



professional LEARNING

Issue #10
June, 2008

Creating Time for Collaboration and Professional Learning by Sam Lopresto

Last week while checking out various Web resources, I stumbled across a video (<http://www.edutopia.org/treating-teachers-professionals>) describing a unique school in California that has carved 90 minutes of professional learning time out of every school day. Daily from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. the principal and staff of Sherman Oaks Community Charter School in Santa Clara, CA gather in the teachers' room for professional development. "The teachers debate instructional theory and practice, try to solve problems that have come up or are likely to come up in their classrooms, discuss curriculum, commiserate, seek advice, offer encouragement, or quietly reflect or refine a lesson plan."

Wondering how the school was able to acquire such a sizable amount of time out of their school day, I did a little searching and sent an e-mail inquiry to the school's principal, Peggy Bryan. In her response, in addition to telling me that it was her last day of work and that she was retiring, Peggy told me "It is actually quite simple." Sherman Oaks added an hour to the end of their day and extended lunch by an hour. They then determined what activities they could offer to occupy students for the additional time. Sherman Oaks students have lunch, free play, Running Club (monitored by lunch supervisors) and a Study Period. A retired teacher was hired for two hours each day to supervise, coordinate and handle the details of the Mid-Day Block. Ms. Bryan says, "It really isn't costly, but I've found grants easy to come by because the student/yard duty supervisor plan is what creates the portal for staff development and teacher collaboration."

Principal Bryan states that the staff never meets

after school and they never opt for a minimum day because "it breaks up the routine of instruction--minimum days always have a different feel to them and we think that 'feel' negatively impacts instruction." This statement made me think about my experience in the Holt Public Schools where the district has provided a late start on Wednesday mornings for secondary students since the 1989-90 school year. In 2003-04 Holt initiated a weekly early dismissal for elementary and middle school students on Wednesday afternoons so that staff members at these levels could benefit from the same opportunities for collaboration and professional learning that their secondary colleagues had enjoyed for a number of years.

The approximately two hours of professional development time the Holt teachers receive each week is achieved by lengthening each school day to insure that the total annual instructional hours comply with state requirements. Holt Public Schools' superintendent Tom Davis, who was high school principal when the late start for secondary schools began says, "The professional development time for faculty learning on Wednesday has and continues to have incalculable value for student learning." Holt's Wednesday collaborative time has been used to implement new curriculum adoptions, provide technology and literacy training, work on building improvement plans and learn best practice techniques. Superintendent Davis goes on to say, "We believe the collaborative learning time has influenced our increasing test scores, and provided a sense of pride and professionalism through an adult learning community."

NSDC advocates that "25% of an educators work time should be devoted to professional learn-

ing and collaboration with colleagues." For that to happen, schools need to get creative and resourceful to develop a schedule and plan that works for them. Even when a school has a plan and time to meet collaboratively, "teachers need guidance and preparation for how to use it." Both Sherman Oaks and Holt Public Schools make sure that there are formal agendas and planned activities for most of their collaborative planning periods so that the time is used constructively.

To help teachers feel professional and to do the true work of school improvement, teachers need time to work collaboratively, discuss student progress, develop school initiatives and learn from one another. Schools need to stop being a "succession of one-room schoolhouses surrounded by a common parking lot." Collaborative professional learning time breaks down teacher isolation and provides opportunities for teachers to share ideas and bond with one another. As you begin planning for next year, think about how your school could create professional learning time for the staff. If you do, I think you will find like a number of other schools and districts that improved staff learning has a positive impact on student learning.

Curtis, Diane. "Treating Teachers as Professionals: The Value of Adequate Preparation Time." October 1, 2000. Edutopia.org. <http://www.edutopia.org>

Richardson, Joan. "Think outside the clock: Create time for professional learning." August/September 2002. Tools for Schools, National Staff Development Council. 28 May 2008 <http://www.nsd.org>

Sam Lopresto was Asst. Supt. for Curriculum in the Holt Public Schools from 1985 to 1997..

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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MSDC Membership Survey Results

In May, the Communications Committee sent out a nine-item survey to the membership to gather input on the organization. The response rate was 18 percent. While this is not a good response rate, the information gleaned from the respondents is worth reporting. The Board of Directors will review the full survey results at their June Board Meeting.

Item 1: What are you looking for from your involvement in MSDC?

67% Tools and resources to support my work

59% A trusted source for relevant information on professional learning.

56% A voice in the professional learning community

52% Professional networking

Item 2: Is MSDC meeting your expectations?

YES 78%

No 22%

Item 3: What type of events would you like to see MSDC sponsor?

81% Professional learning oriented

Item 4: I am more likely to attend events if they are held--

30% Weekdays

26% No Preference

Item 5: Please indicate your level of interest in the following topics for professional learning.

70% Professional Learning Evaluation

67% Data-driven Dialogue

63% Show evidence of transfer of learning

48% Professional learning facilitation

Item 6: Please rate your level of satisfaction with each of the following.

(Combined % of Very Satisfied and Satisfied)

Professional Learning e-newsletter 81%

Website, www.msdconline.org 70%

Listserv communication from MSDC 67%

PD events from MSDC 70%

Overall experience with MSDC 66%

Item 7: What would you suggest to add value to your membership in MSDC?

Networking on a regional level, opportunities for dialogue, and a state conference were suggested.

Item 8: If added benefits were offered with your MSDC membership, would you be willing to pay an increased membership fee? If yes, please identify the types of benefits that would merit a higher membership fee?

YES 59%

Networking meetings on a regional level, bi-monthly meetings of the members, and online chat opportunities were suggested.

NO 41%

Item 9: Is there anything else you would like to share that was not asked in this survey?

A concern was expressed about the lack of time and resources for professional learning in this poor economy.

Several respondents thanked the Board for allowing them to offer input.



MSDC Board of Directors 2008 Election Results

Congratulations to the five candidates who were newly elected to the MSDC Board of Directors in the May election!

Gary Appel is the Michigan State Manager for the Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center.

Leisa Gallagher is the Acting Coordinator of Technical Assistance and Personnel Development for MDE's Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (OSE/EIS)

Steve Hecker was re-elected to the board. He is an independent consultant.

Kathleen McBroom is a Teacher Leader at Dearborn Public Schools.

David Swierpel is the Director of Professional Development for

Carmen-Ainsworth Community Schools.

These new board members will be taking on their new roles beginning on July 1, 2008.

We also want to acknowledge the three retiring board members for their service to our organization.

Dr. Fran Loose, Dr. Judy Schaftenaar, and Dr. Joanne Simmons have been valuable members of the board. Their leadership, their ideas, and the work supporting quality professional learning exemplify what we should be doing as educators to support our colleagues in their work with students. We will miss their leadership on the board, but know that they will continue to make an impact in their respective positions.



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.

SPECIAL EXTENDED DISCOUNTED SUMMER CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FOR AFFILIATE LEADERS AND MEMBERS

NSDC's Summer Conference for Teacher Leaders and the Administrators Who Support Them is scheduled for July 13-16 at the Marriott World Center Hotel in Orlando, FL.

Register by early June and save \$50.00 off each registration. Bring a team of 10 and get one for free. All NEA, AFT, National Board Certified Teachers also receive complimentary memberships in NSDC.

Download a special registration form at <http://www.nsd.org/summer08special.pdf> and sign up today.

This conference is special! Programs are led by the practitioners -- principals and their teacher leaders -- who are making significant improvements in schools. Come to Orlando and learn from colleagues who will share their accomplishments as well as their challenges and lessons learned. Experience learning and networking that will transform teaching and leadership practices into those that impact student achievement.

Professional Development -- A Value

by Dr. Judy Schaftenaar

Answer this question. Do you value professional development for educators?

If the answer is “no”, it could be that you have had poor professional development experiences in the past. You may have found adherence to quality learning absent. A “no” could also indicate a mismatch with the mission of the institution of schools. Learning must be important in an institution based on, well, learning.

If you answered, “yes”, that you value profession learning, then the second question might be – What do you do about it?

In the seventies a movement called “values clarification” swept the educational landscape. One of the founders, Sidney Simon, pointed out that a value is only a value if you act on it. We are all called on to act rather than just give lip service. Where can we go for guidance in acting on this value? The NSDC’s Standards for Staff Development document describes and highlights twelve conditions that must be considered in order to sustain intellectually rigorous and effective professional learning. It takes us way beyond the workshops, courses and presentations by experts that tried to meet all our learning needs in the past.

In addition, the accompanying document, Moving NSDC’s Staff Development Standards into Practice: Innovation Configurations, indicates the specific considerations that each individual user of professional development can do to implement the standards and create quality learning.

The Michigan Staff Development Council (MSDC) offers multiple forums for advancing our professional development in ways that assist pro-

professionals to meet student learning needs. Communication through the electronic newsletter and the listserv assists all members in getting information and sharing ideas. Learning activities sponsored by MSDC model the quality standards and allow teams to develop a process for collective inquiry and school-based learning.

Even with many potential connections in terms of materials and events and communications, a professional may feel overwhelmed. When I have multiple tasks to accomplish, I sometimes procrastinate because I don’t know what to do next. Productivity consultant David Allen (www.davidco.com) suggests that we break down the tasks to connect with what step comes next. This is more sophisticated than it seems at first. We usually say something general like – plan the professional learning experience for the team we are on. He would keep pushing us to be more specific. So we might say, talk to the team. More specifically, set the meeting date. More specifically, make the phone call or send the email on Friday. More specifically: plan what to write in the email. This eventually leads to easy, clear steps that we can take to avoid decision paralysis.

To connect the above ideas, NSDC standards, innovation configuration, connections with other professionals in MSDC, and needs for job-imbedded learning, we can use the standards to specify next steps.

For example: The Context Standard of RESOURCES.

If a current dilemma is related to how time, space, materials, schedules, and funding are used to support learning communities in your school, a matter of resources is relevant. Using the NSDC’s Standards for Staff Develop-

ment document, center a team meeting around the discussion questions listed for the resources standard. In addition, use the Moving NSDC’s Staff Development Standards into Practice: Innovation Configurations document to analyze the specific role that the Teacher, Principal, Central Office Staff, Superintendent and Board have in assuring adequate resources in support of professional learning.

The question of valuing professional learning comes back to our actions regarding our own learning and that of our school learning community. Act to use quality resources and use the specificity gained from considering the NSDC standards.

