Chapter 12

ROLE OF CENTRAL OFFICE

TOOLS:

Where are we?

Central office staff members determine what professional development is available to teachers within the district.

STRONGLY AGREE   AGREE   NOT SURE   DISAGREE   STRONGLY DISAGREE

Local professional development plans reflect schools' use of collaborative professional learning.

STRONGLY AGREE   AGREE   NOT SURE   DISAGREE   STRONGLY DISAGREE

Central office staff shares knowledge, research, and best practices about professional development broadly and widely throughout the district with both principals and teachers.

STRONGLY AGREE   AGREE   NOT SURE   DISAGREE   STRONGLY DISAGREE

Central office staff understands how they serve as a support to schools in the area of professional development.

STRONGLY AGREE   AGREE   NOT SURE   DISAGREE   STRONGLY DISAGREE

When professional development moves from a centralized function in a school district to a school-based function, the work of central office does not diminish. Instead, it increases. The work changes from determining the content and delivering the learning to one that involves building the capacity of school staff to make sound decisions about their own professional development. In essence, central office staff become learning leaders who are responsible for facilitating professional development decisions at individual schools and coordinating efforts between and among schools to maximize resources and effort without diluting the individual needs and interests of schools.

In addition, central office staff is responsible to coordinate the formation of cross-school teams for singleton teachers or noninstructional staff whose primary collaborative professional learning team is outside their own school.

Central office staff members — those who work in school district offices with responsibility for curriculum, instruction, professional development, mentoring, teacher quality, and student success — have seven major responsibilities in a system that views the school as the primary center of learning. These roles include:

- Building capacity of school staff to make sound decisions about professional development;
- Providing research and models of best practices regarding professional development;
- Allocating resources to schools to support their learning plans;
- Coordinating efforts between and among schools;
- Coordinating the formation of cross-school collaborative professional learning teams; and
- Supporting collaborative professional learning teams; and
- Monitoring implementation throughout the district.

Building capacity

When professional development moves from the district office to the school and becomes more collaborative, the control central office has exerted over decisions about the design and implementation of professional development now rests in the hands of teachers and principals. Their success, however, in making sound decisions depends largely on how well the central office prepares school staff to make these decisions.

Central office staff is responsible for helping school staff members understand the standards for professional development and district and state requirements for professional development. They might use Tool 12.1, the Backmapping Model (Killion, 2002a, 2002b), to assist school staff members in understanding how to develop both school- and team-based professional learning, and expand teacher leaders' and principals' understanding of high-quality professional development. The Backmapping Model presents a process to ensure that professional development is aligned with the goals for student achievement within a school. While some teachers may opt to learn outside the school because

their collaborative team exists elsewhere, their primary emphasis is on improving learning in their own school. Central office staff can take an active role in helping school staff implement this process to ensure that their learning team's work focuses directly on student learning.

Because school-based collaborative professional development requires knowledge and skills that may not be present at the school, central office can provide opportunities for teacher leaders, especially department chairs, team, or grade-level chairs, or others to participate in leadership training that would prepare them to lead collaborative learning communities within in their schools. Central office staff can work with principals to identify potential candidates among teachers who can serve as leaders among their peers. These learning experiences would help teacher leaders gain the capacity to facilitate learning teams, hold effective meetings, manage multiple priorities, and plan effective learning among their colleagues.

The transfer of knowledge and skill from a few people to a broader group increases the likelihood that more educators will take responsibility for ensuring high-quality professional development and for linking professional development to the needs of students. The transfer of knowledge can happen in a variety of ways. One is by training a team of teacher leaders and administrators at each school in the standards and the professional development planning, design, and evaluation process. Many districts already have such training programs.

Central office can also facilitate professional development planning, design, implementation, and evaluation process at school sites with a local co-facilitator. This facilitator works alongside the central office staff member to learn about critical decision areas and how to lead decisions about professional development at the school.

The more broadly the knowledge is shared, the more likely teachers and principals will be confident and successful in examining the adult learning needs within their school.

If those making the decisions about professional development have limited understanding and experience with high-quality staff development, their decisions will reflect the forms of professional learning with which they are most familiar. As a result, they may continue to see limited impact of professional learning on teaching and student learning.

Provide research and model best practices

When professional learning moves to the school, central office staff members play a significant role in providing research and modeling best practices. When school staff experience powerful forms of professional learning and see examples of different approaches to learning, they will become more familiar with alternatives to consultant-driven training.

District staff can engage school professional development committee members in learning about multiple designs for professional learning. Tool 12.2, "If Not a Workshop, Then What?" which was created by the National Staff Development Council, can be used to familiarize school staff with various approaches to professional learning. Central office staff may also want to refer to Tool 9.9 for another resource to use in helping school staff understand alternative designs for adult learning.

Compiling and disseminating research and resources about professional development to teacher leaders and principals at schools are other ways central office staff can significantly impact the quality of school-based decisions about professional development. Summarizing or sending articles, policy papers, studies, or examples about best practices can increase the likelihood that school staff members will have foundational information upon which to make local decisions about professional development.

Districts can create web-based resources that link schools to other high-quality resources about professional development, ensure that school leaders know how to:

1. Access a statewide listing of professional development resources at **www.state.nj.us/njded/educators/ pd.htm**.

2. Use the NJPEP web site (**www.NJPEP.org**), and send print copies of syntheses in newsletters, e-mails, or via other technologies.

3. Access the core curriculum content standards and find content-specific web pages with resources at **www.state.nj.us/njded/aps/cccs/**

Allocating resources

Districts can help schools be successful with collaborative professional learning if they advocate for the time and fiscal resources to support this form of adult learning. One of these resources is time. Time is an invaluable resource and the subject of an entire chapter in this tool kit.

Figure 12.1

Turning planning upside down
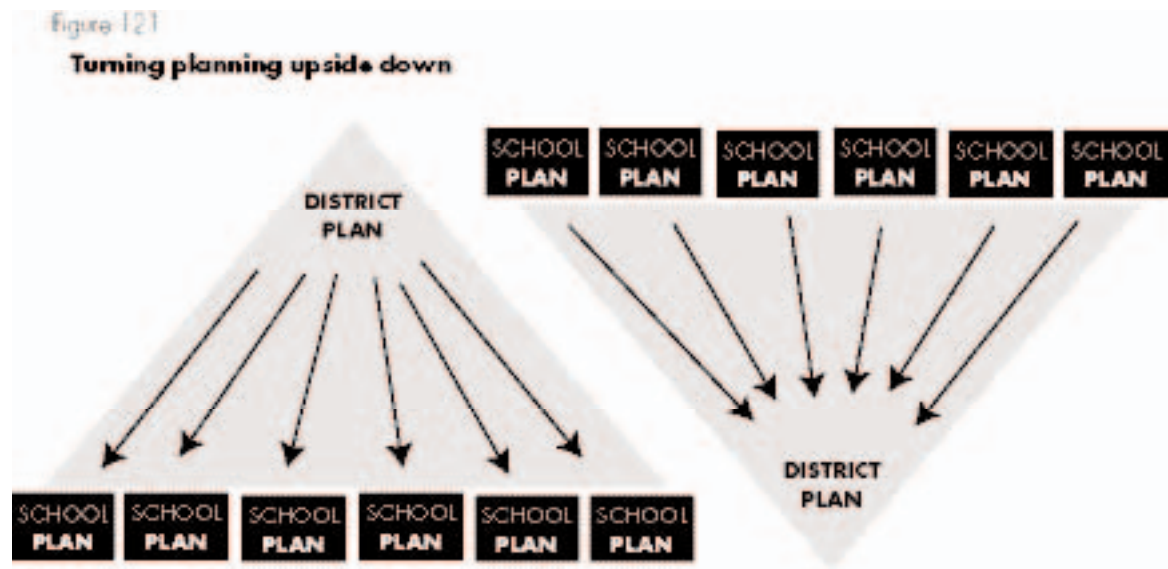
The central office has responsibility to work through the school board to build a communitywide value and support for professional learning. That includes developing support for the time that is required for teams to work together. Parents want their children to have the most qualified teachers possible. Achieving that requires the continuous development of teachers. Tool 12.3, "Break the Inservice Habit," by Joan Richardson in *Tools for Schools,* suggests how districts and schools can prepare teachers to talk about their professional development within the community to build support for and understanding of the value of professional development for teachers.

Districts can form teams charged with examining those policies, administrative procedures, practices, resources, and schedules that impact professional development to ensure that they support school-based professional development. Districts can help schools revamp daily schedules to include time for professional learning. Districts can ensure that schools receive appropriate budget allocations to support high-quality professional development.
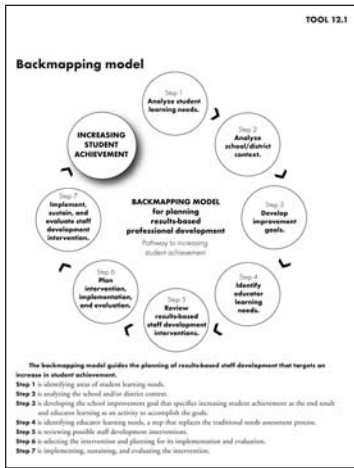
A significant portion of the district's responsibility in this area relates to supporting the Local Professional Development Committee as it creates a district Local Professional Development Plan (LPDP) that reflects how the district will support individual school's professional development plans. The district's LPDP looks like an inverted triangle (see Figure 12.1 above) demonstrating how it emerges from the plans for individual schools rather than dictating the professional development schools will have.

This change from district-driven professional development to school-based professional development is not one that will occur overnight. District office staff has a tremendous responsibility to prepare school teams to design, implement, and evaluate sound professional learning aligned to district and school goals. Districts will transform their services and responsibilities to support school-based professional learning while maintaining alignment and focus on district priorities and goals. Rather than being a top-down or one-size-fits-all approach to professional development, school-based professional development looks at the unique needs of each school and its students, staff, and community and responds to those differences. The work of the Local Professional Development Committee expands from organizing a few inservice days for the entire district to ensuring a comprehensive system of professional learning for every teacher aligned with the identified needs of each school.

Coordinating efforts between and among schools

An essential central office function for supporting collaborative learning at schools is coordinating efforts between and among schools. As central office staff review each school's professional development plan, they will want to determine the strength of the plan, whether the school has allocated appropriate resources to the plan, whether the plan meets the professional development standards, and whether the school's professional development plan aligns with the school's and district's

Tool 12.1

Tool 12.2

Tool 12.3

improvement goals.

Because school-based collaborative professional learning focuses on the needs of an individual school, schools often do not know about other schools in the district that are working on similar areas of improvement. Bringing common goals to the attention of all schools working on that goal can increase the potential for collaboration among schools and increase the benefit for any one school.

Central office staff might also find that they can streamline their support by serving schools clustered together by professional development goal rather than trying to do so one-by-one.

Tool 12.4 might be a useful way for district staff to cluster schools by professional development goal. Schools could also use it to review each other's plans as a way to improve the professional development practices of each school.

One additional aspect of central office staff's role is identifying and broadcasting successful practices within the district. Individual schools will benefit from opportunities to benchmark their professional development plans against other schools within the district and beyond. They will appreciate knowing about professional development in other schools so they can learn from others.

Tool 12.4

Coordinate cross-discipline or cross-school teams

Sometimes teachers will not have colleagues at their school who teach the same content they do. As a result, they will not have a natural team in their own school. This occurs for teaching staff such as counselors, librarians, nurses, and others. When this occurs, there are several opportunities to create cross-school teams, district teams, interdisciplinary teams, and related content-area teams within a school. For example, teachers in the world languages and social studies departments along with English as a Second Language teachers may form a collaborative team focused on developing global citizens. Counselors, nurses, health and physical education teachers may collaborate on ways to improve students' physical health and emotional well-being. In another example, librarians from schools throughout a district may form a collaborative professional learning team to identify how to support classroom reading instruction within their library programs. Organizing interschool visitations within the district or across districts is a way central office can foster collaboration for those educators who are not members of an in-school collaborative professional learning team.

Central office staff members work with principals to identify those staff members who may benefit from cross-school, cross-discipline, or cross-district teams. By

initiating and coordinating cross-school, districtwide teams or even regionwide teams, central office staff members ensure that every professional is involved in one or more collaborative professional learning teams that focuses on student success, core curriculum content standards, assessment, and instruction.

Supporting schools' efforts

By charting the schools and looking at a synthesis of their professional development intentions, central office staff members can quickly see where the clusters are and plan accordingly to provide the necessary support.

Central office can then determine its course of action by asking schools these questions:

- If a school's or cluster of schools' goal is X, how does central office help them achieve this goal? What essential support services, resources, assistance, etc., do they need to be successful? What kind of differentiated support might the cluster of schools need?
- What type of systemic support and systemwide changes are necessary so each school successfully achieves its goals?
- How do we help schools know about and access district resources to meet their goals?
- How do school goals align with district priorities?

Monitoring implementation

Another essential role for central office is to hold schools accountable for their professional development plans. By meeting quarterly or semi-annually with school leadership teams and reviewing evidence of progress toward their professional development goal, central office staff can help schools maintain a focus on results and not the provision of services. By keeping the focus on results and asking schools to use data to review

their progress, schools will be able to celebrate their successes along the way and alter their course of action when necessary.

School visits can be opportunities for learning among team members. They can be a form of walk-through, a form of brief observation designed to gather data and to encourage reflection. One or more central office staff members or teams that include principals and teacher leaders from other schools can conduct monitoring visits. Monitoring visits that include debriefing sessions with the school's professional development team, leadership team, and/or whole faculty offer support, feedback, and the perspective of critical friends to help the school stay the course. The use of data from multiple sources is important in monitoring visits so that facts — and not opinions and preferences — guide the discussion and serve as the basis for identifying successes and selecting modifications. When data are used, decisions are likely to be more objective than subjective.

The role of central office staff members does not diminish when a school district transforms professional development from a centralized function to one that is school-based and that fosters collaboration among teachers about the real work of teaching. In fact, their role expands as they become learning leaders who facilitate school-based decisions about professional development to meet the unique and pressing needs of individual schools.

Reference

Killion, J. (2002). *What works in the elementary school: Results-based staff development.* Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

Killion, J. (2002). *What works in the high school: Results-based staff development.* Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.
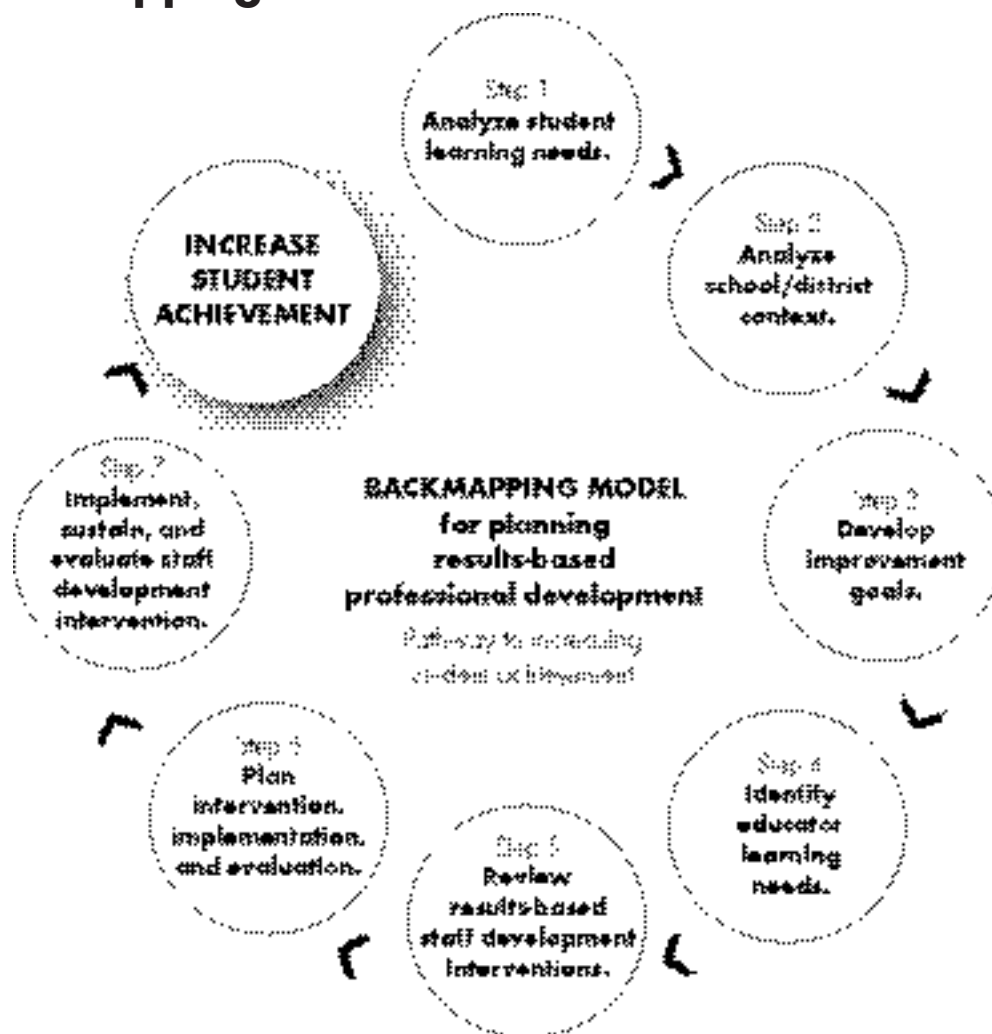
Backmapping model

    The backmapping model guides the planning of results-based staff development that targets an increase in student achievement.

Step 1 is identifying areas of student learning needs.

Step 2 is analyzing the school and/or district context.

Step 3 is developing the school improvement goal that specifies increasing student achievement as the end result and educator learning as an activity to accomplish the goals.

Step 4 is identifying educator learning needs, a step that replaces the traditional needs assessment process.

Step 5 is reviewing possible staff development interventions.

Step 6 is selecting the intervention and planning for its implementation and evaluation.

Step 7 is implementing, sustaining, and evaluating the intervention.

Understanding the steps

STEP 1.

Review student achievement data.

To produce results, staff development must be directly tied to student achievement needs. Before selecting or designing staff development, a careful and thorough analysis of student achievement data occurs. This analysis will help identify specific student achievement strengths and areas of need and will guide decisions about staff dev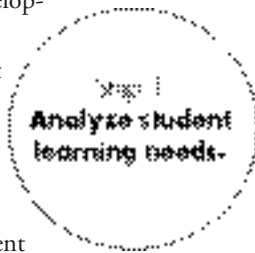elopment programs. During data analysis, it is helpful to examine multiple types of data about student learning such as high-stakes test results, results from common benchmark assessments, classroom assessments including projects and performances, grades, student self-assessment, etc.

Key questions to answer during this step include:

- What assessment data are available?
- What is being measured in each assessment?
- Which students are assessed?
- What areas of student performance are meeting or exceeding expectations?
- Do patterns exist in the data?
- How did various populations of students perform? (Consider factors such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status.)
- What are other data telling us about student performance?
- How are the data similar or different in various grade levels, content areas, and individual classes?
- What surprises us?
- What confirms what we already know?

The data analysis process results in knowing or identifying:

- Specific areas of deficit.
- Specific knowledge and skills students need in order to overcome the deficit.
- Specific students or groups of students for whom the deficit is most prevalent or pronounced.

For example, assume a school's scores on a state test are below the expected or desired level in reading. These scores are insufficient by themselves to use for planning a staff development intervention. Now assume that the English department analyzes subtest scores and subgroup scores. Perhaps they find a deficiency in reading vocabulary for a particular group of students. This analysis may include a review of the curriculum to determine which standards or benchmarks are most essential for students to achieve and what fundamental knowledge and skills serve as the prerequisites to these standards. This type of information can be used to establish schoolwide and/or department improvement goals, identify specific actions necessary to achieve those goals, and guide the selection and/or design of a staff development intervention to address the need by increasing the vocabulary skills of the identified student group.

In the example above, to simply identify reading as the area of focus provides insufficient information to guide the design and/or selection of a staff development

program. The latter information, in contrast, is action-able — that is, it is specific enough to identify what teachers need to know and be able to do in order to improve student performance in reading vocabulary.

STEP 2.
Identify unique characteristics of community, school, department, staff, and district.

When school leaders and teachers understand the unique characteristics of the students, they can use this information to make appropriate instructional and program decisions. The parallel is true for staff development leaders. Knowing the unique characteristics of the adults who will participate in the staff development program will influ-ence the design of the learning experience and the nature of follow-up support provided.

Understanding the conditions under which the staff development program will be implemented also helps inform the selection and/or design of a staff devel-opment initiative. For example, a staff development program for experienced teachers may be different than one for novice teachers.

Likewise, a staff development program design to enable staff to meet the needs of urban, disadvantaged students may be different than one for rural schools. Additionally, a program provided in a district or school setting where there are limited resource and/or time for staff development will be different than in settings where time and resources are budgeted.

Districts, schools, and/or departments complete a profile to provide information about the environment and conditions of the school where the need exists. Detailing the context helps staff development leaders make informed decisions about staff development pro-grams.

Key questions to answer in this area are:
- What are the characteristics of our students?
  Some characteristics to consider area:
    - Ethnicity/race
    - Gender
    - Socioeconomic status
    - Mobility
    - Family support
    - Motivation

- Attitude about school
- Experience in school
- Academic performance
- Retention rate
- Parents' education level
- Sibling data

- **What are the characteristics of the staff?**
  Some characteristics to consider are:
    - Years of experience
    - Years at a grade level
    - Years in the school
    - Past experience with staff development
    - Motivation
    - Performance/ability
    - Attitude
    - Sense of efficacy
    - Response to change
    - Collegiality
    - Extent to which teachers' preparation aligns with teaching assignments
    - Level of education

- **What are some characteristics of our formal and informal leadership for both teacher and administrators?**
  Some characteristics to consider are:
    - Leadership style
    - Roles of formal and informal leaders
    - Level of participation in leadership activities
    - Opportunities to be involved in leadership roles/activities
    - Trust in leadership
    - Support by leadership
    - Support for leadership
    - Level of communication

- **What are some characteristics of our community?**
  Some characteristics to consider are:
    - Support for education
    - Support for the school
    - Involvement in school activities
    - Support for students
    - Support for staff development

- **What resources are available to support the staff development program?**
  Some considerations are:
    - Budget
    - Time

Support personnel in the building
Support personnel outside the building
Union contract
Incentives

STEP 3.
Establish clear, measurable outcomes for the staff development program.

Teams must understand what they hope to accomplish in terms of both student and teacher learning as a result of their staff development efforts. Without a clear goal and specific target, it is easy to miss the mark. Key questions about outcomes are: (1) What results do we seek for students? (2) What results do we expect for staff? (3) What practices, procedures, and policies will affect the achievement of these goals?

Step 3
Develop improvement goals.

Intended results are stated in terms of student achievement. Actions or changes that occur for teachers and principals are means to achieve the goal of increased student achievement and are best as objectives rather than outcomes or goals. In other words, expected outcomes are stated in terms that allow the district, school, and/or department to know if it has or has not achieved the intended results. Too often, results are stated in terms of the means to the end rather than results themselves.

For example, a goal that states, "One hundred percent of the staff will participate in training in brain-based learning" does not say what will happen for students as a result of this training. This is an action to accomplish the desired results — increasing student achievement. A preferable goal is one that states, "In three years, 90% of students will read on grade level as a result of teachers learning and implementing new instructional strategies." The latter goal is focused on the end result of the staff development, rather than on what occurs in the process.

STEP 4.
Assess teacher and principal learning needs.

Many staff development programs begin with needs assessments that ask adult learners to identify what they want to learn. This common practice often leaves a gap between what educators want to learn and what they may need to learn to address the identified goals. For example, teachers are often eager to learn

about new educational innovations, and principals may want to learn h how to shortcut nagging managerial tasks. However, if the goal is to increase students' reading performance, and comprehending and interpreting nonfiction text were identified as the areas of greatest deficit, both teachers and principals have a specific need to develop

Step 4
Identify educator learning needs.

their skills and knowledge in this area to teach and support classroom instruction in reading nonfiction text. Staff development on topics other than these areas may deflect staff development time and resources from the established school goals.

After educators' learning needs are identified, staff development leaders consider specific actions for meeting the identified learning needs. The scope and content of the necessary staff development program will be clearer when the district, school, or department team has a clear understanding of student learning needs, the context and conditions of the school or district, the specific goal, and the learning needs of educators.

STEP 5.
Study the staff development programs described in the guide.

Before determining how to accomplish the goal, the district, school, and/or department team will examine proven staff development programs, those that have evidence of their impact on student learning. Too often this important step is overlooked. District, school, and/or department staffs often fail to conduct a critical review of what is available and what has proven successful. In their urgency and enthusiasm to improve student performance, school staffs may pass

Step 5
Review results-based staff development interventions.

over this step and select or adapt programs with which they are unfamiliar. This guide is particularly useful for this review because it describes programs that have proven success in increasing student achievement. It also identifies the content of those programs so that a district, school, and/or department can determine the degree to which the content aligns with all identified educator learning needs determined in Step 4.

In examining programs, consider the following questions:

- Which programs address the skills and knowledge we have identified as educator learning needs?
- What programs are being used in schools with similar demographics?
- If our school's characteristics do not match those of schools in which the program was successfully implemented, what are the key differences? How likely are those differences to interfere with the program's success?
- What changes could be implemented to increase the likelihood of success?
- What aspects of the program (if any) might need to be modified to accommodate the unique features of our school?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
- What school, district, and community support was required to make the program successful?

After examining successful programs, the district, school, and/or department team determines if it will adopt or adapt an existing program or create its own program. This is a significant decision that is made with careful thought. When making this decision, members are deciding where to place their energy and resources for the long run. Too often schools fail to achieve success because they use a "revolving door approach" to innovations — that is, a series of experts "pop in" to prescribe the best treatment for the problem. Sometimes staff development or improvement efforts are viewed as temporary intrusions that staff can "wait out." In fact, any staff development intervention adopted requires a new way of doing business, one that the district, school, and/or department staff will fully commit to and one that they fully expect to become a routine part of their everyday practice. Without this level of commitment, no staff development intervention holds a promise of improving student and teacher learning.

STEP 6.
Plan for implementation, institutionalization, and evaluation.

As new programs begin in schools, few leaders or participants look beyond the immediate school year. However, if an intervention is carefully selected, it will become a new way of doing business. To make the transition between new ideas and routine practice, a plan to support implementation and institutionalization is important. Teams must plan for a variety of long-range processes: dealing with the challenges of beginning a

new program; sustaining the focus, energy, and resources to ensure success; and adopting procedures to provide ongoing formative — and eventually summative — evaluations of the program.

After a staff development program has been selected, adapted, or designed and before implementing a program, answer these questions:

- How will we assess the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of the program?
- How will we support the program?
  How will we support the individuals involved:
- What are we equipped to do ourselves to support and implement the program, and what outside resources will we need?
- What resources are we dedicating to the program?
- What is our timeline for full implementation?
- What benchmarks along the way will help us know if we are being successful?
- Are we willing to commit time, energy, and financial resources to this effort for the long term?

- How will we align this new initiative with existing ones? What might we need to eliminate to make resources available for this program?
- How closely do the goals of this program align with our school's improvement goals and the district's strategic goals?
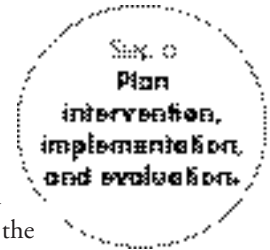
When planning the evaluation of a staff development program, staff development leaders will

1. Assess the design of the staff development program to determine if it is thorough, well-conceived, and able to be implemented;

2. Identify the key questions they hope to answer; and

3. Design the evaluation framework, which is the plan for conducting the evaluation.

Such plans include data collection methodology, data sources, personnel to conduct the evaluation, and a timeline (Killion, 2002). Also, plans for both formative and summative evaluation are necessary. A formative assessment allows staff development leaders to know how well the program is being implemented and answers questions such as:

- Are the program activities being implemented as planned?
- Are resources adequate to implement the program

as planned?

- To what degree are differences occurring in implementation that may influence the program's results?

A summative evaluation allows staff development leaders to know what impact the program has had and answers questions such as:

- Have the intended results been achieved?
- What changes have occurred as a result of the program?
- What changes has the program influenced for students?
- What changes has the program influenced for staff?

Planning the evaluation, while planning the program and its implementation, provides greater options for evaluation. it helps identify important baseline data to collect that may be necessary for determining what impact the program has had. It gives both the staff development leaders and evaluator greater clarity about how the program is intended to work, thus increasing the likelihood that the program will be implemented as designed and that the intended results will be realized.

STEP 7.
Implement, sustain, and evaluate the staff development program.

To be fully implemented, a program requires constant nurturing and support. In order to continuously improve a program, the district, school, and/or department team will use data bout the program to make regular adjustments and refinements to strengthen the results. This nurturing is the primary responsibility of the staff development leaders including the principal and teacher leaders. With a long-term commitment, a focus on results for students, and clear indicators of success, a school team has the necessary resources to monitor and make adjustments, strengthening the results of the program and ensuring success.

Implementing a program requires that those responsible for implementation have a clear understanding of what implementation means and looks like. One tool for reaching agreement on the acceptable level of implementation is an innovation configuration that describes and defines the essential features of a program (Hall & Hord, 2001). Attention to setting expectations and standards for acceptable implementation will make

a significant difference in the quality of implementation.

Once the program is implemented, attention can turn toward sustaining the program. In other words, "How will district, school, and/or department teams keep the focus on the results, provide the necessary resources to continue the program, and use data about the program to continually improve it?" If a program is fully implemented, sustaining it becomes easier, yet requires constant attention and resources.

Evaluating the program provides information about the program's impact and valuable data to improve its results. Using both formative and summative evaluation processes will provide the best data for district, school, and/or department teams to use to continually improve the program and increase the likelihood that it will achieve the results it strives to achieve (Killion, 2002).

RESULT.
Increase student achievement.

The backmapping model guides the schools and collaborative learning teams. When adults learn, students benefit.

References

Educational Research Service. (1998). *Comprehensive models for school improvement: Finding the right match and making it work.* Arlington, VA: Author.

Hall, G. & Hord, S. (2001). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Killion, J. (2002). *Assessing impact: Evaluating staff development.* Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

TOOL 12.2

If not a workshop, then what?

1. Conducting action research projects
2. Analyzing teaching cases
3. Attending awareness-level seminars
4. Joining a cadre of in-house trainers
5. Planning lessons with a teaching colleague
6. Consulting an expert
7. Examining student data
8. Being coached by a peer or an expert
9. Leading a book study
10. Making a content-focused field trip
11. Writing assessments with a colleague
12. Participating in a study or support group
13. Doing a classroom walk-through
14. Giving presentations at conferences
15. Researching on the Internet
16. Leading a schoolwide committee or project
17. Developing curriculum-related displays
18. Shadowing students
19. Coaching a colleague
20. Being a mentor — being mentored
21. Joining a professional network
22. Using a tuning protocol to examine student work
23. Attending an in-depth institute in a content area
24. Writing an article about your work
25. Observing model lessons
26. Reading journals, educational magazines, books
27. Participating in a critical friends group
28. Doing a self-assessment
29. Shadowing another teacher or professional in the field
30. Keeping a reflective log or journal
31. Analyzing the expectations of your statewide assessments
32. Enrolling in a university course
33. Viewing educational videos
34. Maintaining a professional portfolio
35. Studying content standards for your state
36. Observing other teachers teach
37. Listening to video/audio recordings
38. Participating in a videoconference or conference calls with experts
39. Visiting model schools/programs
40. Developing curriculum
41. Doing school improvement planning
42. Examining new technological resources to supplement lessons
43. Being observed and receiving feedback from another teacher or principal
44. Participating in lesson study
45. Working on a strategic planning team

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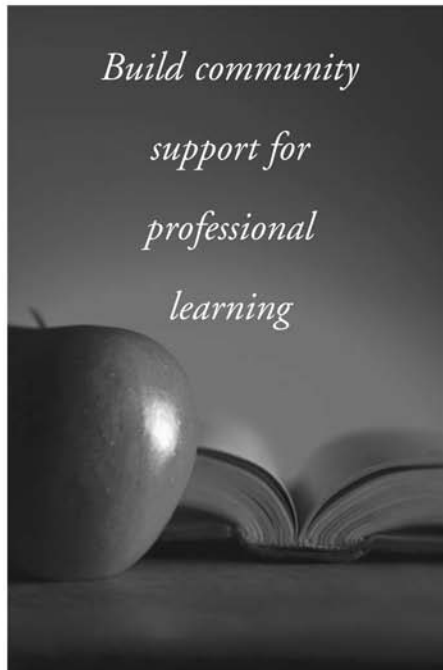
B R E A K
THE INSERVICE HABIT!

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

About 10 years ago, teachers at my kids' school spent part of a back-to-school night explaining the new math curriculum to parents. My daughter's teacher focused on what the district wanted children to learn and parents listened attentively.

Then a mother asked a simple question: *If that's what you want children to know, then how are you going to teach them that?*

The teacher stood silent for several moments. Then, as if a light had flashed on in her head, she grabbed handouts on her desk and began passing them out. "This will explain that," she said.

The bell rang and we all wandered out into the hall, grasping our new handout. "What is this?" asked one parent. "This is just insulting," said another.

Most of us just shook our heads in mild amusement as we tried to comprehend what we'd been given: A sketch of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.

This very talented

Build community support for professional learning

Build support for professional learning

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veteran teacher had been caught in a vise. She had been through weeks of intensive staff development to prepare her to teach this new math curriculum. She loved the new curriculum and, as the year proved, was very capable of teaching it to her students. What she could not do, however, was explain to parents what she had learned about how to change her instruction and how those changes would result in the intended learning for her students. She knew what she would be doing but she did not have the words to express what she knew.

When a teacher cannot explain something to parents, parents become very nervous.

Parents and other community members cannot be expected to support spending money on staff development if they do not understand what it is, why it is necessary, what it looks like, why it looks that way, and what difference it will make for their children. Building their support begins by building their understanding.

When teachers are unable to describe what they have learned and how they will use it, parents rightly become very skeptical about the value of professional development. In an environment where school budgets are being slashed, that skepticism can lead directly to reduced budgets for teacher learning. Parents believe they understand the value of small classes; they do not understand the value

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of professional development.

Parents are tough customers to win over when it comes to support for staff development — particularly for traditional forms of professional development that are based on released time. Parents become personally inconvenienced by half-days, days off, late starts, or early dismissals for staff development. Few newsletters or web sites provide much detail to parents about why children are being deprived of instruction while teachers are away learning. Calendars typically list vague phrases like "institute day" or "staff development." When parents ask what teachers are learning during this time away from students, they often hear teachers say that "inservices" are a waste of time because they never learn anything new.

Teachers are more likely to see value in the time they have during their workday to meet with colleagues to share ideas and examine student work. But parents — and often teachers themselves — are less likely to view that important time as staff development.

This issue is intended to help you as teachers and principals in your district try to communicate the importance of professional development in all its forms to parents and other community members.

Break the inservice habit.

This is a Very Big Rule #1: Stop using the word inservice. Remove it from school district literature and excise it from your vocabulary. While you're at it, stop using "institute days," "released days," "PLC days," even "staff development." Those phrases confuse rather than illuminate.

Replace those phrases with simple, easy-to-understand phrases: teacher learning, professional learning, or staff learning.

Making this transition will be easier if you also minimize your dependence on released-time forms of professional devel-

opment in favor of learning opportunities for teachers during their regular work day.

Talk about learning alternatives.

To many parents, professional development immediately translates into "workshop" and students being sent home from school. So educating parents about the value of professional learning also means educating them about various learning options — and using more of those options for professional development in your community. See Page 8 for a list of the many "powerful designs" that NSDC believes represent good options for professional learning.

Showcase your teacher learning.

Each time your school or district sets aside time for teacher learning, tell parents about it.

Put a message on your web site or include something in your monthly newsletter telling parents exactly why kids are home for the afternoon and teachers are still working. Be specific. For example:

"Roosevelt teachers will spend two hours on Wednesday afternoon focusing on how they evaluate student writing. English teachers will be sharing and explaining their guidelines for grading English papers, known as a rubric. They will be working with teachers in all subjects to help them understand how they can apply the same rubric to student writing in their classes. That will help ensure that all teachers are grading the same way.

"The work that teachers are doing is connected to one of our district goals, which is improving the quality of student writing. Our statewide language arts assessment tests students on their writing ability and, beginning in 2005, the SAT will also test students' writing ability."

If your school has provided time for teachers to meet, include something in each newsletter about how teachers are using that time.

Build community support for professional learning

Emphasize the benefits to students.

One of the best arguments that teachers can make about their need for professional development and for spending time with other teachers is that it helps ensures equity for students. That addresses one of parents' greatest fears — that their child will miss something that other children are receiving — said Kris Olson, communications director for Parents for Public Schools.

Write a brochure.

Create a brochure that describes your district's reading initiative, professional meeting time for teachers, or a new position, such as reading coach or instructional specialist. Explain what the new program or position is intended to do, how it has been funded, and reference some of the research that suggests why it's a good strategy for your district.

Distribute it at back-to-school nights, through your newsletters, and post it on your web site.

Take a camera into a staff development session.

Introduce parents to an actual staff development session or a team meeting by broadcasting a session on your local cable access channel or by creating a video.

The advantage of a video is that it can be taken to parent meetings, broadcast on your local cable TV channel, and made available at your local library for checkout. Parents who might otherwise be unwilling to read about professional development option might watch a video because they perceive it as entertainment, says Sylvia Soholt, a consultant with KSA-Plus Communications in Virginia.

Write a column in your school or district newsletter.

In your school or district newsletter, share news about professional learning and answer parents' questions about current initiatives. We've included FAQs on Page 5 that you can add to your newsletters. However, responding to real questions from parents in your district will make such a column even more readable.

Prepare teachers for spontaneous talk about staff development.

Teachers will not become better communicators unless principals and staff developers spend time helping them learn how to do that. Teachers are unlikely to have formal meetings with parents to talk about their professional learning. Instead, schools should prepare teachers for answering questions from parents during the kinds of encounters that occur naturally in a community — as they shop in the grocery store, leave a religious service, pick up a video, or attend a sporting event.

Start by introducing a communication component into each staff development session including team meetings. See the tool on Page 4 for an example of a handout that could be used for this purpose.

Introduce the handout on Page 4 at the beginning of the meeting or workshop. This will signal teachers that you are expecting them to prepare for how they will communicate with parents about how they are using staff development time, what they are learning, and how their children will benefit from this. Do a short role play in which the facilitator acts as a parent and the teacher is asked to explain what he or she has learned.

With a slight variation, schools with weekly or regular collaborative time for teachers to meet together can use the same activity. If teachers meet daily, ask them to summarize what they have learned each week, perhaps in a learning log that is shared with the principal. The principal also could use a portion of faculty meetings to have a teacher from each team describe the work of that team and how teachers are implementing new learning in their classrooms.

TOOL 12.4

School professional development plan synthesis

Use this tool to summarize the professional development planned at each school. Collect from each school a summary of the collaborative professional learning teams' action plans and compile a districtwide summary to prepare each district's Local Professional Development Plan and to report to the community and other constituents about the district's professional development plan.

- List the district schools in the far left-hand column.
- Identify the goal areas for each collaborative learning team within each school.
- For each goal area, identify the grade level for which that goal has been established.
- Identify the major actions the collaborative professional learning team plans to take to address its goal.
- Write the desired result it wishes to accomplish.

Schools	Goal area	Grade levels	Key actions	Desired results
_____				
_____				
_____				
_____				
_____				
_____				