A TAPESTRY OF INQUIRY AND ACTION:
Cycle of learning weaves its way through Washington district.
By Harriette Thurber Rasmussen and Kathryn Karschney

The West Valley School District in eastern Washington wanted a way to cultivate a culture of rigorous and relevant instructional practice, driven by data, to raise achievement for its students. Using a learning cycle that incorporates data, action, and evidence of results, the district is working to meet its commitment that all graduates will be college-ready.

I AM A PROFESSIONAL:
Learning communities elevate teachers' knowledge, skills, and identity.
By Edward F. Tobia and Shirley M. Hord

As teaching has evolved, professional status remains elusive. Learning communities are a way for teaching to restore its status as a profession. At one middle school, teachers convene in data teams to examine the impact of their teaching on student learning. These educators can be described as professional educators, continuously improving their knowledge and skills while committing their energy, resources, and wisdom to students.

MIDWESTERN MAGIC:
Iowa's statewide initiative engages teachers, encourages leadership, and energizes student learning.
By Dana L. Carmichael and Rita Penney Martens

AIW Iowa is an initiative using a framework that engages teachers and administrators in professional learning communities that are improving student achievement, increasing student engagement, and building a schoolwide culture focused on improving instruction. Data indicate significantly more students score higher in reading, math, science, and social studies in schools implementing the initiative.

WHERE PRINCIPALS DARE TO DREAM:
Critical Friends Group narrows the gap between vision and reality.
By Kevin Fahey

Thirteen principals, graduates of a district-college educational leadership program, formed a professional learning community based on a Critical Friends Group model that uses structured conversation and skilled facilitation to learn about specific aspects of leadership practice directly connected to the real issues facing them. Together for seven years, the group allows them to keep alive a vision of teaching, learning, and leadership that transcends their daily work.

TEAM CHECK-UP:
Use 4 goals to assess a professional learning community's effectiveness.
By Daniel R. Moirao, Susan C. Morris, Victor Klein, and Joyce W. Jackson

Four professional development coaches explore how four school districts determine whether their professional learning communities are working. The answer lies in four broad goals: a culture that supports learning; a common language for talking about teaching and learning; examining and refining instructional practice; and paying attention to the impact this work has on student achievement.

GIVE TEAMS A RUNNING START:
Take steps to build shared vision, trust, and collaboration skills.
By Jane A.G. Kise

Professional learning community members' initial energy for collaboration can dissipate when they run into barriers such as lack of shared vision, trust, and collaboration skills. These barriers are real, yet school leaders often launch initiatives before working to remove impediments. Targeting these key barriers can remove hurdles and energize the work of professional learning communities.

features

REBEL WITH A CAUSE:
A pioneer in the field reflects on the evolution of professional learning communities.
By Carlene U. Murphy

In 1978, the author was asked to become director of staff development for her district. With few resources to draw on, she set out to discover what she needed to know and do. By 1986, frustrated with the status quo and facing the mounting pressure of accountability, she changed direction, focusing on Whole-Faculty Study Groups and connecting professional learning to student achievement.

PRINCIPALS IN THE PIPELINE:
Districts construct a framework to develop school leadership.
By Pamela Mendels

Six school districts are taking part in a six-year, $75 million initiative to ensure that a large corps of school leaders is properly trained, hired, and developed on the job. The key idea behind the initiative, funded by The Wallace Foundation, is that developing effective principals requires four essential elements: principal standards, high-quality training, selective hiring, and a combination of solid on-the-job support and performance evaluation, especially for new hires.

This article is sponsored by The Wallace Foundation.

coming up

in August 2012 *JSD*:

The Data standard

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Collaborative culture:
A shift in perspective can change our attitudes and our outcomes.
By Susan Scott

It's up to us to examine our beliefs, make them conscious, and understand how they affect the relationships and results we want.

Cultural proficiency:
Tap into educators' sense of purpose to create equitable classrooms and schools.
By Sarah W. Nelson and Patricia L. Guerra

Professional developers can help educators develop the courage to go beyond recognizing issues of inequity to taking action to address them.

From the director:
A professional learning community's power lies in its intentions.
By Stephanie Hirsh

The most successful professional learning communities pay attention to all three words in the concept.

Writing for JSD

- Themes for the 2013 publication year will be posted at **www.learningforward.org/news/jsd/themes.cfm.**

- Please send manuscripts and questions to Christy Colclasure (christy.colclasure@learningforward.org).

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