Team learning scenario task

TASKS

- Select one of the following scenarios to read, or ask different members of the group to read different ones.
- Read the selected scenario(s) to identify attributes of collaborative professional learning.
- Compare your notes with those of a colleague.
- Using your collective notes, develop a definition of collaborative professional learning.

DEFINITION

SCENARIO 1

SCHOOL-BASED COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: **Fremont Elementary School 4th-grade teachers**

The school year starts differently at Fremont Elementary School. Instead of the normal whole-school professional development day with a presentation, Principal Frieda Jackson leads teachers through an analysis of student achievement data.

All morning, teachers dig through data and work in various group configurations to learn how students performed on the most recent state tests. They brainstorm actions the school might take in the areas they want to target. The school's leadership team will consider these ideas in greater depth.

Teachers spend the afternoon in grade-level teams planning how to improve student performance in at least one target area they identify in the data from their incoming students. Jackson, helped by the district testing specialist, prepared data for each grade level and for each teacher's new class. The teachers study the class composite and content-specific scores from incoming students' performance on the prior year's test using a simple data analysis protocol Jackson gave them that morning. They identify strengths and weaknesses in student reading, writing, and math subskill areas.

The 4th-grade teachers are listing their observations on a chart and are about to choose a focus area when Jackson stops by to ask how things are going. She expresses her appreciation for the team's efforts last year and notes the 4th graders' improvements on the state tests. As she talks, she reads over the teachers' chart and smiles when she sees writing as a possible focus. She, too, knows that these incoming 4th graders need work on writing.

As Jackson leaves to visit other teams, she reminds the team that a plan is due Friday and that she is available to assist. Walking toward the 5th-grade pod, Jackson thinks, "It will be interesting to see what they decide to focus on this year. If they have thoroughly analyzed the data, they will see writing is the appropriate focus. I trust them. If they make a wrong choice, they'll discover that on their own. They work well as a team."

After Jackson leaves, the team decides to collaborate on improving writing. They plan the first several weeks of school, including giving students a writing assessment within the first three days, scoring a select sample together, and developing lesson plans to address areas of deficit. One team member recommends cross-classroom flexible grouping, but the team decides to wait to see how students perform first. They also choose books to read aloud in the first week that best use figurative language, an area they identified in which students need specific attention. Together, they craft questions to address about teaching figurative language and one team member volunteers to type them up to e-mail to everyone.

They agree to meet Tuesdays and Thursdays during team-planning time to discuss student writing. At their next team meeting, they plan to bring writing samples to score and analyze, and hope by the end of the first week to identify major areas to concentrate on and to begin planning specific instruction.

The grade-level chair asks for a volunteer to help her write the plan due Friday to Jackson identifying their area of focus, a SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, timely) goal, three benchmarks, ways they will assess student performance at these benchmarks, and actions they will take to achieve the goals. All the teachers agree to stay and help develop the plan, knowing they

are free to change it when they have more specific actions they want to take.

When the grade-level chair meets with Jackson to review the draft plan, Jackson reassures her that the plan is a living document and says she hopes the team will continue to review and refine it throughout the year. She helps revise the goal to include all the elements of a SMART goal and suggests actions for the team to consider at the action planning stage. Jackson shares a copy of the 2nd-grade teachers' plan because they, too, have identified writing. She recommends that the two teams connect to share what they are learning when it seems appropriate.

SCENARIO 2

SCHOOL-BASED TEAM LEARNING:
Martin Middle School

The 8th-grade state test scores are back and the school must improve or face sanctions. As they have for the last five years, 8th-grade teachers say they spend too much of their time reteaching the 7th-grade curriculum to unprepared students.

Principal Theresa Sanchez has talked repeatedly with team leaders about the number of 7th graders failing. The 7th-grade teachers acknowledge the failure rate, but attribute it to their high expectations. They want students to learn to be responsible for their actions — an important skill, both for high school and life — so they have agreed to be less lenient on work that is late, incomplete, or poor quality. The lack of leniency leads to more failures, but the teachers say they prefer that students experience those failures now rather than in high school.

Sanchez knows about the tensions between 7th- and 8th-grade teachers and can no longer avoid addressing the matter. She asks the 7th- and 8th-grade team leaders to a meeting Tuesday after school, where she expresses her concern about the increasing ill feelings. She shares some data to support her conclusion, then lays out a plan to form a new professional learning community and asks the team leaders to identify members for the team. She listens as they talk about including a counselor and at least one 6th-grade teacher on the team, along with an equal number of 7th- and 8th-grade teachers. Sanchez asks about including a parent or student, but the group decides to consider adding them later. Sanchez asks for one representative from 7th and 8th grades to co-facilitate the team. She arranges released time for a half-day meeting and offers to help the facilitators plan the agenda.

At the first meeting of the new team — three 7th- and three 8th-grade teachers, a 6th-grade teacher, a counselor, the school social worker, and Sanchez — members start with a team-building activity, then hear the history of what brought them to this point, review the team's purpose and goals, and suggest minor revisions. The team plans to identify the causes of 7th-grade failures, to plan ways to reduce failures by 50% in the next school year, and to plan how to eliminate failures by increasing student success within three years. The team will also identify and support professional learning on effective instructional strategies to engage disengaged students. Members will meet over at least two months.

The school counselor has assembled data, including absentee rates, state test performance for 8th graders, CAT test scores for 6th graders, grade distributions for each grade, retention numbers, and parent and student climate survey results. The facilitators share a protocol for examining the data, then team members divide into pairs to analyze the

data. Each team identifies patterns within the data and teachers begin to discuss these patterns across pairs. The facilitators ask each pair to report out and chart their findings. Then pairs exchange data sets with another team and repeat the process so that two pairs review each data set, adding findings to the chart.

The first meeting ends with a lengthy list of findings. The facilitators ask team members to share the findings with their respective grade levels and to discuss which factors teachers believe may contribute most to 8th graders' performance on the state tests, gathering input to guide the team's planning in the next meeting. Team members also discuss how to let other stakeholders know about the team's work. They agree to write a news release for each meeting and to spend a few minutes at each team meeting to answer questions that arise from other team members. In addition, team members agree to encourage teachers to identify disengaged students and strategies for improvement. Sanchez agrees to collect the students' names and the strategies and to compile them for the next meeting.

Over the next few weeks, Sanchez notices that the 7th- and 8th-grade teams have invested time discussing students and strategies for change. A few teams have even decided to try action research on strategies to assess their effectiveness, and teachers have been discussing the results.

SCENARIO 3

SCHOOL-BASED COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: **Peterson High School science department**

Most students in the school's upper-level science courses are white and Asian males, an issue the teachers recognize. The school's curriculum coach meets with the teaching team and asks how they differentiate instruction and materials, how they link students' background knowledge when they introduce concepts, and about students' readiness for high school science. Teachers talk about student motivation, high absenteeism, lack of basic study skills, and general lack of interest in science.

Together, they identify underenrollment of black, Hispanic, and female students in upper-level science courses as a problem and agree to gather data. First, the coach suggests teachers ask the counselor for data about female students who succeed in upper-level science classes; successful black and Hispanic students; and students in those groups who have performed poorly in basic science classes and choose not to enroll in other science classes. Teachers want to study how these students performed in other classes, their attendance, how many hours they work outside of school, any extracurricular activities, and their scores on the 10th-grade achievement test.

The coach and teachers analyze the data during the department's common planning time and discover no correlation between science achievement and school attendance, extracurriculars, or employment outside of school. Achievement test data told them what they already knew — some students performed better than others. But they found that students who performed poorly in basic science also performed poorly in other classes involving a lot of reading and writing. The same students performed much better in classes that required more physical activity or creative expression, including physical education, family and consumer science, technology classes, drama, art, and music. The teachers decide to study more the type of learner these students are.

The physics teacher wants to study whether

using different instructional processes changes how students learn and volunteers to use more physical and nonlinguistic activities in an upcoming unit. The other teachers point out that their concern is students continuing from lower classes and ask the physics teacher to help them develop a unit in physical science. All agree on this action research, and other teachers volunteer to help plan.

At the next meeting, teachers invite a physical education teacher to help them figure out what activities might engage students in the concept of resistance, and they plan a unit. An Introduction to Science teacher agrees to teach it first. The physics teacher and the other Introduction to Science teacher ask the assistant principal for coverage for their classes so they can observe the first two lessons. After each class, the three teachers debrief over lunch, discussing how to tweak what they designed and how to know if students really understand the concept. On the third day, other science teachers and the physical education teacher ask how the unit is progressing. The three agree to debrief in the department's next common planning meeting.

To prepare, the Introduction to Science teacher takes pictures of her students in class, gathers some of their notes and work, and charts the results of the unit test. She plans to talk about two students in particular, students in their target groups who had failing grades before the unit and who aced the work on resistance. The assistant principal provides two articles about multiple intelligences and differentiation to share. The physics teacher agrees to facilitate the meeting and set the agenda.

At the meeting, teachers agree that collaboration is essential for them to learn instructional strategies that meet the needs of learners who are not typically successful in science. They know their instructional practices often do not accommodate those with different learning styles from the majority of the teachers. They acknowledge that cross-departmental collaboration, such as with the physical education teacher, is critical and identify the next problem they want to tackle as a department — a high failure rate in chemistry. They know they still have a long way to go to incorporate different strategies to engage all students. The physical education teacher sits quietly, already thinking about how to use movement to help students understand electrons, molecules, nuclei, and the periodic chart.

Later, the principal meets with the department chair and asks that the department set improvement goals for the next two years of increasing the number of female and underrepresented students in upper-level classes, decreasing the failure rate in all science classes, and improving the performance of students in science on the state achievement test.

SCENARIO 4

CROSS-SCHOOL TEAM SCENARIO:
West Grove Township School District

Teachers have mixed reactions when the West Grove superintendent begins talking about transforming professional development days into weekly time for collaboration. Some are enthusiastic. Laureen Garibaldi appreciates the idea of professional development that would be more valuable to her, but wonders who will be on her team since she is the only high school calculus teacher. Other single-class teachers, some elective teachers, the school's two counselors, the media specialist, and some special educators have similar questions.

Garibaldi and several others meet with the principal to discuss the plan. Garibaldi is delighted to learn that she will meet with her counterpart

in the other high school to focus specifically on the content of calculus, ways to teach some of its complex concepts, lesson ideas, common assessments, and to plan units.

When the collaborative professional learning teams begin meeting weekly in January, Garibaldi joins Ben Simpson for the district's half-day training on essential skills for collaborative teams. In the afternoon, teachers work in groups to discuss how to set up the teams, data to study, preliminary goals for their own and student learning, and where to meet. Garibaldi and Simpson set a schedule for their team meetings, identify a location, and discuss what to bring to their first meeting to analyze student data and set professional learning goals. They agree to bring Advanced Placement, SAT, and ACT math scores to see what they can discern about student math achievement in their district and respective schools.

After pouring through the data at their next meeting, they discover discrepancies in student performance. Students at Simpson's school do much better than those in Garibaldi's school. Garibaldi asks Simpson to help her figure out why. They set a tentative goal for their own professional learning: To deepen their expertise in teaching calculus by building a common curriculum and pacing guide for the calculus course. They also want to ensure that all students improve on all assessments and that the discrepancy in performance between the schools decreases.

At their next meeting, both bring the district curriculum documents, the state's core curriculum content standards for math, and the texts each uses in advanced math classes. Making a matrix on chart paper, they identify where each math standard is referenced in the district curriculum and in their respective texts. Their 100 minutes is soon over, but both agree they need more time to look at how the standards are addressed in each of the core classes and texts. They agree to integrate the Advanced Placement guidelines in their next conversation.

Both realize they need far more time and help from colleagues who teach other advanced math classes. They schedule their next meeting and agree to invite one or two math teachers from each high school to join them. They complete their mandatory team log and talk about what they want to accomplish at the next meeting.

In their next meeting, Garibaldi, Simpson, and colleagues complete the math course map that identifies where each standard is addressed and determine where students are expected to master each standard. They uncover some discrepancies in the content of courses between the schools. Simpson devotes more attention to integrating standards, while Garibaldi is more focused on completing the text. They also find glaring gaps in Garibaldi's textbook. Several standards are addressed briefly or not at all.

After eight meetings, they feel they have accomplished a great deal because they developed a curriculum map that reflects a logical sequence of their curriculum standards. Now they can turn specifically to calculus. They invite a math faculty member from one of the local universities to meet with them to review their work and discuss strategies for teaching more complex concepts. They agree to design common assessments for calculus that will assess students' mastery of the standards, not just the textbook content. For both Garibaldi and Simpson, the opportunity to collaborate holds great promise.