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Update

JULY 2008

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Professional Learning Friends,

As I reflect over summer 2008, the one word that comes to mind is “magical”. Our family and friends celebrated a wedding on June 20th as my oldest daughter married the man of her dreams. My daughter was breathtaking and the garden wedding was absolutely magical!

After begin swept away in the magic of our wedding, I whisked to Orlando for the NSDC Summer Affiliate meeting July 11th through July 13th. I smiled as I was greeted with the Affiliate meeting theme, M.A.G.I.C. - “**M**any **H**ands **A**ctively **E**ngaging **I**ndividually & **C**ollectively!” With magic in the midst, I knew we were in for great learning under the guidance of The National Staff Development Council!

Last year, under the guidance of our new Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh, NSDC provided a meaningful update to our work with a new PURPOSE for NSDC, “*Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.*” I was very impressed with the timely and clear definition of *Professional Learning* provided our affiliates this summer. The clear definition supports our purpose! The following is the definition of *Professional Learning* as presented at the NSDC Summer Affiliate Meeting this July:

- (34) The term 'professional development' means a comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement —
- (A) Professional development fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance and must be comprised of professional learning that —
 - (1) is aligned with rigorous state student academic achievement standards, as well as related local educational agency and school improvement goals;
 - (2) is conducted among learning teams of educators, including teachers, paraprofessionals, and other instructional staff at the school;
 - (3) is facilitated by well-prepared, school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders;
 - (4) occurs primarily several times per week or the equivalent of three hours per week; and

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- (5) engages established learning teams of educators in a continuous cycle of improvement that –
 - (i) analyzes student, teacher, and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance;
 - (ii) defines a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of the data;
 - (iii) achieves the educator learning goals identified in subsection (A)(5)(ii) by implementing coherent, sustained, and evidence-based learning strategies that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement, such as lesson study and the examining of student work;
 - (iv) provides classroom-based coaching or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom;
 - (v) regularly assesses the effectiveness of the professional development in achieving identified learning goals, improving teaching, and assisting all students in meeting challenging state academic achievement standards;
 - (vi) informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning; and
 - (vii) may be facilitated and strengthened by external assistance.
- (B) The process outlined in subsection (34)(A) may be supported and strengthened by activities such as courses, workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences that:
 - (1) must address the learning goals and objectives established for professional development by educators at the school level;
 - (2) advance the ongoing school-based professional development; and
 - (3) are provided by for profit and non-profit entities outside the school such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organization

We spent time reading and internalizing the new definition; taking the time to reflect over how it represents our current and future work in professional learning. I encourage you to read, reflect, share, and discuss the new definition. I feel strongly we will experience the impact of this clear definition in upcoming Professional Learning dialogue and actions.

I want to thank each of you who support the Georgia Staff Development Council. Lea Arnau, Kathy O’Neill, and I all felt very proud as we reflected over the work our organization engaged in during the 2007-2008 school year while at the affiliate meeting. We began FY08 with a focus on examining the evidence of our work, affecting the policy context, and developing school leaders. We concluded FY08 with accomplishment! Our Georgia Affiliate was recognized for their work *As An Advocate for Quality Professional Learning* with specific recognition as noted: (you will note the awards were themed in *Disney*):

Tomorrowland: To the affiliate leader that has worked to bring about or promote policies that require evidence linking professional development for educators with student achievement.

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Fantasyland: To the affiliate that uses technology to reach out beyond affiliate members to further NSDC's purpose and engage leaders of other organizations.

Fantasyland: To the affiliate that has created partnerships or alliances with other organizations to advance NSDC's purpose.

Liberty Square: To the affiliate that has fostered school-based team learning that focuses on differentiated instruction and meeting the needs of all learners.

Frontierland: To the affiliate that has collected data linking professional development in their state or province with student learning.

Adventureland: To the affiliate that has intentionally targeted school-based leaders through Academies, or hosting roundtable conversations or book studies.

I hope your summer was as magical as mine – I have stars in my eyes as I look ahead to our work for 2008-2009 and I look forward to seeing each of you at our Fall Conference in Savannah. We will continue our work and focus on the study of Evaluation in Georgia. Lois Easton will be leading us through *From Professional Development to Professional Learning – Experience the Power!* We will all gather at the Hyatt Regency Savannah on September 17th and 18th for the conference and hopefully a good number of you will remain for the first session of the 2008-09 Academy on September 19th. Registration information is on our website at www.gasdc.org. See each of you soon!

IS THE FALL CONFERENCE WORTH MY TIME - AND MY SYSTEM'S MONEY?

The “technology” of professional development is changing. Training and professional development are necessary for some things (think CPR); but for changes to occur in this increasingly complex work of education, educators need to engage in professional learning. As they learn more from research and practice about how students learn, they also come to understand more about how they need to learn. At this 2-day conference, participants will explore the differences between professional development and professional learning. They will understand how professional learning fits with the current trend towards PLCs. They will experience several powerful designs themselves – deeply enough that they will be able to facilitate these designs with the educators with whom they work. They will know about other professional learning designs that they can use. They will evaluate their current professional development programs according to criteria for context, process, and content, focusing on strategies that are particularly important to them as educators. Using these tools, they will create a plan to remodel current professional learning approaches so that they more closely align with students' learning needs, meet National Staff Development Council's standards for staff development, and model the type of learning educators want their students to experience.

As a result of this conference, participants will:

- Understand how the work they do benefits from a professional learning approach;
- Have a deep understanding about the differences between professional development and professional learning;
- Know the 12 qualities of professional learning;
- Know the relationship between professional learning and PLCs;

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2008-2009 ACADEMY FORMING

The first session of the 2008-09 GSDC Academy will be held September 19th at the Hyatt Regency Savannah. If you register for both the conference and an Academy session, your conference registration will be discounted \$25. If you use a credit card, the database administrator will credit back \$25; if you use a PO, a corrected invoice showing the \$25 discount will be sent to you for processing with your finance office.

The Academy session ***Providing Focused and Sustained Professional Development*** is a goal for all professional learners. Professional development means different things to different people. To some, it means one-stop workshops and in-services. In this Academy session, participants will learn of much richer ways to enhance professional growth that make a difference in student achievement. Participants will also learn to identify, develop, nurture, and monitor a variety of different professional development experiences that are tied to school improvement.

The Academy session ***Using Data to Lead Change*** will help participants to think about data beyond a cursory look at standardized test scores. Participants will be introduced to basic concepts, complete activities designed to reinforce those concepts, and then apply them in classroom and homework assignments.

The Academy session ***Building and Leading Effective Teams*** addresses the fact that no school leader succeeds alone. For lasting improvement, school leaders must build and lead highly effective teams. Why have teams? What separates effective teams from those that are just taking up space? How do you get a team off to a good start? What tools, techniques, and approaches can leaders use to strengthen team effectiveness? How can team meetings be more efficient? These are questions that are answered for participants in this session.

Subsequent sessions of the 2008-09 Academy are:

- November 6-7 in Houston Co./Douglas Co.
- January 22-23 in Houston Co./Douglas Co.
- March 13, 2009 in Metro Atlanta (Marriott Perimeter).

CAN THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BE CLOSED?

By Curtis Linton

After co-writing with Glenn Singleton the best-selling book, *Courageous Conversation About Race: A Fieldguide for Achieving Equity in Schools* (2005), other educators continually asked me, "Do you really believe the gaps can be closed and that *all* students can achieve?" This question always disturbed me because it showed a distinct lack of belief that closing the gaps is a real possibility. Emphatically responding, I would often state: "Yes! Every student can achieve. I know this without a doubt because I have seen schools that have made it happen."

As troubling as this question is, I realize people ask because they honestly feel doubt about the possibility of closing the gaps. Although every educator wants to believe that every child can be successful, it is difficult when life in the classroom seems to confirm the opposite.

The problem is not the students. The problem is how we teach and treat students who are different. Nearly every educator can give a reason why a student is not successful: "He is poor," "She comes from a bad family," "He does not speak English." Although we seldom mention race as the reason, it is often an underlying, unspoken factor in the excuse given for failure.

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Failure does not have to be the reality we live with. I have visited thousands of classrooms across North America and have seen firsthand schools that have achieved success for every student. These schools faced difficult demographics, but made no excuse for low achievement despite the student body being overwhelmingly poor, of color, and lacking in English language skills.

Although every successful school varies in the specifics, they share a striking commonality that is at the foundation of their success: equity. Equity means that every student receives the individualized support they need to reach and exceed a common standard. To successful schools, equity is not a vague, theoretical concept; it is the guiding principle of everything they do.

This of course raises the question, "I know equity is important, but how do I actually implement it?" As illustrated below, the Equity Framework answers this question and empowers schools to succeed with every student. As a model, the Equity Framework is based exclusively on the practices observed within successful schools. It is a framework grounded in actual practice and verifiable success.

In the quest for improvement, many schools overemphasize one aspect of improvement, which leads to fractured efforts, frustrated staff, and insufficient growth in achievement. The Equity Framework ties together the three critical aspects of leadership, school culture, and teaching & learning to holistically address student achievement.

Before jumping into these three aspects, educators must understand that equity only occurs when expectations, rigor, and relationships intersect. Expectations are the high levels of achievement that a school requires of itself for every individual student. Sharon Brittingham, former principal of Frankford Elementary (a highly diverse poor school that has verifiably closed all achievement gaps) said, "When I came here, the teachers really did believe that they were doing the best job for the population that they worked with. But what had to change was the belief that these children could learn at high levels."

Students respond to the expectations we truly have for them, so it is essential that we examine our beliefs and biases and ensure we have high expectations for every child.

NURTURE LEADERS TO SUSTAIN LEARNING CULTURE

By Hayes Mizell

There are countless stories in public education about the rise and fall of effective practices. Educators often refer wistfully to an era when a particularly useful practice flourished in a school. In spite of a school's investment in such a practice and its positive results, the practice may not endure. Most frequently, this occurs because educators responsible for the practice leave the school or quit giving it the attention necessary for quality implementation. There is no guarantee this phenomenon will not repeat itself in the case of professional learning. When a school successfully implements daily, school-based team learning, it is probably due to the interest and effort of a small group of school leaders. Over time, however, these leaders may move on or there may be new education movements or imperatives that capture their attention. The National Staff Development Council recognizes this vulnerability in one of its belief statements: "Sustainable learning cultures require skilful leadership."

School systems and schools cannot organize effective professional learning without leaders. Who will these leaders be? School systems will naturally gravitate to principals, but most principals know little about professional development.

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What they do know is the result of their experiences with modes of professional development that have produced, at best, mixed results. School systems must consider this reality and compensate for it by increasing principals' understanding of and engagement with more effective means of learning. One approach is to organize principals into learning teams that function similarly to the learning teams the principals subsequently organize with educators in their schools. The purpose of the principal learning teams, which should meet frequently for at least a year, would be for the principals to educate themselves about what constitutes effective professional learning, and provide them direct experience with how to organize, monitor, and assess it . (Principals will also benefit from joining NSDC and receiving its monthly newsletter, *The Learning Principal*.)

School systems must not make the mistake of assuming that overburdened principals will be able to single-handedly organize, monitor, and assess learning teams and achieve quality results. When principals organize educator learning teams in their schools, they will need assistance and school systems must take this reality into account. For principals of low-performing schools, school systems may want to provide an on-site learning team coach for at least two years. All educators will need support as they begin to work and learn together, and this is particularly true in schools where teachers lack positive experiences in engaging in candid, respectful dialogue with their peers.

In addition to leaders who are principals and coaches, there are also teacher leaders in every school. Over the long term, more than principals or coaches, they can provide the "skilful leadership" that "sustainable learning cultures require." This will not happen, however, without school systems and principals nurturing the development of teacher leaders who become dedicated to sustaining a learning culture. Their leadership will be critical to renewing and reenergizing learning teams each school year, helping the teams build on experiences and lessons from previous years. Each year, these teacher leaders should also mentor new teachers in how to participate effectively on learning teams, and help them develop skills necessary to take leadership roles on the teams. If teacher leaders persist in carrying out these responsibilities, it will go a long way towards preventing the withering of learning teams than can occur because of teacher turnover.

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- Match the NSDC standards to the professional learning designs they have experienced;
- Be able to use several tools for selecting appropriate professional learning strategies; and
- Be able to facilitate at least three powerful designs with the people with whom they work.

Now this is a "bang for your buck!"

**Come to Conference
Hyatt Regency Savannah
September 17 & 18**