

Workplace wisdom:

What educators can learn from the business world.

By Sheri S. Williams and John W. Williams

What lessons can we learn from business to support and advocate for educator learning? A human resources professional and an educator offer a business perspective and an education perspective on common practices that could be used to sustain professional development in the school and the workplace and help educators acquire the knowledge and skills to support student achievement. Mentoring, collaboration, and leadership are keys to building educator capacity and responding to the needs of diverse students.

4 schools, 1 goal:

University-district partnership nets results for struggling readers.

By Rosemary T. Taylor and William R. Gordon II

After the East Learning Community in central Florida experienced unacceptable learning gains in high school reading on the statewide assessment test, the community's area executive director and a university partner designed and implemented professional learning that would create common language, knowledge, and skills among intensive reading teachers, literacy coaches, and assistant principals. Statewide assessment test data show that the two-year initiative led to increased reading achievement for the lowest 25% of 9th- and 10th-grade students and for the entire student population.

Bridge builders:

Teacher leaders forge connections and bring coherence to literacy initiative.

By Jacy Ippolito, Christina L. Dobbs, and Megin Charner-Laird

An increasingly diverse student population at Brookline (Mass.) High School led the school to call on university-based consultants to help teachers and leaders focus on disciplinary

literacy instruction. A multiyear initiative pulled together content-area teachers, faculty-elected teacher leaders, a site-based project leader, and university-level instructional coaches. Teacher leaders emerged as most critical in building useful professional learning communities and connecting to the work of external coaches.

The secret to great coaching:

Inquiry method helps teachers take ownership of their learning.

By Les Foltos

Successful coaches realize that routinely taking on the role of the expert with the answers is the wrong path toward collaboration and capacity building. Instead, more effective strategies rely on creating a relationship that is not only built on trust and respect but also supportive — an important consideration when high-stakes testing and new evaluation systems leave teachers reluctant to take risks and innovate. Successful coaches use norms, probing questions, and effective inquiry to help teachers take ownership of their learning and develop the capacity to improve their practice.

Beyond the core:

Peer observation brings Common Core to vocational and electives classes.

By Harriette Thurber Rasmussen

For several years, most of the teachers in Washington's Grandview School District have been immersed in learning about the Common Core and designing instructional strategies to help students meet the new and higher expectations. Grandview High School's principal noted a growing gap between those teaching core classes and those teaching career and technical education and electives. Using a special district resource allocation designed for collaborative peer observation, the school was able to close the gap by weaving Common Core literacy standards into vocational and electives classrooms.

features

One person’s Academy experience shifts a district’s approach to learning.

By Hayes Mizell

As superintendent of a challenged school system, Cynthia Cash-Greene realized she needed help. With a scholarship from the Learning Forward Foundation, Cash-Greene participated in Learning Forward’s Academy, and the experience helped her implement high-quality professional learning in her district. Through it all, Academy support was instrumental and influential.

Happy with your professional learning? That’s not enough.

By Frederick Brown

It’s not enough to deliver new and improved professional learning that makes teachers happy. Powerful professional learning actively engages individuals in their own learning, uses a standards-based system to ensure scaled and sustained implementation, and leaves educators feeling challenged, determined, focused, and ready to practice their new learning.

The instructor’s balancing act:

What qualities are critical for effective professional learning?

By Jenni Iwanski

An instructional coach attends a workshop for bilingual teachers and finds herself focused and fully engaged, even though much of the workshop was presented in a language she didn’t speak and the day’s outcomes were clearly well above her knowledge and skills. How was she able to walk away with valuable new information that she could put to use? The workshop reflected the leader’s beliefs about effective adult learning by balancing teaching with learning, accepting all learners, and putting teachers in the role of students.

Track data. Tweak instruction. Repeat:

A constant focus on student progress boosts achievement in Texas district.

By Valerie von Frank

Aldine Independent School District in Harris County, Texas, stands out as a district that has continually adjusted how and what student data it uses. Aldine uses what it sees to plan what teachers need to know to better instruct students and to offer additional support where schools are lagging. The district’s proactive approach to using data has resulted in steadily improving student achievement for a decade — with a student population that is mostly poor, highly mobile, nearly all students of color, and includes a large number of English language learners.

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CONFERENCE SPOTLIGHT

columns

Lessons from research:

Research on K-12 math professional development falls short.

By Joellen Killion

After examining 910 studies of professional development to identify effective K-12 mathematics interventions, researchers conclude that there is limited guidance based on causal research to guide mathematics professional development interventions for K-12 teachers.

From the director:

Learning from the heart this summer.

By Stephanie Hirsh

It isn’t just the head that we need to reach in our efforts to achieve and sustain transformation. The heart is just as important.

Writing for JSD

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- Please send manuscripts and questions to Christy Colclasure (christy.colclasure@learningforward.org).
- Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are at www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines.