



Leadership standard calls for evidence of effectiveness

There are many ways to exert school system leadership, and one of the most powerful is to judiciously use the words “Stop” and “No.” Invoking these words at the right times, in the right ways, for the right purposes, is essential to improving professional learning.

School system leaders are always under pressure to say “Yes.” They are accountable to many entities: school boards, state education agencies and legislatures, and the federal government, not to mention local political and business leaders. Each of these entities has expectations or requirements that, in effect, drive leaders’ daily work. No wonder leaders’ agendas are often crowded with implementing, maintaining, or improving various procedures and practices that may or may not improve education. Some administrators are so busy they begin to believe their level of activity is a credible indicator of their professional effectiveness.

School systems and schools are more often victims rather than beneficiaries of more rules, programs, methodologies, and interventions. Because there are seldom effective evaluations of such activities, the focus and energies of educators frequently dissipate as the number of initiatives increase. Maintaining activities and piling on new ones can become the focus, rather than ensuring their impact.

In two important ways, this

phenomenon has implications for developing a standards-based system of professional learning. Over time, many school systems have instituted a variety of professional development practices that continue from year to year with little or no scrutiny. However, now that there are national standards for professional learning, school systems must objectively and rigorously analyze their professional development policies, programs, and practices. Which ones authentically align with the standards? Which ones do not? What is the evidence of their effectiveness?

The answers may provide a need for school system leaders to say “Stop.” That is, stop the practices that are clearly at odds with the standards. Such action is consistent with the Leadership standard that calls for leaders to “align policies and guidelines to ensure effective professional learning within their school systems or schools” (Learning Forward, 2011).

This alignment is an essential building block for leaders to establish, as the standards require, “organizational systems and structures that support effective professional learning and ongoing continuous improvement” (Learning Forward, 2011). As tempting as it may be for school system leaders to shave the square pegs of current practices so they fit in the round holes of the standards, that will not create the alignment necessary for professional learning that positively impacts the performance of educators.

Unfortunately, stopping practices that don’t align with the standards is

not the end of the challenge. School system leaders will continue to be subject to a barrage of proposals by policymakers, educators, and vendors who argue that their favored policy, program, or practice will increase professional learning’s effectiveness. Some of the proposals may have potential, many will not. School system leaders must devote the time and effort necessary to critically assess such proposals and determine whether and how they can contribute to a standards-based system of professional learning. It will take a great deal of intestinal fortitude to say “No,” particularly when a proposed approach seductively glitters with false promise, or comes from powerful political or commercial interests.

The professional learning standards do not require adding more policies, programs, and practices. Instead, they call for creating a new system of professional learning built on the standards and the research that supports them. School system leaders can only do that if they have the courage to say “Stop” or “No” when necessary to set professional learning on a new path.

REFERENCE

Learning Forward. (2011). Leadership. In *Standards for Professional Learning*. Oxford, OH: Author. Available at www.learningforward.org/standards/leadership.

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Hayes Mizell (hmizell@gmail.com) is distinguished senior fellow at Learning Forward. ●

