



# professional LEARNING

February 2009

## Never Work Harder Than Your Students

By Kathleen McBroom

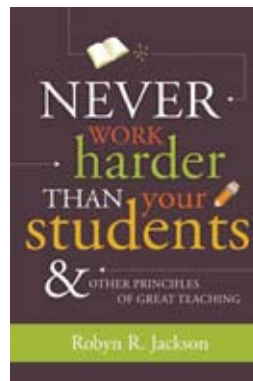
**N**ever work harder than your students” is one of the seven suggestions author Robyn Jackson makes in assuring readers that anyone can become a master teacher. Her other admonishments include starting where your students are, knowing where your students are going, expect them to get there, support them, give them quality feedback, and focus on quality, not quantity. She suggests teachers pursue these goals by distinguishing between the content and process aspects of learning standards, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of student regarding processing skills (reading, note-taking, organizing time, etc.), and then addressing any deficiencies before tackling content.

Jackson acknowledges that this approach is time-consuming, and that it might seem overwhelming considering daily schedule demands and the urgency to cover required content.

However, her track record of success makes a compelling argument.

She details numerous incidents that illustrate her well-reasoned thinking, and offers plenty of advice for implementing the approaches. Especially effective are the “Try This” and “Yes, but...” features, which appear frequently. The first offers practical ways of implementing or at least initiating change; the second deals with dealing with typical resistance concerns.

Each of the seven innovations is addressed in a separate chapter, and a self-assessment exercise allows readers to identify and concentrate on specific traits. The book is written in an engaging and user-friendly style, and should be a popular choice for both personal and book study selections.



## PD Question of the Month

**A**t the recent MASA Midwinter Conference, Brian McNulty, Vice President of Leadership Development for the Leadership and Learning Center, made a statement about Professional Learning Communities that could be debated. Dr. McNulty stated:

“Collaboration is not the outcome for PLCs; it is the strategy to improve student achievement by reflecting on student work.”

Is Dr. McNulty’s statement True or False?

Visit MSDC online at [www.msdconline.org](http://www.msdconline.org), and weigh in to give your opinion.

### PD Question of the Month

**“Collaboration is not the outcome for PLCs; it is the strategy to improve student achievement by reflecting on student work.”**

True

False

[Submit Survey](#) [View Results](#)

# Customizing PD for PLCs

By Dave Swierpel

Professional learning communities (PLC) have become popular vehicles for professional development. It is challenging to evaluate the effectiveness of learning teams particularly in the early stage of development when you are unlikely to see improvements in student learning. Over the past three years, Carman-Ainsworth Community Schools has surveyed teachers to clarify their perceptions of learning teams and determine what type of support to provide for learning team growth.

The district had 155 of 285 (55%) teachers complete a survey adapted from one found in: *A Facilitator's Guide to Professional Learning Teams* published by the SERVE Center. Following are some observations:

- Teachers who rated the time as being *well-facilitated* also rated the time as more *task-oriented* and *more productive* than teachers who rated the time as *not well-facilitated*.
- When asked "Who facilitates the majority of your team meetings?" the response most often selected was *Different Teachers* followed by Administrator, Academic Coach, Identified Teacher Leader and Nobody.
- *Academic Coaches* had the highest rating for meetings being well-facilitated. There was very little difference in the ratings of the other three choices.
- PLC time that was facilitated by an *Academic Coach* was rated the most productive followed by *Different Teachers*, Identified Teacher Leader, and then Administrator.

- PLC time that was rated the Most Task-Oriented was facilitated by *Different Teachers* followed by Academic Coaches, Identified Teacher Leader and Administrator.

Teachers were asked to choose from a list of activities that support teacher growth and development rating them on the following scale: 1 (not at all) to 6 (a great deal)." Below are the top and bottom five activities (of 18 listed) and their average rating.

## Top Five Activities

1. Teachers share assessment results with one another. (4.86)
2. Teachers talk to each other about how they teach (4.58)
3. Teachers share successful strategies currently used (4.48)
4. Teachers ask each other for advice and help with particular students (4.45)
5. Teachers change instructional practices based on assessment results (4.37)

## Bottom Five Activities

1. Teachers visit other schools to examine instructional approaches in other settings (1.94)
2. Teachers learn from each other by watching each other teach (2.36)
3. Teachers help each other implement ideas from workshops attended (3.23)
4. Teachers critique lessons/units with each other (3.47)
5. Teachers develop strategies to address different learning styles (3.61)

This year Carman-Ainsworth instituted classroom walkthroughs in all schools. Teachers are invited to participate in the walkthrough with the administrator. Training was also provided in protocols that allow teachers to critique lessons and units in a safe environment. Academic Coaches are working with teachers to differentiate instruction. All three of these strategies address weaknesses identified through the survey.

Central office administrators are assigned to work with schools during PLC time. They also monitor the PLC time using these questions:

1. How much time is spent on non PLC work?
2. What is the context of the PLC time? (Whole Group, Department/Grade Level, Learning Team)
3. Who is facilitating? (Teacher, Administrator, Academic Coach, Guest)
4. Is there evidence of: Clear Expectations, School Improvement Connections, Data Analysis, Sharing Practices, and Collaborative Culture?
5. Does the time appear to be productive? (very low to very high)

This PLC monitoring data and PLC survey data are used to determine goals and areas where support is needed for the next school year. The Professional Development Committee uses this data to create a PD plan that encourages PLC growth and school improvement.

For a copy of either the Learning Team Survey or PLC Monitoring Survey, email Dave Swierpel: [dswierpel@carman.k12.mi.us](mailto:dswierpel@carman.k12.mi.us)

# Are High Schools Ready for Tiered Levels of Support? Questions and Emerging Practices

By Leisa Gallagher

Nationally and within Michigan, Response to Intervention (RTI), an approach to school-wide improvement, is beginning to receive the attention it deserves. While tiered levels of intervention is a way of working that helps building staff coordinate and support student progress, implementing the tiers and adopting the eight core practices evoke a particular complexity for leadership at the middle and high school levels. While educators recognize a systemic approach could create certain efficiencies and reduce the negative impacts of a 'sort and select' culture, building staff need support to find system leverage to accelerate the rate and degree of school improvement.

The following anchor questions might help a building assess their readiness to adopt an RTI framework:

1. **Beliefs** – Is school culture ready to adopt the belief about success that ensures teacher practice leads to success for each and every student?
2. **Data** – How does the building/district assess the quality of the data infrastructure in order to promote inquiry and analysis for all students? Are buildings 'walking the talk' of balanced assessment rather than inconsistently applying the use of formative assessment? Does the system provide teachers with enough data to monitor their progress?
3. **Problem Solving** – How might the school improvement team share their decision-making model with the rest of the staff?
4. **Tiered Levels of Support** – What sequencing decisions have to be adopted about the tiers of universal,

targeted, and intensive levels of support? For example, if the building staff already share consensus about the universal learning targets (improvement in English Language Arts, Behavior, and Math), how do they know they are ready to adopt targeted and intensive tiers of intervention?

5. **Monitoring Progress** – How might learning community practices help staff create the safety needed for teachers to compare different student results?
6. **Emphasis on a Research Basis for Selected Interventions** – How can staff select interventions which are reliable and valid for diverse student populations?

Aside from these implementation questions, school structures and staff dispositions make adopting an RTI framework a deceptively complex challenge. How does a building balance the individual needs with the needs of the whole school? While reading, math and behavioral supports surely amplify success in other core academic classes, how does a classroom teacher add 'one more thing'?

A recent article in *Education Week* "High Schools Try Out RTI" (1/27/09) reported high school leaders echoing similar concerns as those of Michigan schools attempting an RTI model:

- Semester/Trimester scheduling conflicts
- Scarcity of time and location to provide safety for struggling learners as they repair their learning problems
- Lack of a knowledge base to select appropriate screening assessments for older students.

Yet when faced with the dilemma of waiting or moving forward, Colorado leadership stated 'while they don't have all the answers,... what they are doing now seems better than letting a youngster with academic problems slip through the cracks.' As Michigan middle schools and high schools seem to be grappling with these system and ethical issues, attempting to do this work seems to surface a passion to discover the root cause of academic risk. Is failure a result of a student or a teaching achievement gap?

## Eight Core Practices of RTI

1. Effectively Teaching Each and Every Student
2. Intervene Early through Universal Screening
3. Use a Multi-Tier Model of Service Delivery to Support Student Learning
4. Use a Problem Solving Method to Make Decisions
5. Use Research Based, Scientifically Validated Interventions/Instruction
6. Monitor Student Progress to Inform Instruction
7. Use Data to Make Decisions
8. Use Assessment for Three Different Purposes: Screening, Monitoring, and Diagnosis

Excerpt from, *RTI: Enhancing the Learning of All Children*, Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE), 2006

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"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 Searches For Executive Director

At its January Board meeting, the Board of Directors approved a new contracted position for a part-time Executive Director. It is the viewpoint of the board that an Executive Director is needed to move the organization to the next level of influence and visibility within the Michigan educational community.

The role of the Executive Director of the Michigan Staff Development Council (MSDC) will be to serve as the primary liaison for the organization to the MSDC membership, the National Staff Development Council, state educational organizations, other professional associations, private consultants, and vendors. The core mission of the Executive Director will be to increase the visibility and influence of MSDC in promoting its strategic plan within Michigan and promoting NSDC's definition of quality professional learning.

The posting for this position is available on our MSDC website at [www.msdconline.org](http://www.msdconline.org). Interested candidates are invited to apply up to the deadline of February 20, 2009. The Executive Committee of the board will review applicant materials from February 23-25 and then schedule interviews for the following two weeks. It is hoped that a successful candidate can be recommended to the Board of Directors at its March 11 meeting. It is the board's intent to have the Executive Director in position beginning April 1, 2009.

If you are interested in applying or know of someone who would be an excellent candidate for this position, please send a letter of interest and resume to Dr. Dan Jonker, MSDC President at [jonkerdan@allendale.k12.mi.us](mailto:jonkerdan@allendale.k12.mi.us).

# NSDC Supports You

By Dr. Steve Hecker

The resources of the National Staff Development Council provide a continuing stream of high-quality, time-tested, high-yield strategies which tightly align to the national standards for quality professional development. For example:

- Identify, understand, and address teacher feelings as you focus on professional learning and change in your school. Use the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (The Learning Principal, Oct. 2008)
- Get creative in finding ways to provide collaborative time for teachers. What a school leader needs to know about analyzing time use (The Learning Principal, 11/08)
- Where is your learning team along the continuum of effectiveness? Review the Professional Learning Team Decision-Making Cycle, the meeting overview checklist, and a guide to appropriate use of learning teams (Tools for Schools, 11-12/08)
- The role of the district is vital to success at the building level. Why central office administrators are so critical to the success of new systems of professional learning. Bonus: NSDC tool to help a leader learn about zones of comfort, risk and danger (The Learning System, 1/09). *Featuring the instructive and inspiring work of Michigan's Carman-Ainsworth.*

As a member of NSDC, all these publications can be yours. Plus, a rich library of prior editions is searchable via a comprehensive, online tool.