



## Transition to building-level learning takes conversation and focus

*As told to Anthony Armstrong*

**F**our years ago, the district realized that many of our adult learning activities were not focused on improving classroom instruction, so we started addressing this issue through conversations and learning. We talked with leaders in our district, administrators, and teacher leaders about Learning Forward's standards and what we would like to measure and evaluate. This helped focus our conversations around what we needed to learn and do. One thing we realized we were not doing well as a district was implementing research-based instructional strategies.

We originally had a district model of professional development, where we determined the focus but gave the buildings options for how they could implement it, such as learning sessions, professional development days, book studies, etc. Our district-level professional development committee identified areas of growth for student achievement, and we worked with people across the district in professional learning and instructional strategies to make sure everyone was on the same page. The professional development committee talked about a couple of standards each month, and we followed up with principals in newsletters.

We did this for two years and measured along the way. Measuring professional learning's effect on teacher practice was new for us. To measure

results, we looked at student achievement, behavior, building climate, increases in all the state and local assessments, and teacher practice. When we started our focus on instructional strategies, we observed 25% of the teachers using the strategies. Now, based on our walk-throughs, 84% are using the strategies.

As we supported building leaders in their learning, we slowly gave the buildings more flexibility. Our model went from district-led professional development to one where buildings could choose their topics, as long as it was focused and measurable. Over the years and especially in my experience in Learning Forward's Academy, I have learned much about effective professional learning. Building and teacher leaders also need that strong knowledge of effective practice and professional learning to be comfortable with that level of autonomy. For example, many people didn't know it takes around 30 hours to change teacher practice. We had a lot of conversations over the course of several years about how to find 30 hours to get the most leverage from the professional learning time.

To help keep the professional learning focused, we meet twice per year with school leaders to talk about the building's plan and have conversations about who needs what type of support. This helped us understand common needs across the district.

The principals liked our original model when it had a district focus because it was almost a turnkey service and was much easier for them to



implement. With our new building focus, they are not as comfortable and are realizing there are things they need to learn in order to provide effective professional learning. We are having a lot of conversations around this. It is like a lot of adult learning — they have the knowledge, but need to implement to fully understand. Leaders need to know the information they are to deliver, but they should also realize that they do not have to be an expert — they can learn alongside everyone else. Helping leaders transition to this deep learning is important. They do not have to always be the sage on the stage.

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