand and then apply someone's current knowledge to their specific context or challenge. In reporting on recent allocations of the Investing in Innovation grants, McNeil (2010) states that the "U.S. Department of Education decided to invest heavily in big-name teacher-training and school turnaround organizations" (p.1). Initiatives based on a belief that a proven procedure exists and that others can learn to apply that procedure are approaching a situation as a technical problem.

Adaptive challenges are those where someone learns or creates a new strategy for solving the problem. For these challenges, people have to create the knowledge for how to solve them while they are working on them. For example, if we want to assess students' abilities to exercise sound reasoning in an authentic performance that requires syn-

thesizing learning across disciplines, there may be no expert available to tell us how to do it — we need to figure it out as we go. Transforming our design of schooling from the Industrial Age model to one suited for 21st-century needs creates challenges without proven solutions. This means many of the challenges schools face today are adaptive challenges.

Adaptive challenges open the door to transformation. To solve them, tried-and-true approaches must give way to new, untested approaches. Understanding the differences between technical problems and adaptive challenges is critical for today's leaders. As Heifetz and Linsky (2002) warn, "The single most common source of leadership failure we've been able to identify — in politics, community life, business, or the nonprofit sector — is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems" (p.14).

In the past, our schools relied on school district leaders to create meaning for the changes in our world and then to develop action plans and drive implementation down the organization. This approach will not help educators address adaptive challenges. To face adaptive challenges, all educators in a school or district will need to be alert to the need for responsive change and to fully internalize the context of a school system's work with students so that they can address the challenges in front of them. Then they will be responsible for helping the whole system learn what they have learned. Addressing adaptive challenges is the role that professional learning must fill in our schools. It is the best hope we have for transformation.

How does this shift in thinking happen? Education leaders can begin by understanding the combination of information, identity, and networked relationships driving the world today. The abundance of these elements is causing a global shift from leader-centric organizations to idea-centric organizations. The potential for the future of professional learning is to understand this shift and use it to the advantage of adult and student learning.

INFORMATION, IDENTITY, NETWORKED RELATIONSHIPS

Thanks to continuing advances in technology, infor-

A combination of three concepts — information, identity, and networked relationships — is reshaping how things get done, says education consultant Robert Davidovich.

mation is available in abundant amounts and widely accessible. Information is power — once people have access to it, they are free to make informed decisions in their best interests. People use this information to assist with all kinds of personal decisions and enhance relationships. Personal access to unfiltered information is having a profound impact on how things get done, from socializing to entertainment to instant access to news to shopping to learning to political upheaval.

People process information through their identity or sense of self. They notice and connect with information that supports who they are: the music they like, the causes they champion, their pets and hobbies, and every other facet of their lives. In this age, who we are is increasingly defined by our interests and the associations we make because of them. Our identity is enhanced by the information we access.

> **The combination of information, shared identity, and networked relationships has become the most potent form of organizing in the world today.**

Because of technology, people have the ability to form broad networks with others who are like-minded. In the past, neighborhoods often defined our identity. Today, our identity defines whom we connect with — we find our "neighbors" by sharing common concerns with others across the globe. People find information of importance to them, react to it, share it with others, and act collectively. They form relationships around information as they participate in social networks such as Twitter and Facebook and through user-created content such as blogs and wikis. Technology gives people the ability to form relationships with like-minded people all over the world.

The combination of information, shared identity, and networked relationships has become the most potent form of organizing in the world today. This combination fuels open-source collaboration, political action, and disaster relief efforts, and can also help to keep public figures honest, create overnight business successes or failures, and fuel terror networks. The world organizes more around ideas than it does around formal leaders. As evidence of this paradigm shift, consider that our country is involved in an ongoing war, not against countries but against ideology. Or consider that much recent political fervor comes from essentially leaderless, networked, grassroots efforts such as the Tea Party movement or MoveOn.org.

Creating the conditions for professional learning to focus on adaptive challenges is making a difference for student learning in the schools where I work. There, leaders have begun to foster innovation by leveraging the power of information, identity, and networked relationships to their advantage. Following are three shifts that they are making to create this leverage.

CHALLENGES

To shift professional learning toward addressing adaptive challenges:

1. People need more unfiltered information as soon as it is available and less groomed information disseminated on a need-to-know basis.

In the past, those at the top of an organization shaped and processed information before they passed it along on a need-to-know basis. To meet today's challenges, leaders are working to increase the information flowing through their organization. Additionally, they are trusting people to process raw forms of information of all types — information about student learning, trends that affect what students will need to learn for the future, and impending economic difficulties. They create the expectation that all educators, not just those at the top of the organization, interact with information to determine its meaning in reference to the context of their shared purpose. They find that when information flows more freely through their school or district, many eyes and ears interact with it and everyone involved creates new perspectives. From that, educators generate new understanding about what the information means for accomplishing shared goals.

2. People need more context information and fewer directives.

Educators create and understand their organizational identity when they work within a context of well-articulated, commonly shared purposes and principles. Leaders in the districts I work with are diligent in ensuring that the identity of their district or school lives in the hearts and minds of people, rather than just being posted on a wall. Just like online communities, these schools' identities are creating the context for processing information to solve adaptive challenges.

Transformation comes when people work together to address challenges and share their learning in the process. These leaders find that people are more committed and more inclined to do meaningful work when they understand a clear context and have the latitude to learn and make decisions within that context. We never know where the next great innovation will come from, but it is far more likely to come from people freed to do meaningful work within a commonly shared purpose than it is from a mandate or directive.

3. People need more opportunities to network across boundaries with those who share their interests and fewer structured, formal meetings.

The vision for professional learning must encourage conditions where networks of relationships can form around common interests. Leaders who support transformational approaches encourage networks that do more than just share practice; they encourage networks that create the next teaching and learning innovations. Creating rigid structures to organize all of a school's work efforts is helpful for consistency and for maintaining the status quo, but such rigidity extinguishes innovation. Transformational leaders provide people with the flexibility to

interact with others and organize around their strengths. They allow people the freedom to take on new challenges and projects they feel passionate about. They also give people from all over their school the chance to interact with others they might otherwise never talk to, creating the potential for new sparks of innovation in every interaction. These leaders are finding that people can often self-organize into more highly productive relationships with a greater sense of commitment to outcomes than the work teams they try to orchestrate.

Forces within and beyond our schools are creating expectations for transformation to encourage 21st-century learners. To meet such expectations, we first need to create the conditions that compel professionals to become 21st-century learners themselves. Aligning our thinking about professional learning to create an understanding of forces that are changing our daily lives will help schools foster innovation as well as improvement.

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Lessons from Bhutan

Continued from p. 41

developers?" In many ways, the experience reinforced what we already knew about best practices in staff development. Knowing your audience, incorporating hands-on activities that engage the adult learner, using modeling and coaching, and translating theory into practice will continue to be critical elements in our work with all educators. As part of our professional growth, we also gained an understanding of being culturally responsive. It is not enough to be aware of cultural differences; we need to embrace those differences to become change agents. In Bhutan, it was incumbent upon us to facilitate the process of "Bhutanizing" American special education practices and processes. We recognized the importance of planning with the input of key stakeholders as well as the need for trust and buy-in from key decision makers. We also affirmed that, as staff developers, we could provide valuable technical assistance and information. Ultimately, however, we must assist any audience to adapt these concepts to their own cultural context. Throughout our experience, we reinforced our belief that cultural differences exist in all environments; they are not exclusive to different countries. They reveal themselves school to school and classroom to classroom.

What we learned professionally was important; however, the experience also changed us personally. Like their American counterparts, Bhutanese teachers are passionate about and dedicated to their craft. However, the Bhutanese teachers we worked with had an inner peacefulness and calm that we often do not see in America. We left Bhutan with a renewed commitment to re-establish balance in our own lives. Given our fast-paced American society and our multifaceted roles in life, we need to remember to slow down. By listening more effectively and being more present in the moment, we believe we will be more sensitive to our audiences' needs, more focused in our presentations, and overall, more effective staff developers.

In this age of Race to the Top accountability, we want to share this thought from the Bhutanese Minister of Education: As a nation, we need to have high expectations for all children, but we should never forget the soul of the child. For the four professional development specialists from the U.S., this was our "aha" moment.

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THINK OUTSIDE THE CLOCK

PLANNERS LINK AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS TO CLASSROOM CURRICULUM

By the staff of The Wallace Foundation

For most teachers and parents, education prime time takes place in the weekday hours between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. from roughly Labor Day to Memorial Day. But in recent years, growing numbers of policy makers, city officials, and educators have been eyeing the expanse of time outside these temporal borders and asking a simple question: What can communities do to help children grow and learn after the school bell rings?

The concern is that too many children and teens, especially the poor, are left to their own devices after school and over the summer. The result is long hours filled, at best, with idleness and boredom, and at worst with risky behavior. What's needed, say those focusing on out-of-school time, is a way to allow poor children to occupy these hours with the types of learning opportunities and wholesome experiences that other children take for granted, from the arts to sports to extra academic help.

In short, there's a movement in the United States to make good after-school and summer programs available to those who need them most. "Kids need to have safe spaces," says Paige Ponder, acting head of the Office of Student Support and Engagement, which oversees out-of-school time programs enrolling 92,000 children and teens in the Chicago Public Schools. "They need productive relationships with adults, opportunities to do and learn things in a way that are not typical within the school day, and time just to hang out in a safe and productive environment."

WHY EDUCATORS SHOULD CARE

Why should this be of note to teachers, administrators, and those who lead professional learning — a group that already has a lot to think about?

Perhaps most important is growing recognition that good out-of-school time is good for children. These are hours when children can pursue worthwhile endeavors not covered in the school curriculum, develop new skills, reinforce classroom lessons, and mature in healthy ways. "Recent studies indicate that high-quality, well-managed and structured out-of-school time opportunities can help youth develop critical academic, social, and emotional attributes and skills, especially if offered consistently and persistently over time," said a recent RAND Corporation report commissioned by The Wallace Foundation (McCombs, Bodilly, et al., 2010).

Educators have a closer-to-home reason for paying attention to out-of-school time, too: Carefully crafted after-school and summer programs could play a role in solving vexing education problems facing city youth. In Chicago, for example, Ponder is looking at after-school programs as a strategy in the effort to decrease the school dropout rate. "We don't want out-of-school time to be a couple more hours of the same thing students have been doing all day," she says. "But it if feels really different from what they have been doing all day, you can re-engage their brains and get them enthusiastic again."

There's a practical consideration, too. Educators could well be bumping into out-of-school time programs in the places where they work. School buildings are often the nerve center of after-school and summer activity, with public school classrooms, auditoriums, gymnasiums, and cafeterias serving as the settings for everything from chess matches and play rehearsals to basketball practice, homework help, and snack time. Furthermore, school-day staff members, including faculty, can be important figures in out-of-school time. Sometimes, program organizers turn to teachers to help them get the word out about their offerings, as was the case in Washington, D.C., after market research there revealed that teachers are major influences on young teens (The Wallace Foundation, 2008). And researchers in New York City found that a group of after-school programs that employed a master teacher or education specialist had a higher attendance rate than similar programs without these positions (Russell, et al., 2010; see box at right).

In addition, parents want high-quality after-school and summer programs, and families in which the need is especially great are seeking programs with an academic bent. One survey found that more than half of lower-income (52%) and minority (56%) parents would go out of their way to find an after-school program that set aside time for their children to do homework in a supervised setting. This was almost double the percentages for white and higher-income parents (Duffet & Johnson, 2004). Demand for summer programs is equally high. About 56% of parents whose children do not currently participate in summer learning programs are interested in signing up their kids — that's about 24 million children and teens (Afterschool Alliance, 2010a).

A final reason educators should be paying attention to out-of-school time is that government officials are. Over the last decade or so, federal policy makers who want to turn otherwise-unused hours into an opportunity to reinforce classroom learning have backed their idea with dollars. In fiscal year 2010, the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, established with $40 million in 1998, distributed $1.6 billion to the states for after-school academic enrichment for students in high-poverty, low-performing schools (Afterschool Alliance, 2010b).

CITYWIDE PROGRAMS

Washington officials are not the only ones with out-of-school time on their minds.

City leaders, too, have been eying the potential of out-of-school time, and many have landed on a similar approach to advancing it: putting together the pieces of what amount to citywide systems of out-of-school time programming. Typically in cities, out-of-school-time programming is fragmented. Individual programs — and the government agencies and private funders that finance them — work in isolation from one another. The many, varied organizations involved in some way with out-of-school time include libraries, parks departments, YMCAs and other private program providers, housing agencies, police departments, city hall, and, of course, schools.

The idea behind out-of-school time systems is to coordinate the after-school workings of all these groups so they op-

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Key role of master teachers in out-of-school time

A recent study sponsored by The Wallace Foundation looked at an after-school program for middle school students in New York City. The community centers, called "Beacons," are based in public schools. "When we compared the 20 Beacons in the top attendance quartile with the 20 Beacons in the bottom quartile in terms of the percent of participants meeting a 216-hour attendance objective, we found that more Beacon directors in the top-quartile Beacons reported having a master teacher or education specialist on staff than did the directors of the bottom-quartile Beacons. Specifically, 67% of top-quartile Beacons had master teachers or education specialists on staff, while only 19% of bottom quartile Beacons did" (Russell, et al., 2010, p. ii).

erate in sync to achieve at least three goals: better programs, increased attendance, and data-based decision making about these and other important out-of-school time matters. Data collection and analysis is new for the out-of-school time field. Before system-building efforts began, cities often lacked even the most rudimentary information about their collections of out-of-school time programs, including the number of children enrolled citywide (McCombs, Orr, et al., 2010).

A soon-to-be-published report from the National League of Cities looks at about two dozen cities with out-of-school time system-building efforts under way, and The Wallace Foundation has helped finance out-of-school time efforts in five others. The Wallace-supported efforts are in Boston, Chicago, New York City, Providence, R.I., and Washington, D.C. Another indicator of interest in out-of-school time systems is growth in the National League of Cities Afterschool Policy Advisors Network, a group of city leaders who share information about out-of-school time system building. When the network was launched in 2005, it had 22 member cities. Today it has more than 400. The ventures vary widely according to the needs and circumstances of their locales, which range from small cities (Charleston, S.C., population 108,000) to large (Chicago and New York), and include places as diverse as Denver, Spokane, Grand Rapids, Mich., and Nashville. Some efforts are led by private, nonprofit groups, others by school systems or other municipal agencies, such as family services departments. What all have in common, however, is a hope to turn what is now a largely haphazard arrangement of after-school programs into a more coherent whole.

Building an out-of-school time system isn't easy. It's tough to pull together so many different organizations with so many different interests. And whether the fledgling ventures will endure is an open question, especially in tough economic times. But the systems do hold promise, according to the RAND Cor-

poration report, which was in part an evaluation of work in the cities with Wallace-supported efforts. "This initiative provided a proof of principle — that organizations across cities could work together toward increasing access, quality, data-based decision making, and sustainability," the report said (McCombs, Orr, et al., 2010, p. 74).

ROLE OF SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

Public schools, as the sites of much out-of-school time programming, have a central part to play if out-of-school time systems are to develop successfully. The after-school planners interviewed by RAND stressed that they needed buy-in from the schools to make sure that school buildings would house programs, "that facilities would be open, and that responsibility for maintenance, heating, cooling, and insurance would rest with the schools." In several cities, the out-of-school time program placed an after-school coordinator in school buildings "to ensure full school cooperation, active recruiting efforts for after-school programming, and coordination between school-day and after-school activities" (McCombs, Orr, et al., 2010, pp. 68-69).

For cities on the cutting edge of out-of-school time system building, linking classroom learning to after-school activities presents exciting possibilities. Take Providence, R.I., which, with Wallace support, has emerged in recent years as a national model for out-of-school time system building. There, out-of-school time organizers are working with the school district to develop after-school and summer activities that promote literacy, develop math and science skills, and, when they can, reinforce the learning requirements outlined in the district curriculum. See an evaluation report of the program in Kotloff and Korom-Djakovic, 2010.

In 2006, a nonprofit organization, the Providence After School Alliance, began to set up out-of-school time programming in a number of the city's public middle schools. The project draws on a wide range of community organizations to provide activities: the Providence Police Activities League, the local Y, the U.S. Tennis Association, a local theater group, and even the zoo, to name a few. But teachers are very much part of the scene, too, working with students on academic skills in the programs' required daily learning-time session and also leading activities that come from their own out-of-school interests, horseback riding, web design, and Ultimate Frisbee among them.

Providence organizers are also striving to have the rigors of the school-day curriculum and the hands-on buzz of after-school activity influence one another. Last summer, for example, planners established a four-week, interdisciplinary summer learning program for 7th and 8th graders who had tested just at or slightly below proficiency in math and English. Organizers hoped that this could stem summer learning loss and give children an academic boost when they returned to school in September. The program aimed to help these children build

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Standards and professional development

In examining the out-of-school time sites that receive support from The Wallace Foundation, researchers explored how leaders at the sites work to improve the quality of their programs. Setting standards and offering professional development were key strategies, along with assessment systems to monitor providers, contractual mechanisms, and evaluating outcomes.

Professional development varied across the sites. Providence's offerings didn't initially align with standards, though they have since been adjusted. New York City invested heavily in professional development and offered onsite technical assistance for some programs. Some Boston sites used coaches to assist staff. All those interviewed by the researchers found the coaching extremely helpful.

Source: Bodilly, et al., 2010.

general literacy and numeracy skills, and when possible, learn some of the material specified in Providence's core curriculum. Teams made up of English teachers, math teachers, educators from the science-based out-of-school time programs, and after-school coordinators worked together to design four compelling but content-rich sets of activities to carry out these goals.

The Bay and Me was a typical program, the result of a collaboration between school teachers and educators from Save the Bay, a nonprofit organization working to restore the ecological health of Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay. The children spent only about 40% of their time in the classroom. The rest of the time, they could be found at Save the Bay, in marshlands, on beaches, and aboard a boat that plied the bay's waters. Students drew on algebra to do things like calculate the number of gallons of water produced by rainstorms. They also learned some of their vocabulary words with the tried-and-true method of hearing and using words in context. The meaning of "brackish," for example, became clear when the children sampled the slightly salty water they were studying.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL AND IN SCHOOL

Providence is assembling other out-of-school time collaborations with teachers as well. Last fall, the Providence After School Alliance brought together representatives of 20 out-of-school time programs, 10 middle school math and science teachers, and university professors in areas like math and science education to figure out ways to incorporate science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) concepts into after-school programs. Among other things, organizers hope to develop a web page of ideas for deepening their STEM-based out-of-school time curriculums. The group also developed a document detailing the key elements of inquiry-based learning that each is committed to using in out-of-school time work.

Patrick Duhon is at the center of much of this activity. He is director of expanded learning in Providence, a position that currently is paid for by a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and that gives him two bosses — the head of the Providence After School Alliance and the superintendent of the Providence Public School District. For Duhon, out-of-school and classroom time are two sides of the same coin for city young people. Both strive to give children and teens what's required to grow, learn, and succeed, he says.

"We are looking at kids who are coming to us with so many needs," Duhon said. "The minute they walk into kindergarten, there's already a significant education gap between them and their counterparts in suburban districts. There's no way school alone can give them everything they need. So we need as many adults as possible working together for them."

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The POWER of CONNECTIVITY

MULTILAYERED PROGRAM GROOMS ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP SKILLS

By Eleanor Drago-Severson and Janet Lynch Aravena

Every teacher knows that exposure to new information is one small part in the teaching and learning process. Before students truly learn a concept, they must actively engage with material — discussing, sharing, seeing, and practicing it — to make it their own. In other words, they need to *connect* with concepts and have opportunities to apply them spontaneously. As we know, learning involves making connections — or what we call "the power of connectivity." This powerful process is central to supporting children's and adults' learning and development.

Here we share one powerful program that is built around connectivity. This program focuses specifically on professional development for assistant principals as they grow in their efforts to become more effective leaders and ultimately assume a principalship.

The Executive Leadership Institute is the professional development arm of the New York City Council of Supervisors and Administrators, a not-for-profit organization designed to offer relevant professional development for school leaders in New York City. The Executive Leadership Institute's programs include professional development for principals, newly appointed assistant principals, education administrators, and day care directors. In 2005, the institute created the Advanced Leadership Program for Assistant Principals and carefully incorporated into its structure the powerful and multilayered connectivity process in support of adult learning.

THE URGENT NEED

The Advanced Leadership Program for Assistant Principals was created in 2005 in response to New York City's clear need to build capacity within the existing pool of assistant principals aspiring to principalship. Principal retirements and New York's small schools initiative created a demand for many new principals. In addition, the leadership program was designed to provide a venue for assistant principals with two or more years of experience to grow from intensive leadership development. This organizational need and the importance of strong, inspired, effective school leaders at all levels were the foundational inspirations for the program.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The leadership program is a yearlong learning experience offering assistant principals the opportunity to hone existing skills and explore the complex nature of decision making and authentic leadership required for the principalship. The program embodies the best practices known to support adult learning. Assistant principals with two or more years of administrative experience are accepted based on their applications and nominations of principals and superintendents.

The learning experience includes four components:
1. Advanced leadership seminars;
2. Mentoring of assistant principals by New York City principals;
3. Networking and coaching buddies; and
4. Optional after-school sessions.

1. Leadership seminars

The program begins with three full-day leadership seminars in July, followed by four seminars during the academic year. In the full-day seminars, participants work with and learn from leading educators and authors. Seminars focus on building effective leadership skills in areas such as communication, adult learning, and developmental leadership (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009), change leadership (Wagner et al., 2005), instructional rounds (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009), coaching conversations (Cheliotes & Reilly, 2010), collecting and analyzing data,

supporting learning for all students, and collaboration and team building. These topics are based on and closely aligned with the New York City Department of Education school leadership competencies, which, in New York City, are foundational to principal selection and evaluations. The five competencies are:

- **Personal leadership:** Fosters a culture of excellence through personal leadership;
- **Data:** Uses data to set high learning goals and increase student achievement;
- **Curriculum and instruction:** Leverages deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to improve student learning;
- **Staff and community:** Develops staff, appropriately shares leadership, and builds strong school communities; and
- **Resources and operations:** Manages resources and operations to improve student learning.

An integral part of the first seminar in July is participants' competency-based self-assessment using the Department of Education rubrics. Participants also write two SMART goals related to growing their school leadership competencies during the year. They share their goals with their mentor principal, coaching buddy, and mentor-mentee cohort. Throughout the year, this support system connects the competencies and the individual goals. A school leadership competency post-assessment is part of the reflective process in the final seminar, which occurs in April.

Seminar topic emphasis is refined each year to reflect particular Department of Education initiatives, prior seminar evaluation findings, and needs for the current year. A recent refinement in 2009-10 was the creation of a buddy partnership, where participants are paired to enhance communication and networking.

Professional resources accompany each seminar, and participants are expected to complete assigned readings to prepare for the discussion topics. Resources include books such as Drago-Severson's *Helping Teachers Learn* (2004) and *Leading Adult Learning* (2009), McEwan's *10 Traits*

> **The leadership program is a yearlong learning experience offering assistant principals the opportunity to hone existing skills and explore the complex nature of decision making and authentic leadership required for the principalship.**

Photo by JANET LYNCH ARAVENA

Connected through the Advanced Leadership Program for Assistant Principals (from left): Kimberly Fisher, Janet Hackshaw Smith, mentor principal Mary Padilla, Iris Clariot, Craig Monteverde, and Marybelle Ferreira.

of Highly Effective Principals (2003), and Cheliotes and Reilly's *Coaching Conversations* (2010). Assigned readings enable participants to enter seminars with a working knowledge of the topic and resources for future professional inquiry.

2. Mentoring

Leadership program mentors are active New York City principals with distinguished records of service. The Department of Education and the Council of Supervisors and Administrators choose them jointly. Each of the 12 mentors works with a cohort of five assistant principals.

The mentoring experience begins in September with a three-hour mentor/mentee get-acquainted workshop and dinner. Together, mentors and mentees explore the mentoring relationship that they are about to experience from a developmental perspective. Mentors and mentees engage in dialogue with each other in small groups. They explore questions such as:

• What are your conceptions of what makes for an effective and growth-enhancing mentoring relationship?
• What are your hopes for the mentoring relationship in the leadership program?
• What, if any, are your concerns about being able to engage in this relationship at this time?
• What challenges might interfere with making time to engage both in the program and your mentoring relationship?

After reflecting privately, all are invited to share their thoughts with their mentor principal and their cohort.

Finally, participants exchange contact information and determine dates for visits and meetings during the year. The workshop and dinner is an important first step, not only for the mentoring relationship, but also for learning about the cohort and creating networking opportunities.

Mentors visit each assistant principal in his or her cohort twice during the academic year. During this one-on-one visit, the mentor observes the assistant principal performing routine duties and interacting with the principal and staff. The mentor also discusses the mentee's leadership competency self-assessment and goals. The information the mentor gathers from each of the mentees is important as the mentor plans for the three full-day meetings he or she will host throughout the year for the entire cohort.

Agendas for these three full-day cohort visits to the mentor's school can include classroom observations; instructional walk-throughs; seminar topic connections to everyday school life; data discussions; budget presentation and cabinet meetings; or mentor-cohort discussions focused on leadership competencies and mentees' collective progress in reaching their goals. The final seminar in April brings all mentor/mentee cohorts together for a day of sharing and reflection among the groups and a revisiting of the year's learning.

3. Networking

Working in a school can be an isolated, insular experience. Many educators rarely venture beyond their own school walls, and networking opportunities are slim. They seldom have extended time to engage in collegial discussions around best practices and improvement strategies. Networking opportunities are paramount in the leadership program's design.

The mentoring cohort, for example, is carefully designed to bring together mentees and mentors from like school levels facing similar challenges. This encourages exchanges centered on best practices. For example, a mentor principal with a large high school English language learner population would likely be an excellent mentor for assistant principals in high schools with similar student bodies.

Seating arrangements at seminars are also opportunities for relationship building, networking, and development. The program coordinator considers the seminar focus each time when determining grouping for the 60 assistant principals. Sometimes, grouping aligns with the mentor/mentee cohort. Other times, cohorts are placed together to offer opportunities for fuller discussions. For example, seating participants with their buddy or

with those from different school levels offers different benefits and opportunities to hear and appreciate alternative perspectives. Some seminars groupings even change within the day. Every opportunity is taken to maximize networking possibilities.

4. Optional after-school sessions

In addition to required seminars and mentoring sessions, the leadership program offers the following after-school optional sessions:

- Workshops to introduce participants to the components of the New York City Department of Education principal candidate pool. The Department of Education created this selection process to ensure that outstanding qualified leaders become school principals. In order to apply for a principal position, candidates must first gain entry to the pool. In the workshops, participants learn the criteria for both the essay and the subsequent in-person evaluation, a group interview.
- Informal networking sessions give participants additional opportunities to meet with colleagues. Sessions are designed to meet the needs of participants who request more discussion and information sharing around a particular topic (data, adult learning styles, etc.). The leadership program coordinator, leadership coach, or a mentor facilitates the discussion.

CONNECTIVITY

Connections create the potential for wonderful things to happen. Isolation, on the other hand, is often a death sentence for new ideas, knowledge, and growth.

The leadership program design is one of multilayered connectivity in the teaching and learning process, including the connections between leadership competencies and seminar learning and application. The program also emphasizes connections between mentor and mentee, and among those in the cohorts and buddy system. Describing the implicit care and trust fostered through these connections, assistant principals have shared the following comments:

- "The leadership program has provided me with a clearer way of looking at the big picture when it comes to running a school. Establishing priorities, motivating staff and students, building community, and maintaining a fresh and optimistic look at the possibilities for improvement are just some of the topics that have inspired me. Networking with my colleagues has been an invaluable part of the program."
- "All the way from developing a vision for leading and learning, reflecting on our own styles of communication and those of the people we work with, working effectively in establishing professional learning communities, managing human resources, and sharing in the decision-making process to promote learning for all students, this program has been incredibly helpful in honing my skills as an educational leader."

- "The mentoring aspect of this program adds a critical and practical dimension. My mentor helped me reflect on my own strengths and on some areas for improvement. He shared his leadership skills and was able to answer questions about curriculum, funding, scheduling, and everyday life in a school building. This mentor relationship assisted me greatly in my own professional growth as a leader."
- "The experience that the speakers bring is priceless. The books provided are very well-chosen, and the networking that takes place enhances the possibilities to share the positive, and look at the challenges with a better-equipped perspective."

The leadership program offers a year of professional development and a year to build relationships established in an atmosphere of trust, safety, and confidentiality. It is a safe place for people to grow together, a place in which authentic connectivity builds new and stronger school leaders.

> **Connections create the potential for wonderful things to happen. Isolation, on the other hand, is often a death sentence for new ideas, knowledge, and growth.**

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CLASSROOM VISITS

By Joellen Killion

Educators who have opportunities to collaborate with their peers through classroom visits or lesson observations will benefit from intentional planning. The four tools below and on pp. 55-57 offer suggestions and prompts for classroom visits at the planning and debriefing stages. Use or adapt the tools to fit your context and specific needs.

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1

AN INVITATION TO VISIT

Suggestions for contacting a peer to request a classroom visit.
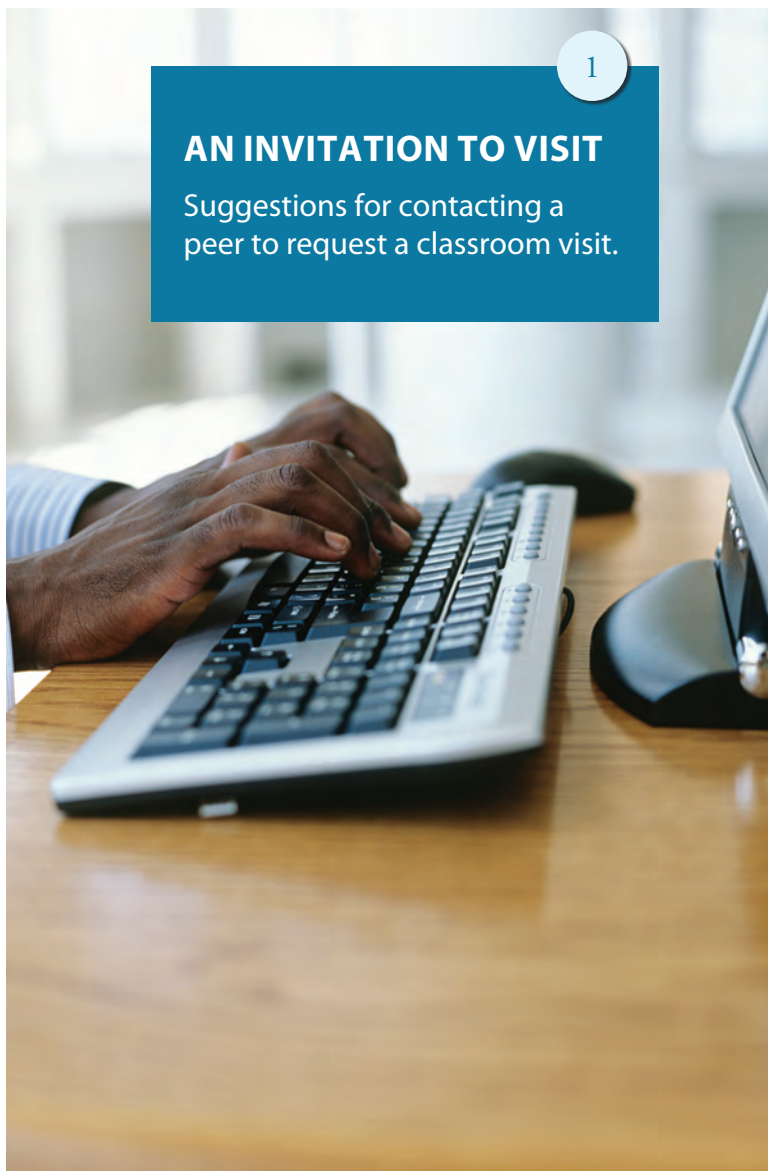
Date:

Dear _____,

   Part of my professional learning goal is to understand more about _____ (*name the aspect of instructional practice, student learning environment, etc.*).

   I would like to visit your classroom sometime in the next two weeks to learn from your practice so that I can enrich my own. (*If comfortable, explain your reason for selecting this colleague to visit, or explain how you decided to use peer visits as one way to meet your goal.*) If you agree to my visit, I would like to meet with you in advance to discuss my visit, plan when it will be appropriate for me to visit, set ground rules that we will both be comfortable with, and determine when we will meet to debrief my visit.

   Please let me know a convenient time and day for us to meet. My best times to meet are _____.

Sincerely,

PEER VISIT PRELIMINARY PLAN

The visiting teacher and the visited teacher consider together the following questions before the visit.

PURPOSE

- What is the exact purpose of the visit?

LOGISTICS

- When will it be best for the visited teacher to welcome his or her peer?
- How long will the visit be?
- Where will the visitor sit during the visit? May he or she interact with students when they are working individually or in teams?
- May the visitor interact with the teacher during the visit?
- What are the shared agreements about confidentiality regarding this visit?

LESSON SPECIFICS

- What is the learning objective for the lesson?
- Where in the developmental process is this group of students with the lesson objective, i.e. introduction, developing, practice, extension, etc.?
- What information about specific students should the visitor know in advance?
- In what ways can the visitor lend a hand if appropriate?

DATA

- What types of information will the visiting teacher be looking for? What kinds of information will he or she collect?
- How will the visiting teacher take notes or record information?
- How will the information collected be used by the visitor?
- What will happen with the information after the visit and debriefing?

OTHER

- What else should the visitor know before coming?

DEBRIEF

- When will we meet to debrief the visit?

3

SAMPLE AREAS OF FOCUS FOR PEER VISITS

The visiting teacher may focus on multiple aspects of instruction during a classroom visit. Below are several possibilities.

TEACHER PRACTICES

- Clear statement of lesson focus.
- Activating background knowledge.
- Use of specific instructional methodologies, i.e. direct instruction, minilesson, inquiry, modeling, discussion, Socratic seminar, guided practice, independent practice, etc.
- How teacher engages students.
- Emphasis of higher-order thinking.
- Use of instructional resources, i.e. technology, print, and nonprint resources.
- Differentiating instruction.
- Accommodating learning needs.
- Formative assessment.
- Student management.

STUDENT PRACTICES

- Level of engagement.
- Type of student work, i.e. hands-on, individual, collaborative, etc.
- Learning processes.
- Seeking assistance.
- Asking questions.
- Independent work.
- Self-monitoring of learning.
- Assessment of learning.

CLASSROOM STRUCTURE

- Organization of physical space.
- Location of resources.
- Types of resources.
- Flow of teacher and students.
- Routines.

4

DEBRIEFING A VISIT

Following a classroom visit, the visiting and visited teachers take time to talk about the lesson. The focus of the conversation begins with the purpose of the visit and may include other topics if both agree they are appropriate to discuss. These sentence frames might help get the conversation going.

VISITING TEACHER

- The purpose of my visit was to _____ (*repeat the purpose*). As a result of my visit to your classroom, I saw several examples in your classroom that will help me. They included _____ (*be as specific as possible*).

- I noticed that when you _____ (*identify specific behaviors*), students were _____ (*identify specific behaviors*). I'd like to know if my observations are similar to yours.

- During the lesson, it was evident that you were making a number of decisions based on how students were responding. I want to know what you were considering as you _____ (*identify some point in the lesson related to the area of learning*). Tell more about how you decided to _____.

- Teaching is never as easy as it looks. I wonder if there were times in this lesson when you reassessed your intention. Where did that occur, if it did, and what prompted it? What decision did you make? Share your reasoning.

- What I learned about _____ (*state focus of the visit*) from visiting your classroom was _____. How that will help me in my own classroom is _____ (*be specific*).

VISITED TEACHER

- Sometimes it takes extra eyes to see everything going on in my classroom. I want to know more about what you saw students doing when I _____ (*identify specific actions*).

- Considering my classroom from your perspective gives me an opportunity to reflect on my practice. As we talked about the visit, what I thought about was _____. What I have learned from your visit that will help me in the future is _____ (*be specific*).

Guerra

Nelson

Inclusive spaces that support everybody can make all the difference for LGBT students

In our last column, we wrote about the need to expand the notion of cultural proficiency to explicitly address diversity in all its forms. As we continue to focus on cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity, we must also recognize that students have additional identities that affect their understanding of the world and their educational experiences. This is particularly true for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students. Because many school communities are reluctant to acknowledge the existence of LGBT students or consider their needs, LGBT students often feel disenfranchised and can become targets of bullying, harassment, and violence. In this column, we discuss strategies for helping educators develop the knowledge and skills to create inclusive spaces that support LGBT students.

ACKNOWLEDGE LGBT STUDENTS

Creating inclusive spaces begins with acknowledging that LGBT students are in our classrooms and schools. Recent reports indicate that more than 750,000 high school students in the U.S. identify as lesbian or gay. This means that, on average, every high school class has at least one lesbian or gay student. This count is likely a low estimate because students are often reluctant to identify as LGBT even on anonymous surveys since LGBT students are disproportionately the target of harassment and discrimination in school. In fact, 80% of LGBT students report verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation. Even students who identify as heterosexual but are perceived to be LGBT experience higher levels of discrimination.

ESTABLISH ANTI-DISCRIMINATION POLICIES

To address harassment and discrimination, schools must establish anti-harassment policies that explicitly prohibit harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation. While all forms of discrimination and harassment should be prohibited, some groups are more likely to experience unfair treatment, LGBT students among them. Specifying the categories of discrimination that are prohibited increases the likelihood the policy will be effective. This is particularly true for sexual orientation because so many educators are confused about whether they have an obligation or a legal standing to protect LGBT students. A clearly stated anti-harassment policy removes any doubt and sends a message to LGBT students that they will be protected.

EMPLOY INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES

Policy alone will not result in inclusive classrooms and schools. To create educational environments in which LGBT students feel safe and valued, educators must develop practices that address the needs of LGBT students. For some educators, this can be a challenge, particularly if the educator knows little about issues that are central to LGBT students. One place to begin is by visiting the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) web site (www.glsen.org). GLSEN is a national organization dedicated to creating safe and inclusive schools for all students with a special emphasis on the needs of LGBT students. GLSEN provides useful information for students, parents, and teachers.

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In each issue of *JSD*, Patricia L. Guerra and Sarah W. Nelson write about the importance of and strategies for developing cultural awareness in teachers and schools. Guerra (pg16@txstate.edu) is an assistant professor and Nelson (swnelson@txstate.edu) is an associate professor in the Department of Education and Community Leadership at Texas State University-San Marcos. Guerra and Nelson are co-founders of Transforming Schools for a Multicultural Society (TRANSFORMS). Columns are available at www.learningforward.org/news/authors/guerranelson.cfm.

ISRAEL'S STORY

As an elementary school student, I was not a particularly masculine boy. Many of my classmates perceived me as being gay. While most of the neighborhood boys participated in football, basketball, and other physical contact sports, I participated in the performing arts. I excelled in acting, speaking, and reading, and I won first place in many competitions. The other boys in school, including my only neighborhood friend, frowned upon my interest in the arts and academics and made fun of me for what they believed was not normal for a boy, especially a Latino.

One day in 4th grade, as the bell rang for dismissal and all the students ran to retrieve their belongings, I accidently stepped on another student's backpack strap, causing his bag to drop. "Get off my backpack, faggot!" he yelled. His remark stung and left me in tears. Boys in my school often used this term casually, but I knew his use of the word toward me was purposeful. Although I was not attracted to boys (or girls) at the time, I certainly knew I was different because I talked, walked, and acted in ways that were dissimilar to the other boys in my class. In this one moment, I learned my differences were not acceptable and experienced rejection.

My teacher, Ms. Moreno, saw me crying, and asked what was wrong. After I told her about what happened, she gave me a hug and suggested that I should not let what others think of me hurt my feelings. The next day, Ms. Moreno asked the class to read a story about a young orphaned girl who no longer wanted to go to school because students viewed her lack of parents as too different and refused to speak to her. Ms. Moreno used this story to engage the class in a lesson about accepting others who are different and as a springboard for a class project. Students were asked to bring pictures, letters, stories, or other artifacts that could help us tell about ourselves to better understand each other.

For several days, I looked around the house for something to show my classmates. I gathered pictures and newspaper clippings of me at competitions and cleaned my trophies. I also interviewed some of my uncles and grandparents, which provided me with information on some popular Latino traditions and values my family observed. During the week, I shared my artifacts and thoughts with Ms. Moreno. She supported me and had constant contact with my mother about the project. Working through this process with Ms. Moreno made me feel proud of the artifacts I was going to share, especially because I felt she understood the innate differences inherent in each of us in the classroom.

From the information other students and I presented, it was clear that differences existed among us. For example, since I didn't play sports, I didn't have any trophies or ribbons that showed my interest in athletics. Instead, I had a picture of me with two girls who received second and third place in a school acting competition. Before this presentation, the fact that I was a small boy with a squeaky voice who did not play sports automatically categorized me as a gay boy. After it, the number of uncomfortable questions or comments that students asked me decreased significantly. It seemed that my classmates accepted my differences, and, as a result, my self-esteem increased.

Ms. Moreno's efforts were a major source of my success in 4th grade. As a result of her instruction, I no longer felt ashamed of how I acted or what I thought. My differences in her class were always present, sometimes unclear and confusing to others, yet always safe in her class.

DEVELOP AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Cultural proficiency requires developing authentic relationships. Resources such as those available from GLSEN are critical to working with LGBT students because, unlike other student groups where families share a similar background and can help educators better understand the needs of students, parents of LGBT students frequently are not LGBT and may not understand issues and concerns that are important to their children. In fact, some families may not even acknowledge they have an LGBT child. This means that educators must rely on external resources to build the background knowledge that will help them develop authentic relationships.

THE POWER OF ONE TEACHER

Often we hear from educators who say they would really like to be more supportive of LGBT students but do not know how because they feel they are alone in wanting to address the issue. They may not have policy to support the work or, worse, the community may be hostile to even discussing LGBT issues. They ask, "What can one educator do?" In response, we have invited one of our graduate students to share his story of one teacher who made a difference that the student remembers nearly 20 years later.

CONCLUSION

Through inclusive teaching strategies such as using literature on differences and having children learn about each other, Ms. Moreno instilled a sense of identity and pride in each student, valued their differences, and developed authentic relationships among students. She created an inclusive space where each one felt safe and accepted. Whether this was sufficient to eliminate biased beliefs in all the students is doubtful, but it was a start. And, for at least one student in that room, it made all the difference. ∎

Conflict is normal, but learning to deal with conflict skillfully takes practice

At this moment, people everywhere are avoiding a conversation with someone at home or work whose attitude or behavior is problematic. And they are paying the price. A close friend readily admits that she avoids confrontation at all costs. She just wants "peace in the land." And, of course, nothing changes, nothing improves. The peace she desires is fragile, bogus, and her blood pressure is high. I was with her recently when she got a parking ticket and was shocked to see her fall apart and sob. Gradually, then suddenly, it was all too much. It's significant when a relatively small event snaps an internal string that has been too tight for too long, and we find ourselves undone. Peace in the land — within a school, within a family, between nations — will arrive one successful conversation at a time. Confronting a tough issue is never fun, but the outcomes are pure gold. It is a skill that can be readily learned and practiced. Consider the experience of Bryan McLain, principal of Denton Creek Elementary in Coppell, Texas.   — Susan Scott

By Bryan McLain

Difficult conversations — all principals have to have them. In the past, I dreaded them and would fret about them for days.

Yet my confidence has significantly improved as I learned more about having effective conversations, both through the book *Fierce Conversations* and from my staff's work with the Fierce organization. Practicing the work has enabled me to be more proactive about the tough conversations I need to have, in part because I now understand that some of the most costly conversations are the ones that never happen.

Bryan McLain

I was recently able to incorporate Fierce principles into my work in two cases. In one example, I was working with a teacher who was not being a team player. I knew I needed to step in to address some serious misperceptions prevalent on our campus. Often, miscommunications arise from unclear expectations. In this case, the teacher and I had differing viewpoints we needed to express. Doing so honestly, though difficult at first, ultimately led us to a successful resolution and improved the communication between us. The confrontation model made addressing this challenge much easier, and the results, though not perfect, were better than I had expected. In the Fierce confrontation model, we start with naming the issue, then clarify our emotions and perspectives through specific examples, and make clear why

this issue is important. We also show an openness to resolving the issue and invite our conversation partners to respond.

In another example, I met with a defensive parent about a discipline issue and was more prepared to handle the intricacies of the difficult situation because I had practiced confrontation. I had learned not to be defensive or take the parent's frustrations personally. I worked hard to find common ground with the parent. I was able to stand my ground about a consequence his child had earned for a bad choice. The parent tried valiantly to defend the young man's indiscretion. I was able to hold the parent as "able," meaning holding him capable of handling the consequences without backing down, and I did so in a way that moved the relationship forward.

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I didn't get upset that the parent didn't agree with the outcome of the situation. I had learned it was all right to feel like the only win-win wasn't just having the parent support me and my viewpoint. That wasn't realistic. Yet I didn't worry about it because I had honestly shared my perspective and listened to the parent. I needed to first completely understand the parent's point of view before I could get him to hear and consider my perspective. I had to listen carefully without being too quick to form a response. When the parent knew I had heard his viewpoint, his defenses diminished, and we were able to reach a solution.

FUNDAMENTAL SHIFTS

As I look back at gaining the skill to have the conversations that used to keep me up at night, I had the following realizations.

Witness the struggle: As principals, we must be willing to empathize and "witness the struggle" of the difficult parent or the frustrated and frazzled teacher. The empathy we show can go a long way in helping resolve conflicts.

A logical, clear confrontation model takes the emotional charge out of confronting a tough issue. It allows you to speak to the heart of the issue with clarity, without attack. Also, key elements are empathy and a sincere desire to understand the other person's perspective.

We've heard it said before — you can't change others, you can only change yourself. Therefore, our responses to challenging situations are critical and significantly contribute to the outcomes. As I am often reminded when dealing with combative parents, managing a difficult person first means managing myself.

In conflict, perspective is everything, and others are more likely to be open to our viewpoint if we are willing to be present, to listen and try to understand their viewpoint.

I've learned to be more bold and direct when confronting issues. Before I might have hemmed and hawed about the issue as I tried to resolve whatever conflict landed in my lap. Now I'm more prepared to address difficult issues with confidence, honesty, and diplomacy.

Although we tend to think of conflict in negative terms, many positive things come from handling conflict effectively, such as change, personal growth, solutions, and the opportunity to solve problems more effectively. Conflict is a normal, inevitable part of our everyday lives, and effective administrators need to learn how to deal with conflict skillfully.

Who owns the problem: In both the parent and staff member examples above, I learned how valuable it is to engage the people who own the knowledge about the issue under discussion. Both parties were able to contribute to the solution, which made it easier and more satisfying for all involved.

Administrators are often required to make unpopular decisions. One question I continue to ask myself as I work with students, staff, and parents is, "How can we move forward from here given this new understanding?"

All confrontation is a search for the truth. We all own a piece of the truth, so as administrators, it's up to us to skillfully find out what is really going on.

Attend to gradually: I've learned the importance of being conscious during the gradually. By that, I reference what Susan Scott says in her work: "Our careers, our schools, our relationships, and our very lives succeed or fail, gradually then suddenly, one conversation at a time." There is a lot of gradually built in there.

I have become more intentional about what I strive to accomplish on a daily basis. Being aware of our relationships and results is important. Sometimes we need to ask what we can do differently to keep from losing students and staff gradually, before a negative suddenly blindsides us.

To really understand in the moment that "the conversation IS the relationship" shifts everything. This sounds simple and is something we all know on one level. I am thinking about that a lot more related to what I do as a campus principal to cultivate more positive relationships with my staff daily. And I know this happens gradually, one conversation at a time.

As many leaders and educators have reminded us, relationships are at the heart of what we do, and as my teachers and I were reminded during our work with Fierce, relationship is our most valuable currency. If we don't connect with peoples' hearts as well as their heads, it's not likely we'll move forward collectively.

Being an administrator is a high calling, and while many obstacles lie in the way of our success, and while we would have no trouble enumerating the many problems we face, we are not in the business of predicting rain, but of building arks.

I believe we either build a bridge or a wall with every person we meet. What is your style when handling conflict? Like you, I'm out to build bridges, and having the courage and skills to have open conversations helps me build bridges by being a more effective instructional leader.

SUSAN SCOTT'S CONCLUSION:

*If, like most educators, you have a few bridges to build or renovate, focus on a single conversation that has your name on it, prepare for it, and have it, using the guidelines in Chapter 4 of **Fierce Conversations, Achieving Success at Work & in Life — One Conversation at a Time.** Not next week, this week. Then do it again with someone else on your list, only do it better. After three times, you'll be getting good at this. Don't let confrontation unnerve or derail you. Send it packing with courage and skill.* ∎

Sharing up, down, and sideways:
Alliance is a driving force in reshaping
New Jersey vocational school.
By Valerie von Frank

School-based learning teams, supported in
part by Learning Forward's Learning School
Alliance, raised student learning to new heights
in a vocational high school in the Newark
area. Educators found their practices — and
their attitudes about professional learning —
transformed in the process.

Archdiocese puts its faith in external coaches.
By Carol Cary and Maria Lamattina

Several high schools in the Archdiocese of
Philadelphia began their journey to improving
professional learning through collaboration
with an external partner. Learning leaders used
student data to determine needs and planned
learning institutes followed up by job-embedded
support from coaches. Positive outcomes included
increased student engagement.

Despite rough seas, teachers in rural Maine swim together.
By Kyle Rhoads

Motivated by the need to create grade-level
assessments, staff at an elementary school learned
to collaborate to enhance their knowledge and
skills. Their principal and several coaches provided
ongoing support and leadership. The school's goals
evolved to focus tightly on student outcomes,
and scores have risen in both mathematics and
language arts.

2 lanes to leadership:
Classroom visits and grade-level meetings
build teacher capacity.
*By Denise N. Morgan, Jeff L. Williams,
and Katie Plesec*

In Solon, Ohio, district and school leaders
collaborated to increase leadership skills within

schools, meanwhile changing the role of the central
office. Classroom visits bring school and district
educators together to examine and discuss practice.
Schools push the collaboration further through
monthly grade-level meetings focused on student
needs and shaping improved instruction.

The way up, Down Under.
Innovations shape learning
at science and math school.
By Kerry Bissaker, Jim Davies, and Jayne Heath

Educators in Australia conceived a new
school intended to support 21st-century learning,
particularly in emerging fields in mathematics
and science. Teacher learning was prioritized in
the new design and tied to student outcomes.
Educators were encouraged to innovate and
collaborate across disciplines and with university
faculty.

Lessons from Bhutan:
Embrace cultural differences to effect change.
*By Laurie Levine, Alison Telsey,
and Kim McCormack*

Through a project supported by a
philanthropic family in the U.S., a team of special
education specialists traveled to Bhutan to lead
professional learning. In addition to helping
Bhutanese educators integrate new teaching
practices, they learned how to adapt to teaching
in new cultures and found their work at home
strengthened by the journey.

To tackle new problems, we're going to need new solutions.
By Robert Davidovich

Transformational professional learning requires
a shift in addressing education's challenges.
Educators will need unfiltered information, the
autonomy to work within their particular context,
and opportunities to network across boundaries
with those who share their unique needs.

columns

Cultural proficiency:
Inclusive spaces that support everybody can make all the difference for LGBT students.
By Patricia L. Guerra and Sarah W. Nelson

Acknowledging LGBT students in schools is the first step in creating safe and productive learning environments for all students.

Collaborative culture:
Conflict is normal, but learning to deal with conflict skillfully takes practice.
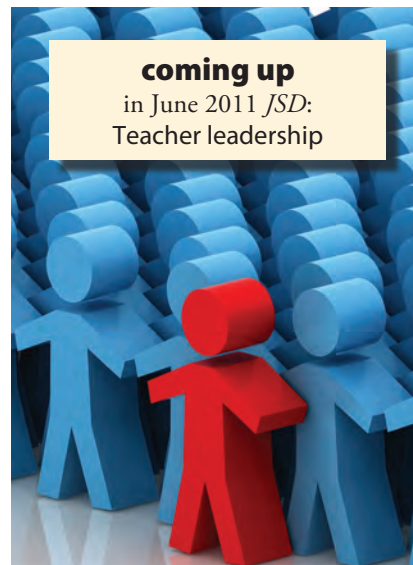*By Susan Scott and Bryan McClain*

A principal finds that models for conversation and confrontation help him work productively with staff members and parents.

From the director:
A learning school on every corner is the best pathway to student success.
By Stephanie Hirsh

The hallmark of a learning school is shared responsibility for all students by all educators.

call for articles

Theme: Resources for professional learning
Manuscript deadline: June 15, 2011
Issue: February 2012

Theme: Supporting implementation
Manuscript deadline: Aug. 15, 2011
Issue: April 2012

Theme: Learning in communities
Manuscript deadline: Oct. 15, 2011
Issue: June 2012

• Please send manuscripts and questions to Tracy Crow (**tracy.crow@learningforward.org**).
• Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are at **www.learningforward.org/news/jsd/guidelines.cfm**.

features

Think outside the clock:
Planners link after-school programs to classroom curriculum.
By the staff of The Wallace Foundation

Those who coordinate the learning that takes place after school or during the summer — out-of-school time — are working to increase the quality of such programs and make connections with teachers to strengthen the learning. In addition, coordination of out-of-school time learning citywide is advancing the overall quality of the programs. *Sponsored by The Wallace Foundation.*

The power of connectivity:
Multilayered program grooms assistant principals' leadership skills.
By Eleanor Drago-Severson and Janet Lynch Aravena

New York City school leaders prepare for the principalship through advanced leadership seminars, mentoring opportunities, extensive networking, and additional learning sessions. The learning connects new leaders to skills and resources, and, more importantly, to knowledgeable colleagues who care about their growth.

@ learning forward

Newest team member to oversee special projects

Learning Forward is pleased to announce the appointment of Jacqueline Kennedy as its new associate director of special projects.

"I'm excited that we can so effectively expand our capacity to serve our members," said Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh. "The depth of talent and diversity of experiences among our staff ensure that we will continue to build valuable knowledge for the field and create useful services for our members."

Kennedy will manage new and ongoing partnerships between Learning Forward and schools or school districts and support foundation-supported initiatives. She joins Learning Forward with a 16-year background in public education, having most recently served as director of professional development at Frisco Independent School District in Frisco, Texas. She has also held central administration positions in assessment and accountability and adult education in two large urban school districts, and served as an assistant principal, counselor,

Jacqueline Kennedy

education consultant, grant reviewer, and classroom teacher.

"Kennedy brings rich, practical experience leading professional development in a rapidly growing school district and supporting principals, teacher leaders, and school leadership teams to implement effective professional learning for student achievement," said Hirsh. "Our members and programs will benefit from her firsthand experience. We look forward to the contributions she will make to our organization."

"I'm excited for the opportunity to contribute to and learn from the field," Kennedy said. "As a practitioner, I enjoy seeing initiatives through from beginning to end — from policy to design — and making a significant difference for educators and students."

Kennedy is a member of Learning Forward's Academy Class of 2011 and will graduate in December. She is a member of ASCD as well as PDK International, which named her as one of its 2010-11 Emerging Leaders. Kennedy is currently completing superintendent certification and is a doctoral candidate at the University of North Texas in the Department of Applied Technology, Training, and Development.

powerful words

"All change is a miracle to contemplate, but is a miracle which is taking place every second."

— *Henry David Thoreau*

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book club

ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: DESIGN, DELIVER, SUCCEED

Although many educators are on the fast track to embracing online professional development, choosing the best solution is not as simple as pushing a button. Author John D. Ross' practical framework guides readers through asking the right questions and making sound development and purchasing decisions. The book's process is founded on proven principles of professional learning and instructional design. This reader-friendly guide provides a path to answering these fundamental questions:

- Why do I need online professional development?
- How much does it cost?
- How do I get started?
- What does high-quality online learning look like?
- What technologies are right for me?
- Did it work?

Included are a decision matrix, a step-by-step planning and implementation framework, buyer guidelines, and real-life case studies from successful online professional development providers.

Through a partnership with Corwin Press, Learning Forward 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 Book Club to your membership before June 15. It will be mailed in April. For more information about this or any membership package, call 800-727-7288 or e-mail office@ learningforward.org.

Transformational professional learning needs to be more than a cosmetic change

on board
MARK DIAZ

It has been my experience that when respected voices in the educational community start talking about professional development being transformational or revolutionary, I had better hold onto my seat. My experience tells me I need to be prepared to be fixed, for my programs or staff to be operated on, and for new external providers to quickly come up with "new and improved" products or workshops to transform strategies and guarantee student success. All too often, what was promised to be transformational is cosmetic, simply a reworking of old ideas — much like a new haircut.

We do have a lot to change regarding professional learning — we truly need transformation. Too often, we see a scenario like this: At the beginning of the year, everyone gathers in a hall to hear a motivational speaker followed by a word-by-word review of the handbook. This all kicks off a day of professional development on a topic that educators are mandated to focus on for the year. Well-intentioned districts will focus on a new transformation that will be better than the old transformation. Later in the year, there will be one to three days of "follow-up." In such scenarios, there is

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Mark Diaz is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees.

no ongoing, job-embedded professional learning that includes data analysis, team-based discussion of student needs, sharing and refinement of research-based strategies, or reflection. Rather, professional development is treated as an isolated event that must be entertaining enough to engage participants for a full day.

As president of Learning Forward, I'm a proponent of real transformation of professional learning, and I'm also alert to unreasonable claims that such change is on the way. Here's another example. I heard about a new possible transformation recently at a gathering of more than 4,000 administrators. Our state education entity is espousing the financial benefits of online professional development. One of our state leaders is also proposing granting furlough days to teachers to curtail educational costs — fewer days worked means less pay — as long as the days furloughed are not instructional days. The clear implication is that we'll use professional development days for the furlough days.

I am concerned about the idea that we can replace professional development days with online learning. The argument goes like this: Teachers can learn online at home on their own unpaid time, we all save money,

and teachers learn as much as they would in other ways. Depending on implementation, this could be as effective as much of the professional learning educators experience in the scenario I described here.

Interestingly, I didn't hear other administrators expressing concern about the idea. If districts' typical professional development had the characteristics of Learning

Forward's definition, there would have been a howl of criticism at the idea that learning online at home, alone, is the best way to improve teacher effectiveness. I believe online professional learning can be extremely effective. I know it can connect isolated teachers and create authentic communities. However, in this example, I am afraid that our knowledge about what constitutes high-quality professional learning will be set aside in a rush to save money.

When it comes to transformation, I want us to be intentional. What are our purposes? How will we know we are successful? And most importantly, who benefits? Otherwise, we'll find we're just getting another haircut. ■

Policy update from Washington

By M. René Islas
LEARNING FORWARD POLICY ADVISOR

There's a fresh push by the White House and U.S. Department of Education to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as No Child Left Behind. A comprehensive overhaul of the law is unlikely, but several areas of the law could see changes.

President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan continue to work toward a comprehensive reauthorization of the law. Specifically, the administration is calling for a renewed commitment to innovation through programs like Race to the Top and the Investing in Education (I3) fund; a focus on improving teaching through recruitment, retention, and evaluation; and programs to increase college readiness and college completion through upgraded standards and assessments. Meanwhile, members of the U.S. House and Senate seem to want a more tempered approach. Many are calling for a piecemeal approach that focuses on technical fixes to the law. One notable exception is Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), who is pushing for a comprehensive reauthorization similar to the president's Blueprint for Reform. Emerging themes include fixing NCLB accountability measures, granting more flexibility to local education leaders, and improving teacher effectiveness.

A CALL TO MEMBERS

So far, discussions on improving teacher effectiveness focus on recruitment and teacher evaluation. While these are important, policy makers need to pay adequate attention to improving teaching effectiveness of the existing workforce. Research shows that effective professional learning is the common denominator among the highest-performing school systems across the globe.

Here's how Learning Forward members can take action: Engage with colleagues and policy leaders in your community to call for investing in effective professional learning. (See our definition at www.learningforward.org/standfor/definition.cfm.) For tools and resources on advocating for policies to support effective professional learning, visit our advocacy page at www.learningforward.org/standfor/advocating.cfm.

LEARNING FORWARD **CALENDAR**

April 15:	Deadline for Awards nominations. **www.learningforward.org/getinvolved/awards.cfm**
April 15:	Apply to join the Learning School Alliance. **www.learningforward.org/alliance**
April 30:	Last day to save $50 on registration for 2011 Summer Conference. **www.learningforward.org/summer11**
May 9:	E-learning series program begins: Shaping school culture for continuous improvement. **www.learningforward.org/elearning/programs**
May 31:	Last day to save $75 on registration for 2011 Annual Conference in Anaheim, Calif. **www.learningforward.org/opportunities/annualconference.cfm**
July 17-20:	2011 Summer Conference for Teacher Leaders and the Administrators Who Support Them, Indianapolis, Ind.

JOIN US ON THE BLOG

www.learningforward.org

Travel to the home page to see the latest blog titles and postings. The blog, now hosted in partnership with *Education Week's* Teacher web site, still features Learning Forward's leaders writing on the news of the day and sharing the organization's point of view. New entries are posted two to three times a week. Check in often and respond with your perspective.

IN GOOD COMPANY

www.learningforward.org /about/partners.cfm

Learning Forward works with partners and sponsors on a variety of initiatives. Visit this page frequently to learn about the latest grant-funded projects and strategic alliances. Learning Forward is grateful for the many partnerships that expand the organization's influence.

EQUIP YOUR LEARNING TEAM

www.learningforward.org /news/teamtools

Each month, Learning Forward posts several free tools or protocols designed to support collaborative learning. The tools come from past issues of publications or recent books. The tools are selected to support one key concept each month — for example, supporting classroom visits or setting effective norms for meetings. Be sure to visit this page each month — the tools are available free for a limited time.

KEEPING TRACK OF THE LATEST REPORTS

www.learningforward.org /advancing/recentresearch.cfm

Find the latest professional learning reports from Learning Forward and other organizations in one location. Explore research from the field on topics including leadership, teacher effectiveness, international comparisons, and data analysis. This page is updated frequently with new additions

FROM *THE LEARNING PRINCIPAL*

www.learningforward.org /news/principal/ index.cfm

The winter issue of Learning Forward's newsletter for school leaders explores distributed leadership. Distributed leadership is more than sharing responsibilities among many people. In the lead article, author Valerie von Frank speaks with leadership researcher James Spillane about the concept that how leaders act isn't the full picture of school leadership. The interactions among all educators in a building as well as considerations of the school's context are also critical pieces in effective distributed leadership.

FOR MEMBERS ONLY

www.learningforward.org /members/ mbrupdate.cfm

When you use the member sign-in feature on the Learning Forward web site, you have access to an archive of more than a decade of member publications. Did you know you also have an easy means to update your contact information? Visit the address above, log in with your member number and password, and verify or update your contact information to ensure you don't miss a single issue of any publication.

A learning school on every corner is the best pathway to student success

Schools, like professional development systems, are at different stages in achieving their intended outcomes. I look forward to a time when all schools are much further on their journey toward high achievement for all students.

When we launched the Learning School Alliance with the support of MetLife Foundation and the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, I had a bold goal — that we would have what we call learning schools within two hours of driving for every school in North America. In learning schools, educators share collective responsibility for the success of all students by implementing the cycle of continuous improvement that is grounded in effective professional learning.

So far, we have hung Learning School Alliance banners outside 41 schools in 20 states, one Canadian province, and one territory. That banner and what happens within each building are our keys to ensuring great schools for all children. This is why I believe a learning school on every corner is our best pathway to student success.

• Educators in learning schools see educator learning as equal in importance to student learning. Staff members are familiar with the research

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Stephanie Hirsh (stephanie.hirsh @learningforward.org) is executive director of Learning Forward.

that says the most important school-based factor that influences student learning is quality teaching. They know the most powerful strategy they have to improve teaching is ongoing professional learning. Therefore, professional learning is part of what defines their work on a daily basis and shapes their responsibilities as a professional educator.

• Educators in learning schools share collective responsibility for the success of every student. Designated teams meet regularly to track and monitor student success. Staff members talk about each student's success and what the team and school are doing to ensure it. They regard every student as their student.

• Educators in learning schools are committed to ensuring great teaching for every student every day. Every staff member understands that students are only as successful as the quality of teaching they experience. The staff recognizes the constant infusion of new knowledge and skills as necessary to strengthen instruction. They know that ensuring high-quality teaching each day is a continuous process.

• Educators in learning schools make decisions based on data and results. All staff members are skillful in using data to determine future learning needs for both students and themselves. They examine data regularly to assess

the impact of decisions and determine what course of action to take. Student achievement is the bottom line.

• Educators in learning schools gather in teams for collaborative professional learning as a regular part of their workday. Collaborative professional learning means students benefit from the wisdom and expertise of all teachers in a grade level or subject rather than just their own teachers. Teams spread the best ideas systematically from classroom to classroom.

• Educators in learning schools regard the principal as the chief learner. The principal prioritizes his or her own learning and demonstrates that commitment by participating in schoolwide learning, selected team-based learning activities, and learning with other principals. The principal can describe for the community his or her own learning goals and how they relate to the school goals. The principal documents the impact of the learning journey on the staff and students.

I invite all members to examine how investments in learning for both students and staff are transforming the way educators work. In my vision, visitors will walk away believing that every student and teacher deserves to go to a learning school and will take steps to create this reality in every community. ■