

STANDARDS ASSESSMENT GUIDES GEORGIA'S TRANSFORMATION

Over the past three years, I've been able to see data that thrills me — NSDC's Standards for Staff Development are changing staff development in my district and my state. I believe this is beginning to happen across the country. As former director of professional learning in Gwinnett County Public Schools and president of the Georgia Staff Development Council (GSDC), I can say that the standards have changed the way I work every single day.

Here's how the transformation is taking place in my state. In 2003, the Georgia Department of Education adopted NSDC's standards as the state's professional learning standards and encouraged all districts in the state to do the same. My home district, Gwinnett County Public Schools, the state's largest, adopted the standards just months before Georgia did. Focusing on the standards helps us as we ensure that every educator has the opportunity to experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work.

Our work in Georgia is supported by a strong relationship between the state Department of Education and GSDC. The Department of Education and GSDC work together to provide school systems with the necessary tools and knowledge to improve professional learning. This collaboration really spurred our statewide changes in staff development practices.

FROM ADOPTION TO MEASURING ALIGNMENT

I began to see the standards at work when staff at Gwinnett had the opportunity to measure how well we were meeting NSDC's standards. The Department of Education asked Gwinnett and another system to pilot an online version of NSDC's Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) (Richardson, 2006). The state has since contracted with NSDC for ongoing use of the SAI; other sites, including the state of Missouri, several districts in Alabama, and individual districts around the country are also using this tool. This anonymous, online assessment

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measures alignment of professional learning practices with NSDC's standards. The survey contains five questions that provide data about alignment with each of the 12 standards (Hirsh, 2006).

About 7,000 certified staff in Gwinnett County completed the SAI in spring 2007. With 10,000 educators in our system, that's a solid return rate. A teacher can log into the system from any computer and complete the task in about 20 minutes. Having a school-based staff developer in each Gwinnett school ensures that high numbers of teachers complete the survey and helps move us toward continuous improvement. In my district and state, we now have three to four years of SAI data to guide our improvements toward high-quality professional learning.

Our data indicate that Georgia and Gwinnett are weakest in meeting the same two standards. Learning Communities and Evaluation have consistently been our areas that need improvement. I can see these data at the system level in a simple, real-time report that accompanies the SAI. Principals can view the same reports for their own schools. The anonymous survey protects teachers, while the visible number of responses lets principals know how many of the staff have completed the survey. We now have a tool to measure what we value: professional learning practices at the school and district level.

Imagine having a principal ask for help with coaching because her school scored lowest on SAI question 29: "We observe each other's classroom instruction as one way to improve our teaching." How do I respond to such questions? I urge schools to marry student achievement data to their SAI data. For example, if reading comprehension is an area in which teachers need to improve as indicated by student data, schools must pair their adult work in reading comprehension with areas on the standards that need improvement, such as teachers observing each other teach, and, in this case, observing research-based teaching practices in reading comprehension.

INTEGRATING ANOTHER STANDARDS TOOL

Now that we've been using the SAI to gather data for years, what's next for our state to keep improving as we implement the standards every day? We continue modeling with school leaders and working as communities of learners, studying the data and making decisions about improvement efforts in our schools. Working with a



This is the first NSDC's standards column by Lea Arnau. The columns will be available at www.nsd.org.

school-based staff developer at each school in Gwinnett, we have studied the SAI data and have begun to examine the Innovation Configurations (ICs) for each standard. Pat Roy, Shirley Hord, and Stephanie Hirsh's work, *Moving the NSDC Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations, Vols. I & II* (2003 & 2005), provides a rubric illustrating implementation for each of the 12 standards. The ICs show us what this improvement looks like for 11 roles, including teachers, school-based staff developers, principals, central office staff, directors of staff development, superintendents, school boards, institutions of higher education, state education agencies, external technical assistance providers, and professional associations.

In practice, each school determines appropriate professional learning practices based on the school's student data, the SAI data, and the ICs. To continue the reading comprehension example, a principal reviewing the IC for principals in Learning Communities would know that one of her tasks is preparing teachers for skillful collaboration and that the content around which this collaboration will take place is reading comprehension.

This work happens at all levels in our state. At the system level, leaders study the ICs for system leaders. In Georgia Staff Development Council, we study the ICs for professional organizations. All across the state, we are focusing on two main standards, Learning Communities and Evaluation. At Gwinnett, staff members have focused primarily on building effective learning teams, training coaches as school-based staff developers, and evaluating professional learning in a way that shows connections to improved student learning. GSDC's work mirrors this focus.

GSDC's board has used NSDC's standards and SAI data from across the state to plan the learning we do together as a professional organization. The teaching leaders at our twice-yearly conferences address these areas for growth. At GSDC's spring 2007 conference, Joellen Killion, NSDC's deputy executive director, worked with us to lead us toward meaningful evaluation of professional learning. Each district and school represented was challenged to take the learning back from the conference and to continue to study in teams and coach each other to ensure continued growth.

PUSHING FURTHER IN THE FUTURE

As a school system, Gwinnett is considering requiring schools submitting professional learning proposals to include an analysis of how the proposed learning improves

student learning and how the learning will align with the standards for staff development. If educators have student data that lead them to improve reading comprehension, then they must review their SAI data and address how their adult learning will be aimed toward improving the standards in which they are weakest.

Work toward implementing the standards has led Georgia to believe that we should reward adult learners more when they include proof that their new adult learning is being implemented in the classroom and is improving student learning. This weighted professional learning unit is part of the recertification process in Georgia, and holds educators accountable for the learning upon which we spend so much time and money. Right now, the weighted professional learning unit is an option. I have to ask, why do we spend any time or money on adult learning if we do not *expect* this new learning to be implemented in practice by these adult learners?

Though it sounds like we have done a lot in Georgia, the work is just beginning. We are constantly aware of modeling learning communities. In metro Atlanta, a group of staff developers has formed a learning community to focus on the Evaluation standard. The group meets regularly and focuses on problems of practice with regard to evaluation of staff development. We have learned to begin our initiatives with data and with evaluation. We share our SAI data and question each other on the work we are doing that improves our staff development and NSDC's standards.

Finally, we work to improve ourselves as members of learning communities by modeling our work as our ideal for high-quality professional learning that is results-driven, standards-based, and job-embedded. We have named our problem, formulated our theory of change, and continuously work to improve our evaluation of the results. With NSDC's standards as our guide and focus, the Standards Assessment Inventory as one of our evaluation tools and data pieces, and the Innovation Configurations as our deep discussion and analysis piece, we believe that all teachers in all schools *will* experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work.

REFERENCES

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