



BY CHRISTOPHER H. TIENKEN AND LEW STONAKER

In the Monroe Township (N.J.) Public Schools, teachers' learning occurs daily, not just on one day in October and February. Central office and school-level administrators foster job-embedded teacher growth. Teachers ask for and receive time to coach peers and observe in each other's classrooms. They meet togeth-

er during preparation time, stay after school to review, revise, and improve lessons, and implement lesson study groups. Every day is a professional development day in the district.

But that hasn't always been so. How did the district become a system with job-embedded professional learning?

In 2003, teachers in Monroe Township had much the same pro-

gram they'd always had: They gathered for two days a year for generic presentations from outside consultants. Kindergarten teachers sat next to high school English teachers in a room with hundreds of other teachers and heard an outsider explain the latest teaching fad. No cohesion of topics, no follow-up, limited use, and limited purpose.

"We just go, sit, and listen," one teacher remarked during an interview. "It doesn't really change what we do in our classrooms."

DATA TO DRIVE DECISIONS

A change within the administrative leadership led to meetings with the district's professional development committee, a team comprising teachers from each of the district's six schools, a principal, assistant superintendent, and the district staff developer. The committee unanimously wanted to change the district's professional development from one-shot "topics" to a system based on NSDC's Standards for Staff Development (NSDC, 2001).

The group began by surveying staff on their views of their professional development and their needs (pp. 27 and 29), adapting an established survey from Christine Lowden's (2003) research on effective professional development. The committee posted the survey on the Internet and encouraged all staff to reply. In addition, committee members talked to teachers in their buildings formally and informally and attended faculty meetings to gather feedback.

The committee then analyzed the initial survey data (52% of staff responded the first year), responses from interviews, input from adminis-

Monroe Township Public School District

Monroe Township, N.J.

Number of schools: Six (four elementary, one middle and one high)

Enrollment: 4,924 (and growing at a rate of 350 students a year)

Staff: 508

Racial/ethnic mix:

White: 75%

Black: 4%

Hispanic: 5%

Asian/Pacific Islander: 16%

Native American: 0.1%

Other: 0%

Limited English proficient: 1%

Languages spoken: Spanish, Arabic, Cantonese, Gujarati, Hungarian, Polish, Tagalog, Turkish, and Urdu

Free/reduced lunch: 5%

Special education: 15%

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trators, and feedback from faculty meetings. The data spoke loudly. Eighty-eight percent of the staff wanted to work in small, job-embedded learning teams on content-specific topics related to their classrooms. The staff indicated that they wanted peers to take a larger role in providing continuous staff development (77%), and they wanted to decrease the number of outside consultants the district used for professional development. These teachers and administration knew innately what Dennis Sparks (1994) and Thomas Guskey and Sparks (1996) meant when they called for a paradigm shift to get away from disconnected and isolated professional development.

Teachers had been working to differentiate instruction for students. They also said they now wanted a differentiated professional development structure for themselves.

CULTURAL CHANGES

The professional development committee studied research on adult learning and communication/change theory (Achilles & Norman, 1974; Achilles, Reynolds, & Achilles, 1997; Rogers, 1962; Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971; Hughes & Achilles, 1971; Berman & McLaughlin, 1974; Yankelovich, 1991). Members unanimously agreed with Stephanie Hirsh's (2002) recommendation to limit the use of one-shot workshops. They based their understanding on these findings:

- Teachers learn best outside of the constraints of large-group workshops (Knowles, 1980).
- Participants in professional learning activities should demonstrate mutual respect (Brookfield, 1986).
- Learning is an outcome of personal interactions (Bandura, 1986).
- Teachers are motivated by participating in a community of learners where knowledge is created and shared among its members (Randi & Zeichner, 2004).
- Small groups facilitate communication and learning (Achilles, Reynolds, & Achilles, 1997).

As William Ouchi said, "Structure must change before culture can change" (2004, p. 18). If teachers were to make the shift to ongoing, embedded learning, the district had to provide time, administrative support, and financial resources for learning.

The first step was to address the structure. To be able to embed learn-

Teachers had been working to differentiate instruction for students and now wanted differentiated professional development for themselves.

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ing by allowing teachers time in the school day, the district increased the number of full and half-days allocated for professional development. These days, known in the district as “drop everything and learn” days, nearly doubled. Rather than 11.5 hours of professional learning time per year, teachers now have 21.5 hours (three full and two half-days) when the district is closed to students so that teachers can have uninterrupted time.

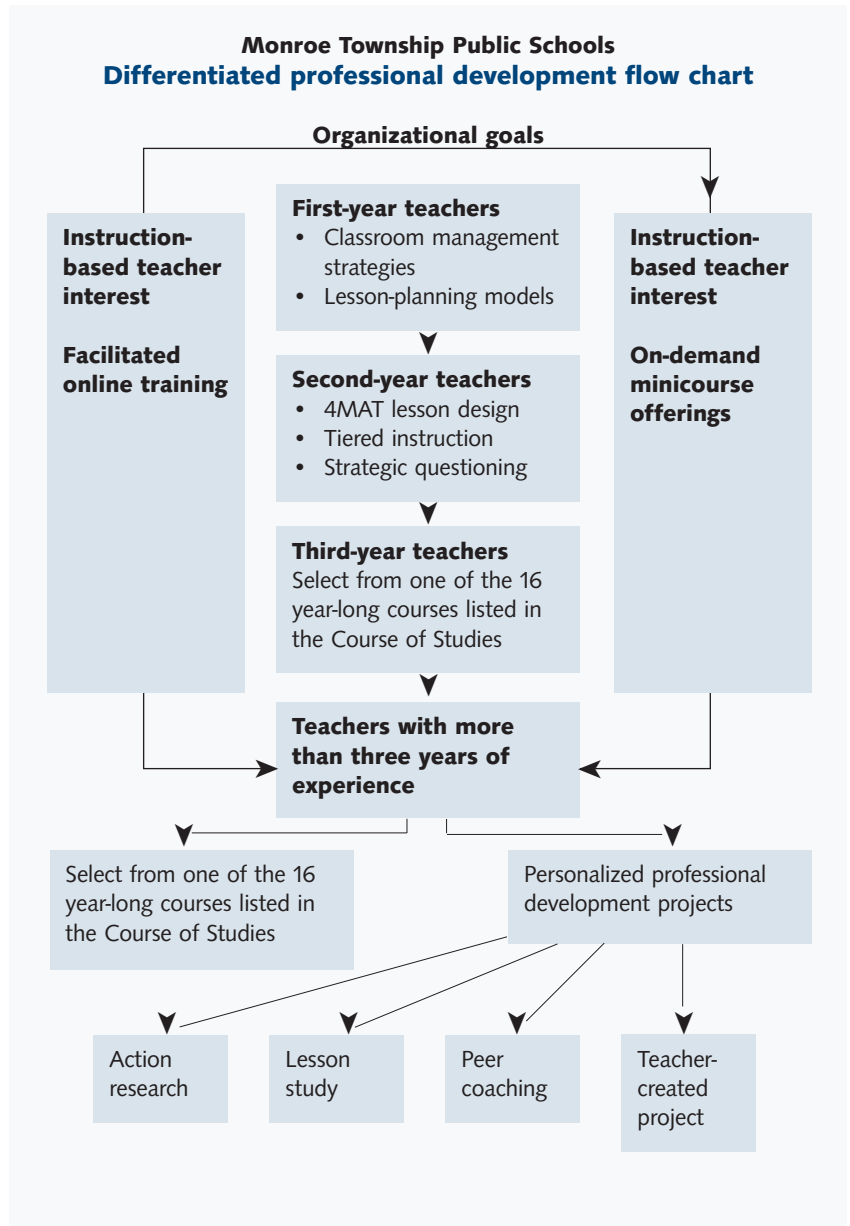
The change was made using “teacher days” within the existing contract. Rather than having two days before schools open, teachers have one preparation day and another day during the third week of September to “drop everything and learn.” On two afternoons, students are released early and the time teachers would have spent in the classroom instructing is used for teachers’ own learning. The

early-release days meet state requirements for regular instructional days and don’t add work hours to teachers’ days.

Leaders also examined their financial commitment. The district’s professional development budget is divided into two lines of money — one for external conferences and another for in-district programs. Leaders reallocated money that had been spent to hire consultants from outside the district and used it to develop a core of knowledgeable teacher leaders who would work with

their peers during the scheduled days. In addition, the district budgeted 60 days of substitute teaching to allow teachers to take part in a teacher exchange, in which a teacher can request time to visit a colleague’s classroom or have a colleague come in for peer coaching.

Leaders reallocated money that had been spent to hire consultants from outside the district and used it to develop a core of knowledgeable teacher leaders who would work with their peers during the scheduled days.



RESTRUCTURING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Next, the committee designed a blueprint for a four-tiered, differentiated structure of professional learning based on stages of teacher development, teacher interest, organizational goals, and research-based instructional strategies (see chart above).

The new structure offers staff members multiple paths for professional growth. First- and second-year teachers spend their “drop everything and learn” time in cohorts that focus on their particular needs. Third-year

teachers participate in one of 16 year-long courses taught by trained peers from within the district.

Teachers with more than three years of experience may participate in one of the year-long courses that directly relate to their teaching responsibilities and grade span; may develop a personal professional project using action research, lesson study, peer observation and coaching, or a lesson study group aimed at improving classroom instruction; or may create a hybrid of coursework and a personal project. While the state man-

dates 100 hours of professional learning time, the control for that time is now in teachers' hands.

Year-long courses

Teachers participate in courses led by the district's teacher leaders and based on the district's strategic plan, which has been focused into individual school improvement goals. During "drop everything and learn" days,

teachers spend the morning on the new content, working in small groups to process. In the afternoon, staff development leaders coach participants as they plan lessons they can take back to their classrooms. Each session concludes with an open-ended assignment.

The accountability and expectations for learning are much higher during these days than traditionally — no grading papers, no straightening classrooms, and no making copies in the copy room during this time. Teachers and administrators must drop everything and learn. There is a buzz of activity during these days that was not present before the initiative, and the buzz flows through to regular workdays.

Back in the classrooms, teachers pilot the new strategies. They may meet informally before, during, or after school. They also may request released time to work with a staff developer or content-area supervisor in a small group, or may request teacher exchange time.

In successive course sessions, the teachers report back to the class group examples of the strategy in practice and their results. The number of participants in these year-long courses rarely exceeds 17, and classes are broken down further by grade spans (e.g. K-2, 3-5, etc.).

Personal projects

Some teachers identify specific, individualized needs and propose personal projects in which they use action research, lesson study, or peer coaching to hone their instruction. During their "drop everything and learn" days, they may meet with others involved to plan or to review data.

For example, a group of high school math teachers was interested in alternative assessment. They outlined a project to create common alternative assessments that they would use, and spent the professional develop-

ment days reviewing the results and refining their work. A group of 1st- and 2nd-grade teachers worked on developing and piloting guided reading units.

Teachers working on lesson study use the districtwide time to plan the lesson to be taught, write the guiding questions and discuss what the visiting team will look for, and write questioning scripts for their debriefings.

Hybrids

Some teachers may use action research, lesson study, or peer coaching in conjunction with their coursework. They use the time during the regularly scheduled professional learning days to take part in the scheduled offerings and then extend the work with a personal project.

ADDITIONAL TIME

Teachers in the district were clearly willing to invest in their own learning. All they asked for was time. So, in addition to expanding the districtwide days, the professional development committee created an informal structure of "on-demand" courses, based upon teacher interest, that do not necessarily address specific district or school goals. These in-district mini-courses and district-facilitated online opportunities target classroom instruction, but are based on staff members' requests. Last year, for example, district teachers and administrators taught more than 35 courses during the year and 15 in the summer on topics including 4Square Writing K-3 and 4-6, Analyzing Mathematics Learning 3-6, 7-8, and 4MAT Lesson Design K-3 and 4-6. The courses occur during school and after the school day. The district provides released time for

Evaluation survey results

The results of a 2003-04 professional development program evaluation survey and focus group interviews indicated:

- Only 56% of the staff felt the district's professional development was time well-spent.
- Less than 58% of staff members applied what they learned during professional development to their classrooms.
- Only 51% of staff felt that the content of the district's professional development program was related to their job and teaching responsibilities.

After restructuring the professional learning program, the district's professional development committee surveyed staff again in 2005-06 (after a year of running the program) and found:

- 81% of staff indicated that professional learning time was time well-spent.
- 86% applied things they learned as part of professional development in their classrooms.
- 81% indicated that the professional development program related to their individual classroom needs.

To be able to embed learning by allowing teachers time in the school day, the district increased the number of full and half-days allocated for professional development.

Professional development evaluation survey sample

See web version for complete survey results.

1. My teaching performance has been enriched/enhanced by the district's professional development program.

| | % 2003-04 | % 2004-05 | Change |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|--------|
| Strongly agree | 5 | 30 | +17% |
| Agree | 65 | 57 | |
| Neutral | 14 | 11 | |
| Disagree | 15 | 3 | |
| Strongly disagree | 2 | 2 | |

2. I made specific changes in my teaching as a result of the district's professional development program.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Strongly agree | 4 | 20 | +15% |
| Agree | 58 | 57 | |
| Neutral | 18 | 16 | |
| Disagree | 19 | 7 | |
| Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | |

3. I made NO specific changes in my teaching as a result of the district's professional development program.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Strongly agree | 1 | 1 | -11% |
| Agree | 20 | 9 | |
| Neutral | 11 | 11 | |
| Disagree | 61 | 49 | +11% |
| Strongly disagree | 9 | 32 | |

4. I learned practical instructional strategies during professional development sessions.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Strongly agree | 1 | 28 | +25% |
| Agree | 55 | 53 | |
| Neutral | 15 | 11 | |
| Disagree | 18 | 7 | |
| Strongly disagree | 6 | 9 | |

5. Professional development in this district was time well-spent.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Strongly agree | 7 | 27 | +10% |
| Agree | 63 | 53 | |
| Neutral | 12 | 14 | |
| Disagree | 15 | 5 | |
| Strongly disagree | 3 | 1 | |

6. I apply things in my classroom that I learned during professional development.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Strongly agree | 5 | 25 | +29% |
| Agree | 52 | 61 | |
| Neutral | 20 | 12 | |
| Disagree | 23 | 4 | -19% |
| Strongly disagree | 1 | 1 | |

7. I have become committed to some new teaching strategies as a result of the professional development I received.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Strongly agree | 10 | 19 | +3% |
| Agree | 57 | 51 | |
| Neutral | 25 | 22 | |
| Disagree | 8 | 10 | |
| Strongly disagree | 0 | 1 | |

8. I have gained new knowledge and skills from attending district professional development.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Strongly agree | 6 | 26 | +11% |
| Agree | 69 | 60 | |
| Neutral | 10 | 11 | |
| Disagree | 14 | 3 | |
| Strongly disagree | 2 | 1 | |

9. The content of my professional development programs was related to things I must do in my classroom as a teacher.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Strongly agree | 1 | 18 | +30% |
| Agree | 50 | 63 | |
| Neutral | 17 | 9 | |
| Disagree | 30 | 8 | -24% |
| Strongly disagree | 5 | 3 | |

Source: Monroe Township School District Professional Development Evaluation Survey 2005-06

teachers and pays for substitute teachers to cover the teachers' time. The budget was adjusted within the professional development department to cover the substitute time.

EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS

How can the district leadership be sure that the differentiated professional development program translates to better teaching and student achievement? The district measures effective-

ness against three criteria (Guskey, 1986; Tienken & Achilles, 2003):

1. Participants demonstrate a positive change in skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. The new professional practice is integrated

into the teacher's practice.

2. The desired changes and improvements are measurable and observable in both the short and long term. They become the norm until better knowledge or skills are available.
3. The results of the professional development lead directly to observable, measurable positive change in student outcomes on clearly defined criteria.

Building principals and content-area supervisors observed teachers and noted changes in teachers' practices in formal evaluations. The changes have been sustained during the past two school years. In addition, administrators have monitored standardized tests scores, student grade point averages, numbers of students taking Advanced Placement courses, SAT scores, and college acceptance rates, and have looked for trends. All indicators showed improvement since 2004-05, although it is too early to attribute the increases solely to the new professional development program. Yearly staff surveys, focus group interviews, and student achievement indicators help leaders monitor and adjust the program as needed.

FULL-TIME LEARNING

Personal professional and organizational growth occur simultaneously every day in Monroe Township because the staff and administration focus on learning. Teachers and administrators follow year-long personal learning plans. Administrators and teachers work with peers in learning teams.

Still, professional development committee members continue to actively look for ways to improve the program. Members identified two areas to target next:

- Improve grade-span configurations for all year-long courses by better balancing teachers' first requests and the optimal grade-

span configuration within a course.

- Celebrate teachers' growth. To celebrate staff members' hard work and successes, the committee created an after-school professional development symposium in which teachers could present results to colleagues. In addition, the committee developed a virtual Project Hall of Fame for teachers to post abstracts of their work online. However, fewer than 20% of the teachers participated. To improve participation, the committee plans to change the symposium's timing to better accommodate busy schedules and create a streamlined process for posting project results to the web site.

As John Dewey stated, "Arriving at one goal is the starting point of another."

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Professional Development

Source: Monroe Township School District Professional Development Evaluation Survey 2005-06

- 1. My teaching performance has been enriched/enhanced by the district's professional development program.**

| | % 2003-04 | % 2005-06 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 5 | 30 | +17% |
| Agree | 65 | 57 | |
| Neutral | 14 | 11 | |
| Disagree | 15 | 3 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 2 | |

- 2. I made specific changes in my teaching as a result of the district's professional development program.**

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 4 | 20 | +15% |
| Agree | 58 | 57 | |
| Neutral | 18 | 16 | |
| Disagree | 19 | 7 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 3 | |

- 3. I made NO specific changes in my teaching as a result of the district's professional development program.**

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 1 | 1 | -11% |
| Agree | 20 | 9 | |
| Neutral | 11 | 11 | |
| Disagree | 61 | 49 | +11% |
| Strongly Disagree | 9 | 32 | |

4. Professional development in this district was time well-spent.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 1 | 28 | +25% |
| Agree | 55 | 53 | |
| Neutral | 15 | 11 | |
| Disagree | 18 | 7 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 6 | 9 | |

5. I learned practical instructional strategies during professional development sessions.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 7 | 27 | +10% |
| Agree | 63 | 53 | |
| Neutral | 12 | 14 | |
| Disagree | 15 | 5 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 3 | 1 | |

6. I apply things in my classroom that I learned during professional development.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 5 | 25 | +29% |
| Agree | 52 | 61 | |
| Neutral | 20 | 12 | |
| Disagree | 23 | 4 | -19% |
| Strongly Disagree | 1 | 1 | |

7. I have become committed to some new teaching strategies as a result of the professional development I received.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 10 | 19 | +3% |
| Agree | 57 | 51 | |
| Neutral | 25 | 22 | |
| Disagree | 8 | 10 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 1 | |

8. I gained new knowledge and skills from attending district professional development.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 6 | 26 | +11% |
| Agree | 69 | 60 | |
| Neutral | 10 | 11 | |
| Disagree | 14 | 3 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 1 | |

9. The presenters for my professional development programs were knowledgeable and effective.

23 out of 25 presenters had average satisfaction scores of 4.0/5.0 or greater.
2 out of 25 presenters had average satisfaction scores of 3.5/5.0.

10. The content of my professional development programs was related to things I must do in my classroom as a teacher.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 1 | 18 | +30% |
| Agree | 50 | 63 | |
| Neutral | 17 | 9 | |
| Disagree | 30 | 8 | -24% |
| Strongly Disagree | 5 | 3 | |

11. I recognize that participating in professional development is important.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 51 | 56 | +2% |
| Agree | 45 | 42 | |
| Neutral | 3 | 2 | |
| Disagree | 1 | 1 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 3 | 1 | |

12. The professional development program had a positive impact on my classroom management.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 5 | 16 | +10% |
| Agree | 42 | 41 | |
| Neutral | 28 | 32 | |
| Disagree | 24 | 12 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 3 | 1 | |

13. My colleagues recognize the professional development program as being important.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 5 | 21 | +16% |
| Agree | 37 | 47 | |
| Neutral | 36 | 25 | |
| Disagree | 20 | 9 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 3 | 1 | |

14. Professional development in this district is generally a positive experience.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 5 | 22 | +20% |
| Agree | 57 | 60 | |
| Neutral | 21 | 11 | |
| Disagree | 17 | 7 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 2 | |

15. I am interested in participating in a self-directed professional development program that would allow me to develop a year-long classroom based project.

196 staff members chose this option for the 2006-07 school year.

16. My professional development had a positive impact on my students' achievement.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 5 | 18 | +18% |
| Agree | 44 | 49 | |
| Neutral | 35 | 26 | |
| Disagree | 15 | 8 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 0 | |

17. I know more strategies for dealing with a wide range of student abilities because of this year's professional development program.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 8 | 10 | +8% |
| Agree | 53 | 59 | |
| Neutral | 32 | 22 | |
| Disagree | 7 | 10 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 1 | |

18. I can note changes in my teaching performance because of my participation in this year's professional development program.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 3 | 14 | +13% |
| Agree | 51 | 53 | |
| Neutral | 17 | 23 | |
| Disagree | 27 | 11 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 3 | 0 | |

19. If I had a choice, I would choose to participate in smaller groups during professional development.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 54 | 37 | -8% |
| Agree | 34 | 43 | |
| Neutral | 8 | 14 | |
| Disagree | 2 | 4 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 4 | |

20. I believe the district should concentrate on a smaller number of professional development topics for several years in order to build a district focus.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 24 | 17 | -8% |
| Agree | 38 | 37 | |
| Neutral | 22 | 27 | |
| Disagree | 13 | 18 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 4 | 2 | |

21. It would be effective to have district staff take a larger role in delivering professional development.

| | % 2004 | % 2006 | Change 2006 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 9 | 21 | +39% |
| Agree | 39 | 56 | |
| Neutral | 34 | 22 | |
| Disagree | 15 | 2 | |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 2 | |

| 22. Job description: | 2004 | 2006 |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Classroom Teachers | 80% | 79% |
| CST | 2% | 4% |
| Nurse | 0% (1) | 0% (1) |
| Specials Teachers | 14% | 14% |
| Guidance | 2% | 3% |
| PT/OT/Speech | 2% | 2% |