



Coaches lead professional learning on a road not always taken

Most people have been faced with a fork in the road, where they were not sure which path to take. In the poem “The Road Not Taken,” the American poet Robert Frost illustrates the difficult decision to follow one of two paths. While some interpret the poem as a call to take the road less traveled, one that veers from the norm, others have professed that it is more about considering the paths we don’t take.

Decisions about teaching and learning paths can present a similar dilemma among educators today, especially when it comes to ways to leverage professional learning to meet curriculum and performance goals for students and educators. Rather than a focus solely on student outcomes, those with responsibility to

lead, facilitate, plan, and implement professional learning also attend to educator performance standards that set reliable indicators of effectiveness.

The Outcomes standard describes three actions essential to determining professional learning content that should be considered prior to engaging in any instance of professional learning: Address student curriculum standards, meet performance standards, and build coherence.

Engage others in professional learning to increase student results. Use student curriculum and assessment standards to identify professional learning needs and inform decisions about the content of professional learning. These standards identify what students are expected to know, understand, and be able to do in a specified discipline, and should reflect the content in classroom instruction and guide content for educator professional learning.

Similarly, identify the expectations for your role, responsibilities, and performance standards, and do the same for those you support to better understand the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices required to be effective. Use educator performance standards to identify professional learning needs, and make decisions about the content of professional learning activities. These standards address what educators are expected to know, understand, and be able to do in their specified role or position. The performance standards should

accurately reflect effective practice in the workplace and educator professional learning.

Facilitate dialogue about the congruence between professional learning and other initiatives to support a seamless professional learning system. Identify the relationship among schoolwide, team, and individual improvement goals to ensure alignment and sustainability. Develop a coherent set of learning opportunities that build on prior experiences and scaffold learning while providing for ongoing engagement with colleagues.

Coaches, teacher leaders, and instructional support staff who recognize the link between student learning and educator professional learning can be influential in moving beyond fragmented, topic-based professional learning. They lead others on a road not always taken by focusing on both student and educator learning. Their insight, guidance, and experience in supporting schools, teacher teams, and individuals is invaluable, and can increase the likelihood that professional learning contributes to student learning.

REFERENCE

Frost, Robert (2003, June 16). The road not taken. *Poetry X*, Edited by Jough Dempsey.

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