



Issue #1
September, 2007

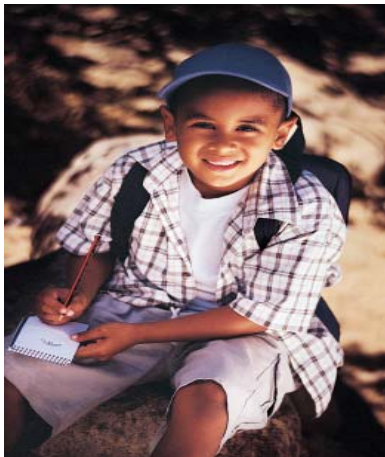
professional LEARNING

President's Message

By MSDC President, Sam Lopresto

The Michigan Staff Development Council (MSDC) is proud to be an affiliate of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC). Over the years NSDC has provided an excellent example and leadership for Michigan to emulate the best practices in professional development. In fact, Michigan was one of the first states to embrace the national standards for staff development and in August 2003 the State Board of Education included the national standards in their Vision and Standards for Professional Learning of Michigan Educators document.

Today under the leadership of new Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh and Deputy Director Joellen Killion, NSDC is tackling a more challenging task – amending ESEA through advocacy. NSDC has worked through Congress to have Senate Bill 1979 introduced by Sen. Jack



Reed (D-R.I.). SB 1979 amends ESEA to improve school performance by building the capacity of educators through:

- Multi-year induction and mentoring for new teachers and
- Team-based, job-embedded professional development for all teachers.

This legislation improves the definition of professional development in ESEA by saying that professional learning for educators:

- Engages teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff in ongoing professional development;
- Focuses on teams that engage in professional learning multiple times per week during the regular work day;
- Revolves around a continuous improvement cycle that uses data to (1) determine and define student, teacher, and school learning needs, (2) institute learning strategies to address learning needs, (3) and measure the effectiveness and impact of professional learning.

Executive Director Hirsh asserts, "Research has demonstrated that the quality of teaching is the single greatest determinant in the success of students and staff development is the most powerful intervention to ensure that teachers change

their practice so that more students experience higher quality teaching every day and thus greater learning every day."

SB 1979 introduces a new evaluation component to ensure that federal dollars spent on professional development achieve the intended results. The bill calls for evaluating the impact of both induction and mentoring for new teachers and high-impact professional development for all teachers by examining the following indicators: teacher retention, student learning gains, teacher instructional practice, student graduation rates, parent, family and community involvement, student attendance rates, teacher satisfaction, and student behavior. This amendment to ESEA links school improvement activities in Title I to the teacher development initiatives in Title II.

Advocacy at the both the federal and state level ensures that policy makers understand the importance of professional development and its impact on student learning. By encouraging and supporting educators at all levels to undertake advocacy efforts, NSDC can fulfill its purpose to "ensuring that every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves."

Leadership Coaching for Team Results

By Diana Williams

MSDC 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.”

MSDC News Briefs:

Dr. Carole Schmidt takes over at Benton Harbor Public Schools --

MSDC's Past President, Dr. Carole Schmidt recently accepted the position of Superintendent at Benton Harbor Public Schools. Dr. Schmidt had been the Superintendent of St. Joseph Public Schools and the MSDC President for 2006-07. Because of her new duties, she has resigned from the Board of MSDC. We will miss her leadership and her experience both with MSDC and NSDC.

Eugene Norris takes position in Racine, Wisconsin --

MSDC Board Member, Eugene Norris, has taken a position in the Professional Development Department in the Racine Unified School District in Racine, Wisconsin. Mr. Norris was previously the Director of Professional Growth & Program Development for Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Ben Boerkoel, former president of MSDC joins Kent ISD --

Ben Boerkoel, last year's past president of MSDC and Director of Curriculum & Instruction at Grand Rapids Christian Schools, recently took a position with Kent ISD.

MSDC launches new "branding" for its web site and publications --

The MSDC Communications Committee has been working with Krieger Communications to create a new "branding" for the web site, newsletter, brochures, and other publications. Please check out our new web site look at www.msdcnline.org. Also, take note of our new logo and templates for this newsletter and our membership brochure. The committee's goal was to give MSDC an identifiable look that members and others would begin to easily recognize as we build visibility for the organization.

MSDC Board looks for feedback from its membership --

If you have news on professional learning you would like to share or comments you would like to make regarding the role and work of MSDC, please send your ideas to MSDC at scofiel8@msu.edu or djonker@oaisd.org.

There are numerous school level teams and committees that perform different functions in the school. There may be grade level teams, small schools teams, professional learning community teams, curriculum committees, school improvement committees, social committees, parent involvement committees, or union compliance committees. They usually have a wide range of functions which include but are not limited to making decisions about school operations, serving as the steering committee for various initiatives, or serving as the problem-solving arm for the school. They may make decisions about teaching and learning or about professional development for the school. They may plan social functions at the school. They may engage in professional learning, grant-writing or curriculum writing. They may serve to solve the problem of the traffic patterns on the parking lot at pick-up time. With so many different foci, it is understandable that initiatives become fragmented, and teachers and administrators that serve on various committees get burned out.

Leadership coaching skill development for the school team is one way to develop the staff into a cohesive community of leaders and learners. Often it is only the principal or the assistant who is introduced to the concept of coaching through professional development and are able to avail themselves of ongoing individual coaching. As a result of the coaching, the principal or assistant then begin to speak and listen differently. They form new habits of thinking about issues and problems. Ideally the entire team would have an opportunity to learn together about the tools and skills of coaching and then practice their knowledge through participation in group coaching circles with the assistance of a skilled coach. When the team can have this optimal experience, they can make huge gains in closing the gap between all that they know about how to have a great school and actually making it happen. Persons who engage in

leadership coaching develop a language to deliberate more strategically on their goals and dreams for their work. They speak more powerfully and effectively with each other, with students and with parents. They listen to each other with a new ear, and they form habits of new mental models and tools to work in a more productive way with others. In the book, *On Common Ground*, (Dufour, 2005), the authors draw on the work of Pfeffer and Sutton to describe the barriers to action in organizations and how to overcome them (Pfeffer, 2000). School Team Coaching holds great promise to address these barriers in the following ways:

- To help schools get clarity about what actions to take
- To substitute action for planning
- To reduce the complexity of layers of team and committee work by all working together and speaking the same language
- To offset precedent ("that's how we've always done it")
- To minimize internal competition and foster cooperation
- To collaboratively design measurement systems to monitor progress
- To look inward rather than outward for solutions
- To focus on attitudes as a barrier to action
- To substitute knowledge gained by doing rather than by knowledge gained by formal training programs

It is our contention that leadership coaching is for the whole team. A team can be strengthened when the members speak the same language, listen to one another and bring the same protocols for communication to the table. Once the whole team participates in the coaching experience, they are all better equipped to solve their problems more strategically, to engage in planning for the future with greater robustness and have the kind of school they dream of and want.

A Vision for Quality Professional Learning

By Joellen Killion

The following op-ed piece written by NSDC Deputy Executive Director Joellen Killion appeared in the Denver Post on Sunday, August 26, 2008. This article, which focuses on improving education and never mentions “professional development,” provides some concrete suggestions as to how to create the conditions for quality teaching by providing quality professional learning opportunities.

“Reforming schools is challenging. Multiple innovations directed at the district, the curriculum, the test, the length of the school year, the community, etc., can make a difference. What makes the greatest difference, however, is the quality of teaching in classrooms.

Quality teaching occurs when teachers and principals engage in daily, collaborative, rigorous, professional learning focused on the learning needs of students in their classrooms and schools as a part of their work day. Increasing student academic achievement and keeping students in school through graduation requires that teachers and principals work

together, learn together, and solve problems of practice together. Given the chance, professionals in schools can solve any problem they face if the conditions are right.

The conditions are simple. First, the school day allows for time for professionals to learn and work together to deepen content knowledge, expand pedagogy, plan instruction, examine student work, address different student learning needs, clarify student learning outcomes, and use the results of frequent classroom assessments to modify instruction. Secondly, everyone assumes collective responsibility for student and teacher success. Thirdly, teachers and principals have the know-how to work together. Collaborative learning is the hallmark of a profession and the major contributor to student results.”



Sharing Best Practices

MSDC's *Professional Learning* e-newsletter is a monthly publication of the Michigan Staff Development Council during the school year. MSDC members are encouraged to contribute articles that showcase effective practices in staff development occurring around Michigan.

If you have an article on an effective staff development practice you would like to share, please send it as an electronic file to Dr. Dan Jonker, MSDC e-newsletter editor, at djonker@oaisd.org. Articles should be between 150-300 words and digital photographs are welcome. The MSDC Communications Committee reserves the right to edit articles to meet publication standards and guidelines. Articles must be submitted five days prior to the first of each month during the school year (Sept-June).

PLC Web Resource

The All Things PLC web site provides research, articles, data, and tools to educators who seek to learn more about PLCs at Work

<http://www.allthingsplc.org> is a web site dedicated to Professional Learning Communities. It's a service featuring the work of the DuFours, and includes:

- PLC blog and discussions
- Evidence of effectiveness, a “finder” function to locate success stories in districts/schools similar to yours
- Tools and resources, which includes sample agendas, activities, and links

The articles and research tab fills several screens with links to hundreds of articles in the following categories:

- Getting Started
- Teamwork/Collaboration
- Assessment
- Leadership/Managing PLC Change

Additionally there's a “History of PLC” tab which brings to your screen a comprehensive, readable review of the movement over time.

GOALS

- * To provide up-to-date, timely and useful information to educators regarding Professional Learning Community concepts and practices.
- * To provide educators with insights from leading practitioners through an interactive web log (blog).
- * To provide research and articles about Professional Learning Community concepts.
- * To provide information about schools that have successfully implemented the Professional Learning Communities at Work model.

3 “What Ifs?” and 5 “Why Nots?”

by Dr. Rod Rock & GERALYN MYCZKOWIAK

Envision with us an opening professional development day across the state where educators at all levels—from the Michigan Department of Education to pre-school—

put aside their lists, forms, computers, phones, motivational speakers, and welcoming lectures to think together. Willingly and honestly, educators from Ironwood to New Buffalo reflect on their practices and systems, asking themselves, “What are we teaching for?” Candidly, they examine students’ work and classroom instruction, thinking about the big ideas that engage and challenge students. Imagine this opening day kick-off as the launching point of a personal commitment, on the part of all educators, of time and effort for continued dialogue around teaching, learning, and leading. What if . . . and why not . . . ?

In the world of professional development, many organizations, including the National Staff Development Council, advocate for professional learning communities. In fact, educational thinkers such as Rick DuFour and Robert Eaker, Michael Fullan, and Michael Schmoker define these collaborative-team structures as the means and sources of professional learning within schools. Despite this, many of us spend time alone preparing to teach, prescribe learning communities to others without engaging ourselves, and develop organizational structures that promote isolation. What if, within the educational gamut—from the board of regents, to collegiate faculty meetings, to local boards of education, to teams of administrators, to teams of teachers, to students—we actually made and spent time learning in community with others?

Another and related phrase appearing frequently in the literature is the knowing-doing gap. Here, researchers identify a lag, or space between what educators acknowledge as best practices and actual

school-level practices. As an example, Richard Elmore stated that educational leaders, on average, spend less than 20% of their time focused on issues related directly to teaching and learning. Conversely, Barbra Scott Nelson and Annette Sassi in *The Effective Principal*, concluded that an administrator’s content-area and pedagogical knowledge, along with his/her commitment to spending time learning with teachers, constitute essential elements of high-achieving schools. What if, in each school, state-level conference, committee meeting, workshop, classroom, negotiating session, and boardroom, educators reflected with colleagues about their knowing and doing, and worked collectively and consciously to close the gap?

Given the pressures of high-stakes testing, the quality of an American education is oft measured in the percentage of students who demonstrate proficiency on high-stakes tests. In response, many teachers and schools narrow their curricula, focus content in a piecemeal fashion, and deliver information in a teacher-centered format. This is a recursive cycle, meaning that high-stakes testing frequently begets teaching that leads to surface-level understandings that often do not transfer into novel contexts, leaving many students under prepared for college, despite their test scores. What if educational entities acted upon the notion that a student’s ability to pass a test is an indicator, and not the sole purpose of a quality education? Rather, a student’s ability, motivation, and recognition of opportunities to think about and deeply understand new and challenging topics are the expected outcome of a quality education.

As you begin anew another school year, why not enact, in all that you do, the values of a professional learning community? Why not insist, and in fact demand, that professional development, almost

without exception, is experienced by educators, at all levels, with colleagues in the contexts of their work, during the school day? Why not consistently and constantly ask yourself and your colleagues, “What evidence do we have that this activity/experience/expenditure will make a significant difference in the way that students learn, teachers teach, and leaders lead?” and, “How do we ensure that these ideas transfer into the classroom?” Why not create structures, expectations, and opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate deep thinking and understanding about truly important ideas, despite the pressures of the tests? Why not act in accordance with what we know?

Thank you for thinking with us.

[In the spirit of professional learning, we invite fellow professional developers to build upon our ideas in future issues of the Professional Learning Newsletter.]

