

NSDC'S STANDARDS PROVIDE BUILDING BLOCKS TO SUPPORT PRINCIPALS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

As a new principal, Ann is overwhelmed with her responsibilities. Before accepting the appointment to become the principal of a large, urban elementary school, Ann had served as an assistant principal for just two years. Like many other new principals in her fast-growing district, she finds herself in this leadership position a few years ahead of the schedule she had in mind. She spends hours each day simply trying to survive in her role as the leader of adult and student learning. Ann knows she needs to stop working harder and learn to work smarter, but where will she find the time, the energy, and the resources needed to make this shift? How might we, as staff developers, support the learning of principals without adding to their overwhelming workload?

Ann's dilemma is happening all over the country. School systems that embrace NSDC's Standards for Staff Development will create professional learning for principals and other system leaders that is standards-based, results-driven, and job-embedded, enabling new and seasoned leaders to work smarter. These systems focus on professional learning for principals that serves as a model for the professional learning that systems need to replicate in schools.

Focusing on several of the 12 standards, let's follow Ann through a portion of her school year to see what support the district provides and what steps Ann needs to take.

Fortunately, Ann has the support of a coach provided by the district for the first three years of her principalship. Throughout the year, Ann will work with her leadership coach and the four other early career principals that her coach mentors and supports.

Let's begin in July. School has not begun, yet Ann is challenged by a lack of time. Like many school leaders, she has a stack of professional reading on her desk. She feels guilty closing her door and taking time for professional reading, even in the summer when students are on vacation. Sound familiar? One of the NSDC standards Ann will need to consider this year is Resources. We often do

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not consider time as a resource, usually thinking of money or technology or people as ready resources for our work. Time, though, is Ann's greatest challenge. Therefore, whatever time Ann is going to invest in learning for herself must be time well spent.

One way Ann maximizes her time is to suggest to the new principals group that they focus their meetings on problem solving and professional learning instead of announcements or "administrivia" types of information that might be better shared via e-mails or memos. The group uses the Innovation Configurations to guide their professional learning (Roy & Hord, 2003). They decide to begin with the Resources standard since time is a challenge for all of them.

According to the Innovation Configurations, principals must focus on four desired outcomes regarding Resources. They include supporting job-embedded professional development in the school, focusing resources on a small number of high-priority goals, allocating resources to provide for continuous improvement of school staff, and allocating resources to technology that supports student learning. When considering her own school, Ann thinks about how to allocate time for continuous improvement. She must consider time for her own learning and time for her teachers to meet in learning teams. They must analyze student learning data and plan for improving teacher and student learning throughout the school in the coming year.

In August, Ann and the other new leaders focus on the leadership issues with which they struggle. As they get to know and trust each other, the group builds a model for collaboration as noted by Roy and Hord. The Collaboration standard calls for principals to "build a school culture that is characterized by trust" and by the "collective responsibility for student learning" (pp. 94-95). In addition, Ann and her colleagues "assist teachers in learning how to work successfully with colleagues" and "model the use of effective collaboration skills when working with faculty" (p. 95). When these leaders come together to prepare their schools to analyze data, build capacity, and hold teachers accountable for improved student learning, they practice the actions they want their teachers to emulate.

In late September, school is well under way. Ann has determined she must focus the adult learning in the school on the high-priority goals she and her staff have set. Ann's



Lea Arnau's columns on NSDC's standards are available at www.nsd.org.

focus on her school's goal to improve student writing calls for teachers to observe each other's practice in order to improve their own instruction. Before that, though, Ann must create the collaborative culture that supports collegial learning. Her principal group is also concerned about creating the culture to support the work they hope to see in their schools. Ann and the principals shared the areas in which they are focusing during an open discussion at their most recent meeting. These conversations support Ann as she takes the work back to her school. For example, Ann's group practiced analyzing a variety of data so that they will be comfortable walking teacher leaders through this same task. This activity sets the stage for team learning throughout the year. Ann's work with her fellow principals — discussing data, determining plans, including professional learning, implementing new practices, and holding each other accountable — becomes the model for her school.

Ann and her principal partner study the IC on Learning Communities and the expectations for the principal in this work. They determine that as principals leading schools to become learning communities, they need to train and support all teachers in group facilitation skills so that leadership on learning teams is rotated among all members. As principals, they support their staffs by finding time for this learning, even though teachers will initially resist. They determine incentives, recognitions, and rewards for teams that improve student learning. Throughout this work, Ann builds a culture in her school that encourages teachers to share ideas, to take risks, to learn together.

In October, Ann and the others in her principal group pair up and spend a half-day in each other's schools in a peer-coaching model, observing how they work to meet their school improvement plans. Once a partnership is formed, Ann and her coaching partner meet for a pre-visit conference. The central office staff developers support this

work by providing principals training in peer coaching.

In November, when all four early career principals meet with their leadership coach, the group members hold each other accountable for the learning they have gained during their conferencing and visits. They model the outcomes for a successful learning community by supporting each other's learning and focusing their work on the continuous improvement of student learning. Ann values the opportunities to learn from her principal colleagues.

December is the time when Ann and her colleagues want to reflect on their first half-year as new principals. Reflection is a powerful tool that these new principals can model in their buildings, suggesting their teachers engage in a similar activity at this point in the school year. Ann makes a note to herself to remind her teachers that staff development is no longer something done to teachers, but is instead a way of working and improving professionally so that students continue to achieve at higher levels.

January includes time for Ann, her assistant principals, and teacher leaders to work together, reviewing the first half of the year with an eye toward continuing their progress. Looking back over this year, Ann realizes that she and her fellow principals, all new at their work, have had coaching that has informed and instilled in them the confidence to improve the learning of not only the students in their buildings, but also for the adults who impact these students. The Resources, Collaboration, Learning Communities, Design, and Data-Driven standards, among others, have guided the work of this principal group.

REFERENCE

Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003). *Moving NSDC's standards into practice: Innovation configurations, Volume I*. Oxford, OH: NSDC. ■