

editor's note/ TRACY CROW

STORIES OUT OF SCHOOL AND WHAT THEY TELL US

My sister-in-law has been teaching in a small school system for almost 30 years. As the system's entire music department, she works with all levels of students. She's passionate about what she does. I'll often hear stories about parents, students, coworkers, or the upcoming musical.

While working on this issue of *JSD*, I've realized something about her stories — when she talks about the content or the students she teaches, she's telling a story about the high school. When she talks about her colleagues and what's going on at the building level, she's talking about elementary school. I've shared meals with a half-dozen of her elementary school colleagues, but I've never heard the names of any of her high school peers. Yet she spends most of her time at the high school.

In this realization, I recognize a lot of the challenges for effective professional learning in high schools. The culture in high schools doesn't typically encourage collaboration. High school teachers don't generally turn to coworkers for professional support — they work in isolation. Only the most innovative programs have teachers in different content areas planning instruction together. The more advanced levels of content taught in high schools lead educators to assume they don't have anything to offer one another professionally. Additionally, the perceived differences in abilities in students become sharper as teachers prepare students for life beyond high school.

I know my sister-in-law's situation isn't unique. I talk to instructional coaches in high schools who have encountered much more difficulty building trust than coaches at other levels. An advanced math teacher, weighing whether to attend an NSDC conference, asked me, "How many of the sessions are just about math?"

The roadblocks to effective professional learning in high schools, however, are not insurmountable.

In this issue of *JSD*, read about high schools and districts that have produced exciting results for teachers and students alike. In spite of the different cultures in high schools and the challenges those educators face, the professional learning strategies that work in high schools aren't so different from what works in all schools:

- Time and structures for collaboration along with tools for establishing learning communities;
- Skilled leadership and opportunities to lead;
- A culture that establishes high expectations for all students and all teachers;
- Effective coaching and mentoring programs; and
- Relevant avenues to expand their content knowledge.

As the new editor of *JSD*, I want to hear from you about what you want from this publication. Please read on p. 6 about NSDC's newly articulated purpose: Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves. How can *JSD* support you in that purpose? I welcome your feedback anytime. ■



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NSDC'S PURPOSE: Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.

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