

# THE LEARNING Principal®

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF SCHOOL LEADERS ENSURING SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

## LANDMARK STUDY EXAMINES U.S. PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

*Findings point the way to improving student achievement*

BY STEPHANIE HIRSH

**A**cross America, teachers lack in-depth, sustained, coherent, high-quality professional learning that can assist them in addressing the daily challenges of teaching and improving student learning. And mounting evidence confirms that effective professional learning impacts both teacher practice and student learning.

The challenge of ensuring success for all students requires teachers and school leaders to work and learn in collaboration, examine their practice in reflective dialogue, and expand their knowledge and skills continually (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

The role of school leaders in creating the culture and structures for continuous profes-



**This landmark study is looking at ways to increase student success and close achievement gaps.**

From the perspective of instructional leadership, one important role for principals is facilitating professional learning.

sional learning grows more significant each day. And principals, as both research and common sense demonstrate, are the linchpin in schools.

Over the years, the focus for principals has shifted from managing satellite learning centers to instructional leadership. Most principals know it takes expertise in both to create the systems, structures, and cultures that allow teachers to learn in order to support student learning. If teachers within a school are not learning and collaborating, student learning will not improve.

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**DARREL GALERA**  
Principal, Moanalua  
High School  
Honolulu, Hawaii

**Grades:** 9-12

**Enrollment:** 2,020  
students

**Staff:** 130 teachers,  
200 staff

Moanalua High School is a comprehensive high school on the fringe of metropolitan Honolulu. Students come from families that span the economic spectrum. The student population is 20% white; 20% Filipino; 15% Japanese; 8% Chinese; 12% Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, and other IndoChinese; 4% African American; and 11% Samoan, Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian. Children of military personnel comprise about 30% of the student body.

## Q&A Teachers encouraged to lead their own professional learning

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

### Q. How has professional development changed at Moanalua?

I had a strong belief that an effective professional development program can transform a large high school and that trying to increase student achievement would only happen if we improved instructional practices in the classroom.

Professional development had been more traditional, more the single workshops, inservice sessions. Our whole school's focus now is on our professional learning community. Teachers work in teams, are expected to formally reflect on what they do, to look at student work and instructional practices, and to share with others. We culminate the year with a professional learning conference. Our teachers are the stars, sharing with others from all over the state. Some share through formal conference presentations, others through publishing in our professional journal. We differentiate the way they can share based on what they're comfortable with. It's a lot of respecting the professionalism of our teachers.

### Q. How did you provide time for teachers to team?

We build it into our schedule. Every Monday from 2 to 3 p.m. is dedicated to professional development time across the staff. Our instructional school day ends at 1:45 p.m. on Mondays and the faculty committed to this time. Professional development was a focus, so it had to be in the schedule. We had to show that professional development is not just a thought, that it would be reflected in what's important for our school.

We've changed how we use our Wednesday faculty meeting time. We rarely have a traditional meeting where we make announcements

or do business. We use our time for professional development or for teams to meet. We have six professional development days throughout the year. Then it's finding any other resource we can. When teams request to meet, I find funds for substitutes. We use stipends if groups want to meet on Saturday or during vacation time. We have to have a menu of ways to create the time.

### Q. How did you change attitudes toward professional learning?

You have to start with the data and the research. We made sure we collected research to show there needs to be a focus on professional learning. We collected data from teachers on how they perceived their practices, their needs, how they learn, and other information. We shared that. It's hard to argue with data and research. The second part is you have to do some risk taking.

### Q. Why do your own conference?

We wanted our professional development program to be a coherent approach to what we have to do. To be relicensed, teachers have to show evidence of work. If they write a journal article, they get so many points; if they present at a conference, if they do curriculum work, etc. We told them, "If you do all these things here at Moanalua, you will have your work done for relicensing. If you go for National Board Certification, all the work can go toward your board." And for those working toward their next internal classification, we set up the program to give them course credits. It became a win-win. Teachers didn't have to do everything separately. We made relicensing, National Board, credits, and teacher evaluation into one plan. They saw that this makes so much sense.

#### QUOTE I LIVE BY

"Some men see things as they are and say, 'Why?' I dream things that never were and say, 'Why not?' "

— Robert F. Kennedy



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003).

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## Become a Martian anthropologist

**S**eymour Sarason, a Yale psychologist, brought to our attention years ago the role of school culture and the problem of change. Like a Martian anthropologist, he assumed a 5,000-foot vantage point and described the “regularities” of behaviors within a school.

Among his conclusions — ignore organizational culture at your peril, for it is a potent force that can vanquish the best change initiatives (Sarason, 1971). While his work was conducted decades ago, it still rings true. Today’s school principals need to become cultural architects and help to **create school cultures that support continuous improvement** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 65).

What actions can a principal take to create a culture conducive to change? First, the principal **expects and recognizes team members for their efforts to implement new instructional procedures and share student results.** Robert Marzano referred to this leadership behavior as *contingent rewards* and found that it was rare within the typical K-12 egalitarian culture, where everyone must be considered equal regardless of competence (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 45). To implement recognition of exemplars, the principal needs to understand instructional procedures and provide appropriate acknowledgment to staff members. In some schools, that might mean a shout-out during a staff meeting. At other schools, acknowledging staff involves placing a handwritten note in a teacher’s mailbox.

Second, the principal **provides models in which teams review their students’ achievement results, identify high-priority learning goals, and identify new instructional proce-**

**dures that result in increased learning.** Merely forming grade-level or content-area teams in the school is not enough. Collaborative work is still not routine within most schools. The principal needs to become familiar with numerous protocols that provide a structure for how teachers can work together to become expert professionals.

Third, the principal **models continuous improvement during staff meetings by discussing current schoolwide results and identifying new processes that result in improvements.** Continuous improvement is nourished through examining results and acting on those results as opposed to trying to place blame or ignore realities. Continuous improvement is an attitude or perspective as much as a process.

Fourth, the principal **assesses and diagnoses the current school culture to determine which aspects support continuous improvement.** The principal, like Sarason, must become the anthropologist within his or her own school. Do staff members invite or deflect the discussion of results? Listen to or refute schoolwide problems? Accept responsibility or lay blame for student learning? Encourage or discourage innovation and initiative? The work of Terry Deal and Kent Peterson can help principals search out and identify positive cultural components that need to be reinforced and negative aspects that need to be transformed (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

The principal can either accept the default culture that already exists in the school or proactively shape and influence a culture that promotes improvement and positive results. Effective leaders will tackle the difficult job of creating a culture that inspires growth and change.

#### NSDC STANDARD

**Leadership:** Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement.

# DEFINING EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

**Purpose:** To promote deeper understanding and next action thinking among the school leadership and/or professional development team about the study, "Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the U.S. and Abroad."

**Time:** Approximately 1 hour to 1½ hours to read the study; 1 to 2 hours for discussion.

**Materials:** Chart paper, markers, copies of the study (available at [www.nsd.org/stateprofllearning.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/stateprofllearning.cfm)).



1. Read the study and record your thoughts in the four squares in preparation for a longer conversation with colleagues:

## IDEAS THAT WERE NEW FOR ME

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## COMMENTS THAT AFFIRM MY ACTIONS

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## QUESTIONS I WANT TO ASK THE AUTHOR

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## ACTIONS I WILL TAKE NEXT

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2. Engage the school's leadership team in a discussion of the reading by first sharing what each person put in each quadrant of the grid and then discussing these questions:
  - What implications does this study suggest for professional development in our school?
  - What are several strategies we can implement to strengthen our school's professional development?
  - What would be our first actions to make that happen?

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1. Assign a question to different people in the group as a focus for reading the study. Ask each person to prepare a summary in answer to the question and to be ready to share it with others:

- What did you learn about the link between professional development and student learning?

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- What did you learn about the kind of professional development most teachers experience in this country?

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- What did you learn about the kind of professional development teachers experience in countries that outperform the U.S.?

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- What did you learn about other countries' support for collaboration?

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2. Allow each person about 5 to 7 minutes to share his or her summary and 3 to 5 minutes for questions from others.

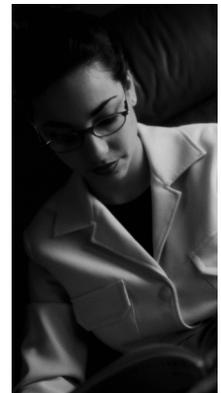
3. Be ready to discuss this question at the end of the report outs and questions:

- How does the kind of professional development available to us compare to what most teachers experience in the U.S. and in other high-performing countries?

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## Landmark study examines professional learning in the U.S.

*Continued from p. 1*

Finding ways for educators to improve professional learning in schools in order to increase student success and close achievement gaps is the focus of a three-year study NSDC has undertaken. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the MetLife Foundation, and The Wallace Foundation are supporting aspects of the study. The “Multiyear Study of the State of Professional Learning in the U.S.” will provide the most comprehensive picture and far-reaching analysis of professional learning to date in this country.

The first phase of the study, “Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the U.S. and Abroad,” has just been completed by Linda Darling-Hammond and a team of researchers at Stanford University’s Educational Leadership Institute. This phase of the study examines how U.S. teachers experience professional development and compares those experiences with the professional development of teachers in other countries, especially those that outperform the U.S. on the Programme of International Student Assessment exams (PISA).

Phase one of the study reported here provides baseline data and information about what research says works and what other nations that are dramatically improving their achievement and results are doing to build the skills and knowledge of their teacher workforce.

The data are drawn from national and international datasets, including the Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI), developed and validated by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory to measure teacher perception of quality of professional learning experiences as defined by NSDC’s Standards for Staff Development; the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), administered by the National Center for Education Statistics to evaluate the status of teachers and teaching in U.S. schools; and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) teacher surveys associated with each student assessment.

In phase two, researchers will administer the SAI to a randomized national sample that will allow for state-by-state comparisons and analyses as well as the identification of higher-performing states and school systems. In phase three, the same team of researchers will develop selected state and district-level case studies that delineate the policies and practices that contributed to the higher student performance results.

While much of NCLB’s implementation has focused on “highly qualified teachers,” it has devoted considerably less attention to “highly effective teaching.” It is NSDC’s experience, validated by research, that schools need teachers who are (a) prepared to teach increasingly diverse learners, (b) knowledgeable about student learning, (c) competent with complex core academic content, and (d) skillful at teaching. Though professional learning is the primary means to move current teachers toward higher levels of performance, many school systems fail to use professional development effectively.

Effective professional learning must be planned and organized to engage all teachers regularly and to benefit all students. This requires high-quality, sustained professional learning throughout the school year, at every grade level.

Principals lead learning within their schools and have a crucial role in establishing the structures, culture, and support that provide the framework for engaging teachers in learning. Principals use a delicate balance of pressure and support, according to Michael Fullan (2007), to help teachers continuously improve by better understanding students’ learning needs, making appropriate decisions regarding content and pedagogy, and assessing students’ learning within a framework of high expectations.

The study’s first phase allows us to more deeply understand the current state of professional learning and how it compares to successful practices in this country and worldwide. The keys to increasing quality teaching, Darling-Hammond’s team says, are creating the time for teachers to learn collaboratively, focusing the

*Continued on p. 7*

For a complete copy of the report “Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the U.S. and Abroad,” see [www.nsd.org/stateproflearning.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/stateproflearning.cfm).

## Actions for the principal to take

1. Use this article and/or the study to **begin a conversation with faculty members** about the degree to which they recognize the contribution professional learning can make to the goals they want to achieve in the school.
2. Use this article and/or the study to **convene a conversation with PTA and/or other key community leaders** to discuss the reasons for investing in high-quality professional learning for teachers.
3. Use this article and/or the study to **write a letter for the school newspaper or PTA newsletter** to discuss the importance of teacher learning.
4. Ask members of the school leadership team to study the article and/or the study and **present a summary to the faculty**, leading a discussion on implications of the findings for action in the school.
5. Discuss the findings of the study with fellow principals and **brainstorm strategies** for piloting some of the more significant recommendations in the school.
6. Organize a small leadership team to **audit your own professional development** and compare it to the most common practices in other nations.
7. Invite different grade levels and/or department teams to **pilot one practice recommended** in the study and report to the entire faculty on its impact.

*Continued from p. 6*

learning on concrete tasks of teaching connected to their real work, and improving teachers' sense of efficacy by allowing them to make professional decisions, such as about curriculum and instructional practice.

The Stanford team concluded that teachers require job-embedded professional learning structured within their work day, collaborative time that is focused on both improving their grasp of content and on pedagogical strategies proven to affect student achievement, as well as collaboration focused on the real-world work they are doing. Teacher influence on teaching and learning processes also are important, according to the study.

The study concluded U.S. teachers are less likely than those in high-achieving countries to have time to observe one another teaching, to collaborate with each other on research or issues around instruction, or to receive support for advanced coursework. In addition, teachers gave low ratings to the usefulness of most of their current professional development activities, indicating that existing programs are neither fulfilling teachers' needs nor affecting practices in ways that will improve student learning. Many teachers' experiences with professional development

in the U.S. are with one-shot workshops that are ineffective for changing practice or affecting student learning. Most teachers' planning time is spent independent of their colleagues.

The research found that in many high-performing countries, teachers spend as much as half their work time planning with each other, honing lessons, and developing curriculum. Meanwhile, U.S. teachers spend as much as 80% of their work time instructing students.

Understanding effective professional learning is the first step for leaders. There is also a need for persistent leadership and advocacy for more effective practices. School leaders can begin working to determine the extent to which their professional learning meets high standards, is offered where teachers work, and in ways that research says make a difference in teaching and learning.

## REFERENCES

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### NSDC'S BELIEF

Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.

Learn more about NSDC's purpose at [www.nsd.org/connect/](http://www.nsd.org/connect/) **NSDCpurpose.cfm** and NSDC's Standards for Staff Development at [www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm). Use NSDC tools to help you advance the quality of professional development in your school.

NSDC's web site ([www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org)) provides additional information and resources for high-quality professional development.

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## True leaders unleash others' potential

Educators need a new paradigm to successfully teach students in a way that will prepare them for an ever more rapidly changing world, according to Stephen Covey, leadership authority and noted author of

*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Free Press, 1990). Covey, a keynoter at NSDC's 40th Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., Dec. 6-10, 2008, told the nearly 4,000 attendees that the life and career skills required of young people today are vastly different from the learning most adults experienced just a few decades ago.

Covey said educators need to lead the way in creating a different map for students to follow, one that embraces new challenges. He said the globalization of markets and technology, and near-universal connectivity and easy access to information through the Internet, are



creating greater competition in the workforce.

Understanding the shift to what Covey termed the "Knowledge-Age Market" is essential for education leaders to make a difference. The different skills required mean educators must shift their mental model to

one in which students learn not by rote, but by learning to think outside the box. Rather than teaching students to take tests, teachers must focus on teaching teamwork, interpersonal skills, self-motivation, work ethic, analytical and organizational skills, and must allow for creativity. Leaders begin by inspiring trust, then clarify purpose, align the system, and unleash talent.

"A child's worth is so much more than a score on a piece of paper," Covey told the group. "My definition of leadership is communicating people's worth and potential so clearly that they are inspired to see it in themselves."