

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Most people who hear the words “comprehensive school reform” take a deep breath because they know much work lies ahead. New, more challenging standards require much more of students, of course, but they also require much more of teachers and staff. Everyone involved in education must have an expanded ability – a greater capacity – if every student is to succeed.

For example, teachers must have the knowledge and skills to create lessons that are tied to standards and to develop standards-based assessments. They also may need to learn to use new grading methods or understand new formats for reporting students’ progress by individual standard.

How can this capacity be developed? According to the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1996), “schools that have found ways to educate all students well have done so by providing ongoing learning for teachers and staff” (p. 9). Clearly, professional development is the key to developing the capacity needed to reach the goal of comprehensive school reform.

## THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERS

A healthy district climate is one that encourages teachers to learn and grow. District leaders play an important role in creating a culture that values lifelong learning, first and foremost by leading the process of developing a vision of staff learning that focuses on student outcomes. All professional development activities across

the district should grow out of – and be linked to – specific student learning needs.

### *Characteristics of Effective Professional Development*

Focuses on teachers as central to student learning, yet includes all other members of the school community

Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement

Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community

Reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership

Enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards

Promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools

Is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development

Requires substantial time and other resources

Is driven by a coherent, long-term plan

Is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning; and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts

*Source: U.S. Department of Education, 1995*

### ***Guidelines for District Leaders***

- ❖ Communicate a strong and consistent message that staff development should be focused on helping students meet high standards.
- ❖ Identify professionals who can help plan, implement, and evaluate a program that meets the needs of teachers and staff.
- ❖ Create a climate of shared problem solving with school leaders. Work together to find ways to better tap into the expertise of teachers and staff, but also to identify capacities that need to be expanded.
- ❖ Give school leaders the flexibility to decide how professional development activities will be structured for their faculty and staff.
- ❖ Hold staff accountable for developing useful, relevant, and current professional development programs. Measure effectiveness and create a feedback loop that ensures ongoing improvement.
- ❖ Use ongoing evaluation of staff development activities to maintain alignment between staff development activities and reform goals.

### **THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS**

Principals and other school leaders should take the lead in creating and sustaining a climate of learning for everyone – students, teachers, staff, and administrators. One key way they can do this is to find opportunities each day to

stimulate sharing and reflection about how to better help students learn.

### ***Guidelines for School Leaders***

- ❖ Know the fundamental concepts of adult learning.
- ❖ Learn about effective models and strategies for professional development.
- ❖ Encourage teachers to take responsibility for their own learning by modeling an ongoing commitment to personal and professional growth.
- ❖ Lead the process of gathering data to identify professional development needs and to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development programs.
- ❖ Secure the necessary human, fiscal, and technological resources.
- ❖ Find time for teachers to collaborate, share ideas, and learn together (e.g., developing lesson plans and units). Participate in these activities.

### **KEY CHALLENGE: CREATING A CULTURE OF LEARNING**

Most people associate professional development with bringing in an outside consultant to lead an in-service. But effective professional development encompasses much more. Professional development is most useful when it

is embedded in the daily life of the school — when there is a *culture of learning* in the school and district.

A culture of learning is characterized by a respect for learning, a high level of trust, collaborative processes such as shared decision making, a mutual understanding of the goal of improved student learning, and a collective commitment to the success of all students. Cultivating these shared principles happens over time as teachers purposely study together, exchange ideas, reflect on their practices, and find better ways to help students learn. Without this kind of culture, teachers will find it difficult to learn all they need to know to change their practices in ways that lead to improved student achievement.

School leaders build a culture of learning by fostering respect, trust, and strong, personal connections among staff; by being nonjudgmental and focusing on the positive; and by organizing staff into grade-level or “vertical” (cross-grade) teams to accomplish specific instructional tasks. These collaborative structures (and others, such as action research groups and study groups) help create a culture of learning by providing time for dialogue, planning, and consensus building. Principals also help develop a culture of learning by providing the resources teachers and staff need to engage in shared reading and discussion about books or articles that stimulate thinking

### *Where to Begin*

Believe that staff have the desire to succeed.

Examine the culture of the school. Look for ways in which the culture supports or impedes effective professional development.

Gather data about student learning. Use the data to identify professional needs.

Collaborate with teachers to design a professional development program that includes a variety of ways for them to acquire the knowledge and skills they need.

about teaching and learning. All of these actions send the message that everyone is valued, everyone is responsible, and everyone benefits.

## RESOURCES

- Bernhardt, V. (1994). *The school portfolio*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Collins, D. (1999). *Achieving your vision of staff development*. Tallahassee, FL: South East Regional Vision for Education (SERVE).
- Gonder, P. (1999). Invigorating education by reinventing staff development. In *Noteworthy perspectives on comprehensive school reform*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. Available: <http://www.mcrel.org/products/noteworthy/csr.asp>

- Hassel, E. (1999). *Professional development: Learning from the best*. Oakbrook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Loucks-Horsley, S. (1999). *Professional development that works*. Columbus, OH: Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science.
- National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (1996). *What matters most: Teaching for America's future*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- National Staff Development Council. (1998). *Standards for staff development*. Oxford, OH: Author.
- O'Day, J., Goertz, M., & Floden, R. (1995). *Building capacity for education reform*. CPRE Policy Briefs (RB-18-December 1995). New Brunswick, NJ: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.
- Spillane, J., & Thompson, C. (1997, Summer). Reconstructing conceptions of local capacity: The local education agency's capacity for ambitious instructional reform. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 19(2), 185-203.
- U.S. Department of Education. (1995). *Mission and principles of professional development*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Zepeda, S. (1999). *Staff development: Practices that promote leadership in learning communities*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

### **Web Sites**

- National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform. <http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu/>
- National Staff Development Council  
<http://www.nsd.org>
- North Central Regional Education Laboratory  
<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/pd0cont.htm>
- United States Department of Education  
<http://www.ed.gov/inits/teachers/teach.html>

## **NATIONAL MODEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD WINNERS**

### **1996/97**

- Lawrence Public Schools, Lawrence, KS  
Samuel W. Mason Elementary School, Roxbury, MA  
San Francisco Unified School District, San Francisco, CA  
Wilton Public Schools, Wilton, CT  
Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, Manhattan, KS

### **1997/98**

- Ganado Intermediate School, Patagonia, AZ  
Geneva City Schools, Geneva, NY  
H. D. Hilley Elementary School, El Paso, TX  
Hungerford School, Staten Island, NY  
International High School at LaGuardia Community College, Long Island, NY  
Lewisville Independent School District, Lewisville, TX  
Montview Elementary School, Aurora, CO  
Shallowford Falls Elementary School, Marietta, GA

### **1998/99**

- Carroll Independent School District, Southlake, TX  
Edmonds School District No. 15, Lynnwood, WA  
Norman Public Schools, Norman, OK  
Olathe District Schools, Olathe, KS  
Sprayberry High School, Marietta, GA  
Spring Woods Senior High School, Houston, TX  
Wherry Elementary School, Albuquerque, NM