



# professional LEARNING

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## NSDC's Five Priorities

The National Staff Development Council has done some targeted revisions to its strategic plan. In the past year, NSDC revised its purpose statement to say that the organization exists to ensure that "every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves."

How close is your district or school to achieving that purpose? When and where does the professional learning take place in your organization? Is it occurring on a regular basis or does it only occur when you have negotiated staff meetings and professional development days?

In an effort to turn the NSDC purpose into reality, NSDC has developed five priorities to operationalize its purpose. Those priorities include:

1. Affecting the policy context
2. Documenting the evidence
3. Narrowing the achievement gap
4. Developing school leaders
5. Engaging thought leaders

*Affecting the policy context* involves influencing the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. NSDC has engaged Rene Islas as its federal lobbyist to work with key congressmen and senators to draft a new version of No Child Left Behind that will legislate the importance of professional learning for school improvement and greater student achievement.

*Documenting the evidence* allows educators to show the importance of professional

learning in terms of documented change in teacher behaviors and student achievement. Without strong evidence, professional developers are losing the battle in budget allocations, because they cannot show data that support the value of professional learning. NSDC is committed to commissioning studies to examine the evidence regarding the impact of professional learning on student achievement.

*Narrowing the achievement gap* emphasizes the importance of improving teacher learning to improve the educational experience for all students. This priority is based on the assumption that low-performing schools lack the professional dialogue and research-based instructional strategies and resources to affect change for all populations of students. NSDC believes that when the school's learning culture changes for adults and students alike, all students will make achievement gains. And research has shown that low-performing students will make the greatest gains.

*Developing school leaders* is an essential component of the drive to achieve the NSDC purpose. Effective and sustainable professional learning cannot take place without the support and involvement of the school leader. School leaders have a key role in professional learning. If the school leader does not promote, participate, and monitor the professional learning, it will not become job-embedded for staff. As the old adage states, "what gets tested, gets taught,"

so it is with professional learning. If the leader does not take an active role in the professional learning, the learning will not be implemented to the level of transferability necessary to improve student achievement.

*Engaging thought leaders* suggests that educators need to network with legislators, community leaders, and business leaders to help them understand what it takes to achieve quality results, and to learn from those leaders about the needs and concerns of the communities in which they live and work. Educators cannot live in an "educational bubble" nor can they allow community leaders to dictate changes in schools without thoughtful dialogue.

MSDC supports NSDC priorities and is developing its own action plan to address these priorities within Michigan.



**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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## Finding Time for Professional Learning

NSDC's purpose statement suggests that every educator should engage in professional learning every day. How do we make that happen when time for professional learning has been cut? Teachers have limited contracted time to engage in professional learning. Their schedules are full of student contact time and very limited (almost to the point of absurdity) in professional time other than individual planning.

If we wish to reform and improve our schools, we need to give educators the time to plan, study, observe and dialogue together. But where do we find the time to do this work? Learning Point Associates (formerly known as NCREL) published a *Critical Issue: Finding Time for Professional Development*. Within that issue the author spoke of “time to work in study groups, conduct action research, participate in seminars, coach one another, plan lessons together, and meet for other purposes” (p. 2).

Purnell and Hill (1991) identified six general approaches to creating time for staff development:

- \* Promote time outside the classroom during the school day
- \* Refocus the purpose of existing time commitments
- \* Reschedule the school day
- \* Increase the amount of available time
- \* Promote teachers volunteering some of their time
- \* Promote more efficient time use

While each of these ideas has merit, several of them are already in place in many schools with limited results. Rescheduling the school day and increasing the amount of time available require

a negotiated change between administration and union. But if we want what's best for staff and students, we should be willing to reach agreement on this fundamental resource.

In addition, Raywid (1993) cited a number of examples for creating professional development time:

- \* Use part or all of faculty, department, or team meetings for professional development.
- \* Lengthen the school day for 20 minutes four days per week; use an early release on the fifth day to provide an extended period of time for professional development.
- \* One morning per week, engage students in alternative activities such as community service that are supervised by parents, community members, or noninstructional staff; use this time for professional development.
- \* Provide a common scheduled lunch and planning periods for teachers working on joint projects.

Again, several schools have established early release or late starts. Others have worked to schedule staff into common planning periods; however, with cuts in staffing those common planning times have also been cut.

We need to change the mindset within education that the educators should spend 85-90 percent of their time with students. NSDC suggests that at least 25 percent of staff time should be devoted to professional learning. What do we need to do to make that happen?



## Seven Strategies to Foster Transfer

One of the most critical keys to quality professional learning is the transferability of that learning to the classroom. Curriculum directors, building administrators, and staff developers begin initiative after initiative with limited results. Those results are often hampered by too many initiatives, lack of involvement by the building leadership, and a “wait this one out” attitude by staff members who are resistant to change.

Robin Fogarty offers “Seven Strategies to Foster Transfer.”

### *Strategy 1: Understand Transfer*

Fogarty suggested two types of transfer—simple and complex. When creating a professional learning experience, staff developers need to know what kind of transfer they are asking educators to make. Is it an obvious skill they can immediately use in their classrooms or is it a second-order change that challenges their mindset?

### *Strategy 2: Set Expectations*

Do you require the learners to do something with the learning they have gained in the professional development experience? Traditionally, teachers go to workshops or conferences with little expectation regarding how they will make use of the new learning or share it with colleagues.

### *Strategy 3: Model with Authentic Artifacts*

Share examples of how the skill or strategy has been used by others. You can also elicit ideas from educators about how the new learning might be used in other content areas or life situations.

### *Strategy 4: Reflecting Metacognitively*

Engage teachers in thinking metacognitively about their transfer. Make them aware of the six levels of transfer (Fogarty, 1989): Invent, Strategize, Integrate, Replicate, Duplicate, and Overlook. Encourage them to dialogue about where they are within the levels of transfer to help them understand their own barriers to transfer.

### *Strategy 5: Plot an Application*

Have teachers develop application ideas for their content and their students before they leave the training session. Encourage them to set a goal for implementing their application ideas.

### *Strategy 6: Try Something Immediately*

Encourage teachers to try the new idea or strategy the next day. Get them to commit to a colleague that they will do it. Stress the importance of changing behavior by implementing the strategy over the next 3-4 weeks.

### *Strategy 7: Dialogue with Bridging Lead-ins*

Develop prompts that you or an administrator can use to connect the training setting to the classroom setting as you talk with your educators.

Creating sustainable, job-embedded professional learning requires staff developers to be very deliberate about their planning for transferability. We can never assume that transfer will take place. If we want our professional learning experiences to impact the classroom, we need to teach and model the transfer process.



## MSDC'S STRATEGIC GOALS

**1. Increase the understanding, use, and advocacy of standards for quality professional development and educator learning across the state.**

**2. Increase the visibility, influence, and credibility of MSDC and NSDC to partner in transforming the existing systems for the delivery of professional learning and development.**

**3. Build organizational capacity to lead standards-based professional development within and beyond MSDC.**

# Coaching as a Transformative Force by Shug Brandell

In schools that have become learner-centered, there's often a palpable sense of high expectations, personalization, and the purpose of school as a place for students to use their minds well. This article focuses on McCulloch Science and Technology Academy, Jackson Public Schools, an urban elementary school serving a population of high-poverty students in Jackson, Michigan. Building collaboratively on the school's strengths and addressing its weaknesses, school reform coaches became partners in change that resulted in developing practices at McCulloch that:

- Made teaching, learning and leadership practices visible and accountable,
- Fostered the development of professional learning communities,
- Developed shared leadership practices,
- Moved the schools' foci from teacher- to learner-centered.

Julie Baker, a fourth grade teacher at McCulloch, described the feeling of her students' first day this year, "The kids came in demonstrating a high level of confidence. They believe they are very capable." When asked how this differs from opening days before the partnership with Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools (MCES), Baker responded that the kids now understand the expectations; they help create the norms and display an ownership of the school. Students volunteer for many activities and show more responsibility."

## Making Values Visible

Baker observed, "Putting into words what we already believed and valued, like personalization, made us pay attention to it. For students to use their minds well, we began protecting time during the day for that. Partnering with parents and the community

helped them and us see what can they bring to the table. We developed a process of communication, of staying in touch. We want them to know what we've been working on and get everyone involved."

## Developing a Professional Learning Community

Baker also reflected on the importance of using the Cycle of Continuous Improvement to make data-driven decisions at McCulloch. Baker recalled, "I don't remember sitting down and doing item analysis of the MEAP and other data analysis of multiple sources much, whereas now we spend 55% of the school retreat time to look at student performance and gaps." It became a habit of mind for the staff to seek evidence as to how they were doing as they set goals to achieve the broader vision.

## Shared Leadership

Baker commented on the change of leadership from principal powered to principle powered as crucial to McCulloch's transformation, observing, "The principal and staff members were greatly affected by learning about shared leadership, and now the faculty has say in so much of what happens. All decisions are made with staff input and increasingly more and more with input from community members. We have monthly meetings during which staff members look at lessons and student work, as well as reports to help make decisions." Teacher-Centered to Learner-Centered Baker eagerly led the effort at McCulloch toward integrative units where everything is connected. "When kids' hands shoot up while I'm explaining something, it used to be that I'd think, 'Not now.' But now, I know I need to call on them, because they are making connections. Having more hands-on and learning by inquiry – by wondering – is very

effective. Putting a kid in front of me now and lecturing for a long while would not feel right. I would be doing all the work, but my kids wouldn't get anything out of it. They would not be engaged like with the hands-on approach. Looping with my kids to really get to know them, their learning styles, and their families is becoming part of the intentional practice here at McCulloch."

## Results

The impact for Baker centers on her classroom, "For those of us who went through the training, we think about those things, such as Literature Circles where students love a book and want to get more information because they love it. That's the end result from my perspective- more than the MEAP or a grade. The student is the product and you know what kind of student you want to send forward. We now send them out more able than before, more capable with more skills."

