

SHAPING THE WORKDAY

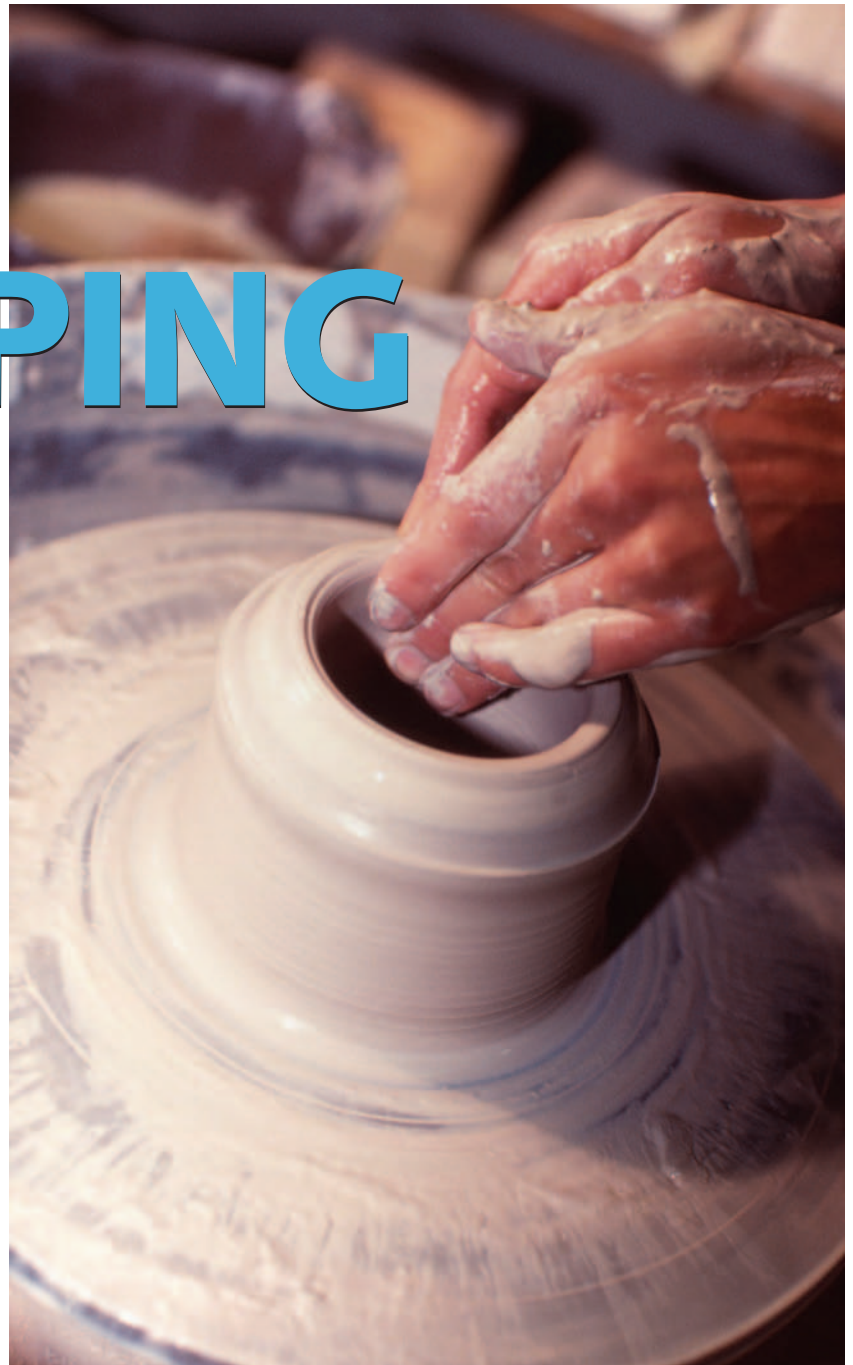
District brings professional learning into the classroom

BY KATHRYN SEVER AND LINDA BOWGREN

New York's Maine-Endwell Central School District has faced a

decreasing budget, even as its needs have increased. As opportunities for paid summer or after-hours professional development work evaporated, the district needed to support teachers' professional learning within the workday. Giving teachers time within regular work hours, however, led to a dilemma: How could the district balance staff learning with the need to keep teachers in their classrooms with their students?

District leaders believe in the power of job-embedded staff development. The time dilemma gave them the opportunity to put that belief into practice. Over the last several years,



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the district has used conference days, early-release days, and what have been dubbed "roll-throughs" to give teachers time to learn collaboratively.

CONFERENCE DAYS

Nearly every district schedules systemwide professional development, or conference, days. Frequently, these days are used for sit-and-get workshops where consultants give motivat-

ing speeches to multidistrict audiences to celebrate teachers' roles in creating tomorrow's leaders. Sometimes, the sessions are workshops in which outside experts present on a topic and then fly off to their next engagement, never to be heard from again.

Beginning in 2001, Maine-Endwell changed the focus of the district's two to four workshop days each year to in-district work that furthers

the defined goals of various teams, departments, or grade levels. The district's numerous teams are at varying stages of addressing the three guiding questions Richard DuFour outlines in his books, *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* (Solution Tree, 1998) and *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities* (Solution Tree, 2002, p. 6): "If we truly believe all kids can learn, what is it that we want them to learn? How can we be certain all students have learned it? How can we respond to assist those students who are not mastering the intended outcomes?"

Maine-Endwell now uses these districtwide professional learning days to focus on balanced literacy, reading, and writing in the content areas, literacy for students with special needs, and math problem solving, for example. Through modeling, coaching, co-teaching, and reflective sharing, district staff developers work with teachers on new practices. Teachers also have opportunities during these days to observe peers, then follow up with guided conversations to analyze and set goals for their future instruction.

Lead teachers and teacher trainers facilitate the meetings, a practice that helps connect the curriculum across grade levels and buildings. For six years, Maine-Endwell has offered stipends to more than 30 lead teachers in English language arts, math, science, social studies, and special education in each building. The stipends were funded by eliminating an administrative position at the director level. These lead teachers are selected for their leadership and facilitation skills and spend time through-

USE of staff development time

- Embed staff development into teachers' day.
- Provide what teachers need.
- Feed teachers with small bites.
- Support teachers throughout the process.
- Connect teacher learning with student learning.

OUTCOMES of staff development time

- Increased teacher knowledge.
- Increased collaboration and sharing.
- Increased student achievement.
- Increased positive student/teacher relationships.

out the year honing their knowledge of adult learning, presentation, coaching, and collaboration.

The lead teachers support their colleagues in implementing new standards and assessments, communicate with staff around best practice research in their subject areas, and work with administrators to organize and facilitate staff development for conference and early release days.

During conference days, each curricular team typically works on its targeted goal with the lead teacher or other teacher trainers facilitating. Teams are expected to establish norms or protocols to guide their work. Curricular teams work for full and half-days on targeted goals such as analyzing common writing assessment data, restructuring and realigning curriculum with state standards, and sharing best practices.

By providing time for teachers to analyze student work, develop common assessments, and address the many changes in curriculum alignment resulting from revisions in state standards or from gaps determined from their own data analysis, the district is seeing a marked increase in student achievement as they consistently exceed regional and state standards.

EARLY-RELEASE TIME

Recognizing the need for staff development time beyond the infrequent districtwide professional development days, the district also instituted a series of early-release days when students are dismissed two to three hours ahead of the regular time to allow teachers time for staff development. Elementary schools are released early six times a year, while middle school has four early-release days, and the high school has three. Providing teacher learning time in this way avoids contractual issues or added expense since the change does not impact teachers' workday.

In the beginning, some elementary parents were concerned about child care issues resulting from this released time. The district overcame this hurdle by working with community day care facilities to offer child care at the schools. By providing a district calendar at the beginning of the school year, parents have time to arrange child care.

During these days, teachers are required to work in teams on targeted goals or to build common knowledge on an identified topic to be incorporated into grade-level or department work. Some teams, for example, have focused on using data or analyzing the results of state assessments. Lead math teachers have presented on problem

The roll-through made it possible for teachers to embed nine new math problem-solving strategies into their daily practice in one year of professional learning.

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solving, and other lead teachers have worked with social studies and English language arts teachers on strategies to help students with the skills to answer analytical reading questions on the state assessment.

Although district leaders continue to struggle with giving students released time versus instructional time, they realize the necessity of enabling teachers to collaborate, review, and learn so they can improve and refocus their instruction.

Even with standard conference days and adding early-release time, can schools provide additional time for collaborative learning?

ROLL-THROUGH TIME

Maine-Endwell's roll-through provides short, targeted staff development for teachers that doesn't significantly disrupt classroom instruction. For teachers who elect not to participate in after-school professional development, the roll-through provides for continued learning using just a few substitute teachers in a day. A roll-through brings specific groups of staff together for identified learning, followed by individualized coaching in the classroom.

An efficient roll-through requires hiring enough substitutes to cover one grade level or department at a time. Substitute teachers cover classes long enough (usually one to two hours) for the regular teachers to participate in the learning session. Substitutes then "roll" to the next classroom, enabling all teachers from all grades or

departments to engage in the staff development in small groups. Sessions are offered for an entire building in one or two days, with time for the discussion, modeling, guided practice, and questions necessary to achieve desired results. Teachers then decide

Maine-Endwell Central School District Endwell, N.Y.

Number of schools: Two elementary, one middle, one high school

Enrollment: 2,689

Staff: 230

Racial/ethnic mix:

White: 92%

Black: 2.8%

Hispanic: 1%

Asian/Pacific Islander: 1.6%

Native American: 0.02%

Other: 2.6%

Limited English proficient: 1%

Languages spoken: English

Free/reduced lunch: 18%

Special education: 16%

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how much time they need to practice a new skill and for classroom coaching before they come back together for the next roll-through.

Follow-up for reflection and sharing are conducted in the same way. Teachers are taken away from their students for only a few hours at a time rather than a few days at a time as for outside staff development. Since roll-through time is incorporated into the contractual day, the district spends less on a few substitutes for that time than it would for stipends needed for staff. A roll-through also allows the district to meet individual needs and address issues specific to a grade or department. The richness comes as teachers and in-house facilitators work together in classrooms to embed new learning with students.

For example, the district's elementary math instructional support teachers wanted to introduce all elementary staff to a common math problem-solving model. In the first year of a new math initiative, teachers attended a roll-through with their grade-level

colleagues nearly every month. At each session, they were introduced to a problem-solving strategy based on the work of noted math researchers. Teachers engaged in guided practice using an adult math problem and then were given several lessons with grade-level problems to take back to their classrooms.

After the initial strategy roll-through, support teachers scheduled push-in lessons with each grade level and special educator to model how to use the strategy with students. Teachers then spent time teaching additional lessons the support teachers had provided to reinforce the newly learned strategy. During the next roll-through, teachers debriefed and shared successes and challenges. As a collaborative team, they shared student work, modified existing lessons, and explored new thinking. With this accomplished, the next strategy was introduced, modeled, and teachers set off to practice once again. The roll-through made it possible for teachers to embed nine new math problem-solving strategies into their daily practice in one year of professional learning.

In the following years, the number of roll-through sessions decreased while classroom support was augmented and tailored to individual teacher needs. Currently, support teachers still offer to model lessons, as well as co-teach and observe peer-to-peer. Teacher trainers continue to facilitate roll-through sessions to address instructional gaps identified through teams' ongoing analysis of student assessment data.

Teachers in all subject areas in our middle school have reaped the benefits of roll-through time as district literacy specialists model reading and writing strategies for the content areas. Teachers can meet and learn together in short time increments and then return to their classrooms to refine and solidify new practices.

Teachers say they feel energized with the immediacy of bringing new ideas from staff development sessions directly to the classroom.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Maine-Endwell teachers have discovered the power of collaboration and reflection. They feel energized with the immediacy of bringing new ideas from staff development directly to the classroom. Their comments on evaluations demonstrate the improvement they feel:

- “Having the opportunity to share techniques we’ve tried with students and receiving constructive feedback and new ideas is the most valuable professional development I have.”
- “I value time to collaborate with my colleagues. We all have our own perspectives and expertise, but we always learn from each other.”
- “I learned two new strategies for

teaching paragraph writing that I will be able to use right away!”

Effective professional development is based on district goals and consists of inquiry, action research, reflection, collaboration, and mentoring (Lowden, 2006). Looking at how the district was using its staff time led Maine-Endwell administrators to new ways of using time to help teachers continue their professional learning. Leaders came to realize that time was the variable in the teaching and learning equation. When the district changed to using time during the workday to maximize teacher learning, our learning community began to embrace a more collaborative approach to our work and felt less pressured by time.

The result has been an increase in student learning — and in teacher pride and satisfaction.

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