



professional

LEARNING

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FROM THE HILL

NSDC's Purpose: Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieve.

The Michigan Staff Development Council is working diligently to ensure NSDC's purpose becomes a reality both near and far. Its efforts have taken a variety of forms such as offering professional learning opportunities that model quality staff development; working with the Michigan Department of Education to reflect on and revise its policies and practices to align with the current research; and supporting national legislation and the state's proposal for the Race to The Top funds.

In the coming days, Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) will introduce the "Teacher and Principal Improvement Act" and Congressman Jared Polis (D-CO) will introduce the "Great Teachers for Great Schools Act."

These pieces of legislation offer more concise, direct definitions of "professional development" in ESEA, and set the vision for quality professional development in American schools (The NSDC's formal definition of professional development reflected in these bills can be found at www.nsdconline.org). The proposed bills repurpose the existing Title II, Part A grant program to assist

underperforming schools in building the capacity to implement high-quality professional development systems.

These bills

- (a) Redefine "Professional Development" in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). For too long, the definition of "professional development" in ESEA has not been conducive to good practice.
- (b) Replace the current definition of professional development with one that aligns to NSDC's vision for effective professional learning.
- (c) Provide funding to build educator and system capacity for professional learning and financial support for the implementation of effective professional learning.

The NSDC believes that the specific provisions outlined in these bills for professional development reform are absolutely vital to teacher retention and student performance. Unless as a nation people are content with maintaining the current achievement

and socio-economic gap, the reauthorization of ESEA needs to require states and districts to develop the capacity of teachers and principals through "systematic, sustained, coherent school and team-based, job-embedded professional development."

The Michigan Staff Development Council strongly encourages its membership to voice its support for these bills by contacting one's representatives in the House and Senate. Legislative victory is within our reach. With your help, the quality of education can be improved for every child in the country, including Michigan.

For more specific information about the contents of the two bills go to the MSDC website www.nsdconline.org.

How You Can Help:

Send letters of support to your representatives in the Senate and House. Sample letters and more information are available on NSDC's website at the following address: www.nsdconline.org/getinvolved/pdlegislation.cfm.

Implementing NSDC's New Definition of Professional Learning:

The Problem of Change

Cynthia Carver, PhD
Michigan State University

Recently, I had the opportunity to share NSDC's new definition for Professional Learning with a group of teacher leaders and their principals. Remembering my own surprise and delight upon reading and studying this document, I was eager to share this hot-off-the-press document with the group. What I didn't anticipate was their hesitancy. Although this was a momentary reaction, tempered by further discussion, their first response reminded me yet again of why change can be difficult.

At the time of this discussion, our group had been working together for nearly a year. While our long-term goal was focused on improving student learning and achievement in algebra, our more immediate task was to support teachers as they began to make changes – large and small – to their instructional practice. From the beginning, my colleagues and I expected there to be bumps along the way. Obstacles would need to be removed (e.g. fear of change), and hurdles jumped (e.g. limited resources). Still, we remained hopeful that the press of state policy requiring successful completion of algebra would motivate the group forward. As the months passed, we were encouraged by the eagerness with which participating teachers and principals engaged in our sessions. Clearly, they got it. They understood that quick fixes were the equivalent of snake oil, and that real change would take an investment of time, resources and commitment.

In its newly worked definition, NSDC (2009) describes professional development as “a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement.” Our own project

and purposeful learning through established teams who meet regularly.

Through continued discussion within our group, it became apparent that participant concerns zeroed in on the last feature: established teams who

meet regularly. By listening carefully, we were able to identify two distinct concerns: the lack of time and the fear of teacher buy-in. Notably, these were not new concerns for our group. Our project

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satisfied this definition: our 30-hour study group sessions were content-rich, we drew on the combined expertise of teachers and principals, and our goal was to improve student learning through more effective teaching. Moreover, our ongoing work was designed to target an ever-widening circle of teachers.

Why, then, the hesitancy from our group? The answer, it seemed, was found in the details.

As the NSDC argues, the content of high-quality professional development is aligned with state standards and school improvement goals, as well as informed by the careful analysis of student and teacher performance data. Gone are the days of haphazard and disconnected workshops and seminars. Unlike traditional forms of professional development that rely heavily on external support, this definition of professional learning privileges facilitators that come from within the system, e.g. well-prepared administrators and school-based teacher leaders. Finally, this approach engages every teacher in ongoing

was asking them to think differently about algebra and how they teach algebra. A commitment to ongoing professional learning would require an enormous investment of time. Our participants were rightfully concerned about where that time would come from. Our project also asked that they work with one another to try new things, share ideas, observe and give one another feedback. Collegial trust, as well as openness to doing things differently would be foundational to moving this work forward. Our participants knew that it was prudent to anticipate resistance from teachers who didn't want or see the need for change. As the discussion continued, yet another concern surfaced. Who from the inside would best guide and lead these professional development experiences? Further, what kinds of support would this individual need?

In grappling with the new definition, our teachers and principals were acknowledging the implementation challenges that they would likely face. This new definition of professional learning represents a radical change, not a tinkering around the edges.

Districts will need to do a better job of finding and then protecting teachers' time for professional learning. Schools will need to work at establishing building climates that welcome thoughtful discussion of practice. Also needed will be meaningful agendas for professional learning connected to real problems of practice, and facilitators who have a knack for leading adult learning. As it turned out, allowing our group time to voice their concern also opened the door to brainstorming practical solutions.

For example, in talking with our teachers and principals about designing high quality professional learning with resistant staff, one idea we offered was to start with relatively easy, low-risk entry points for collaborative work. For example, rather than asking all mathematics teachers to incorporate high cognitive demand tasks into their algebra instruction (Stein, Smith, Henningsen & Silver, 2009), we suggested that they first invite teachers to observe a lesson where a high demand task is being taught, then debrief that observation as a departmental team. Alternatively, rather than requiring teachers to bring copies of their own student's work for analysis, we suggested that they start by analyzing a set of work that another teacher has collected. As we explained to our group, to fully engage in a learning community, teachers will need to learn how to work together. More specifically, they will need time to establish norms for talking openly with one another about teaching, and time to develop skills for exploring problems of practice.

Admittedly, this solution of low-risk entry doesn't address all problems of buy-in, time or facilitation, but it does represent a useful starting point. In

our work with teachers, this is how authentic change begins. Identify a problem, brainstorm solutions, and then make a commitment to act. For many schools, the reworked NSDC definition for Professional Learning represents a new way of doing things.

Moving closer to this vision will require teachers to think differently about their professional learning, and that of their colleagues. Giving teachers an opportunity to voice their concerns may well begin the journey toward change.

Identifying Concerns; Implementing Change

Staff Discussion Tool

Purpose: To engage staff in an open discussion of changes that may be needed in order to implement the new NSDC vision for professional learning.

Materials: Text of the new definition is available at www.nsd.org/standfor/definition.cfm.

- 1) In small groups, have participants begin by sharing their HOPES and CONCERNS with the new definition. Record responses for later sharing with the large group.
- 2) Once the group has generated a list of responses in each category, transition to an open discussion of concerns. Record responses for later sharing.
 - Can the group find patterns within the range of concerns identified, e.g. concern for a lack of time, or concern about teacher buy-in?
 - What concerns are most pressing and why?
- 3) Still in small groups, brainstorm potential strategies for managing high priority concerns, e.g. engaging staff in collaborative work through low-risk entry points. With extra time, begin to identify the resources needed to implement various strategies. Record responses for later sharing.
- 4) Return to the large group and have each small group share key ideas from their discussion. Transition by asking the group: What changes will be needed in order to implement the new vision? As the discussion winds down, encourage participants to see the connection between their concerns and the changes needed, as well as their role in working toward those changes.

Is Social Networking a New Basic Skill for Teachers?

By Dave Myers, Executive Director,
Michigan LearnPort

I'm at a ballgame this summer with my adult son. As we banter back and forth about our beloved Detroit Tigers, he is constantly on his cell phone typing away or reading text messages. I finally ask him who he is "talking" to and what he is talking about. Seems he has friends throughout the ball park that day and they are talking about the same things that he and I are. Live social networking in action.

Social networking seems to be second nature to the so-called digital natives, young adults who grew up with computers, IPODs and cell phones in the house and classroom. Not so much with most teachers who have more than a few years in the classroom. Of course, obvious examples of early adaptors are everywhere but, in most cases, social networking means talking to the teacher next door.

Electronic social networking, or communicating across time and space via Internet or cellular, has tremendous implications for teachers, students and parents. Just as my son is no longer bound by proximity, teachers, their students and parents are no longer tied to a classroom. Schooling, for many, has grown beyond the building and six hours for 10 months. Let's explore just a few examples of how social networking can influence the business of schooling.

Communicating with Students

Social Networking can be synchronous, happening now, or asynchronous, happening anytime. Students in class can text questions to the teacher during lessons or later while working on homework. Using social networking sites, like Ning, students can ask questions of teachers or other students at any time of the day or night. Ning blogs and discussion forums provide a 24/7

capability for communicating when the answer can wait for a while. Social network sites provide a means to answer one question but help many. In this way, it is different than email.

Extending School beyond the Brick and Mortar

Michigan Virtual University®, though Michigan LearnPort®, has established a social network on Ning to introduce the idea that teachers and school districts can address continuing education through periods of school closures caused by wide-spread illness or even building mechanical problems or weather. This site shows what can be done to create individual Ning sites by individual teachers for their students and parents. Located at www.learnportmyclass.ning.com, the site offers suggestions and tutorials about how to add lessons, audio, video and other content, create blogs and discussions, and even set up live chat. Through social network sites, teachers can address long-term absences or even the daily absence of one or two students. Parents can monitor assigned work and be better prepared to help students at home.

Just as social networking can become an important instructional tool, it can really make a difference in the effectiveness of professional development. The National Staff Development Council supports efforts to extend, reinforce and provide practice in new knowledge, skills and attitudes introduced in professional development activities. Whether these activities are offered in a traditional face-to-face or an online setting, the ability to provide support over time



to teachers as they work to enhance or develop new strategies for use with their students can be facilitated through social networking.

This year, MVU, working with the Michigan Math and Science Center Network and the Michigan Department of Education, is supporting an ambitious professional development activity called Algebra for All. The program has been offered in a traditional face-to-face manner for many years. This year, the program is offered across the state to about 800 teachers using distance learning, both through MI Streamnet, a broadband video broadcast by Wayne RESA, online learning opportunities designed by MVU and offered through Michigan LearnPort and through social networking developed by MVU on the Ning platform. Teachers in the program are supported throughout the year by facilitators and peer coaches and have the opportunity to network in the NING site with local teachers as well as those around the state.

Social networking is only one way that education is growing beyond the classroom to help teachers help students meet the rigorous demands of the curriculum. Teachers, students and parents now have additional tools to work together to help students reach their full potential. Look at the technology that your students are using to communicate among their peers and figure out how that power can be harnessed to increase learning capacity. Visit [Michigan LearnPort](http://MichiganLearnPort.com) today.

Mission Statement:

"MSDC advocates for quality research-based professional development policies and practices to increase the capacity of those who work to improve student learning."

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Strategy Harvest

Say Something protocol

With the start of the new year, we are beginning a new feature in the MSDC Newsletter. On a regular basis we will be featuring a strategy or protocol that has been proven to be effective in facilitating meetings or processing various kinds of information. While the newsletter will contain the description, the actual protocol and any accompanying tools will be found at the new MSDC member wiki <http://msdcmembers.pbworks.com>. To request access to the wiki, simply follow that link and click on "request access."

MSDC members are also invited to contribute to the wiki. In addition, if you would like us to consider featuring your contribution in the newsletter, please send the description and any acknowledgments to terriportice@kentisd.org or benboerkoel@kentisd.org. The meeting protocol described in the October, 2009 newsletter has already been placed on the wiki.

This month features the "Say Something" protocol used for processing information from a selected or designed reading. The protocol is adapted from *Data-Driven Dialogue*, pp. 110, 111.

Say Something Protocol

Read _____. While reading highlight key points and make notes in the margins for discussion. Follow the protocol below throughout the reading:

1. Pair up for partner discussion. (Trios or quads can be used for increased interaction, but it will also take more time.)
2. Read silently to the designated "stopping point".
3. When each partner has finished reading up to the "stopping point", stop and "Say Something" to one another. "Say Something" might be a question, a brief summary statement, a key point, an interesting idea or a personal connection.
4. Continue the process until you have completed the process of stopping to "Say Something" to one another at each stopping point throughout the entire reading selection.
5. As partners, find one main point in the reading that you want to highlight to the group. Be prepared to share the information and formulate conversation around the topic.
6. When everyone is done reading, each team will share their special learning with the group. Group discussion around these points should occur.
7. Continue the process of team sharing and discussion until each group has had a time to share.

What does the strategy do?

- Supports individual learning by promoting short dialogue points throughout the reading, as well as at the end through whole group dialogue. This protocol offers these short periods of dialogue with partners in non-threatening manner.
- Structure minimizes off-task comments and non-essential elaboration
- Requires attentive listening and respect for the ideas of others
- Slows the pace of the response, providing individuals with time for reflection as well as a protected space within which to offer comments