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PSDC News

A Message from the President

Cynthia A. Knauer, Ed.D.

This is a time of unprecedented pressure on the public school system in our country. Across the nation, schools are urgently implementing innovative changes in curriculum, assessments, in the use of time, community involvement, and fiscal management. Directing efforts toward any of these innovations can make a difference in the success of our students. However, it is widely recognized that to make the greatest difference, we must focus on the quality of teaching in the classroom.

Supporting quality instruction at the classroom level requires that all teachers have access to professional growth opportunities that are focused, driven by data, sustained over time, and embedded in the work day.

Toward that end, the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) has committed extensive effort and energy to promote a definition of high-quality professional development that will ensure that all teachers have the development and support needed to positively affect student achievement.

This definition is included in the language of the “Great Teachers for Great Schools Act of 2007” (S. 1979) sponsored by Senator Jack Reed and Congressman Jared Polis. With passage of this Act, meaningful language to define effective professional learning will be included in the reauthorized version of NCLB.

According to NSDC, “The legislation makes key changes to NCLB in support of effective professional development and recognizes that quality teaching occurs when teachers and

principals engage in daily, collaborative, rigorous, professional learning focused on the learning needs of students in their classrooms and schools as a part of their work day.

Under this legislation, educators will have time to learn and work together to deepen content knowledge, plan instruction, examine student work, address different student learning needs, clarify student learning outcomes, and use the results of frequent classroom assessments to modify instruction. Secondly, it will foster collective responsibility among educators for student and teacher success creating a perfect recipe for improved school performance.”

Pennsylvania Staff Development Council (PSDC), as an affiliate of NSDC, supports efforts to include this new language in the reauthorization of NCLB. We urge you to contact your legislator to strongly suggest support of this important bill. Information and sample letters can be found on the NSDC website (www.nsd.org).

In Pennsylvania, our organization is committed to supporting NSDC’s beliefs that:

1. Sustained and intensive professional development for teachers is related to student achievement gains.
2. Collaborative approaches to professional learning can promote school change that extends beyond individual classrooms.
3. Effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong working relationships among teachers.

Join our journey to better teaching.

The Four Pillars of Differentiated Instruction: Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, & Management

Peter Grande, Ed.D.

My purpose here is to articulate a framework for Differentiated Instruction that can help administrators and teachers set appropriate expectations. This framework can also serve as a guide for growth. It begins with the realization that DI is an expert teacher skill and a worthy goal for all. DI is not a single strategy or set of strategies. Effective differentiated instruction rests on a teacher's ability to construct and integrate the four pillars that support this approach—curriculum, assessment, instruction and management. Let's examine each pillar.

Curriculum. Effective differentiated instruction begins with curriculum clarity. Starting with state and national standards, teachers need to know what is most important and translate standards knowledge into units based on essential questions and enduring understandings. Of the four pillars, curriculum is first because clarity is essential to implementation, and you can be superb at the other three, but if your curriculum target is off, your work has been wasted.

Assessment. In the DI classroom, assessment must take multiple forms because it is ongoing and the basis for informed decision making. Fortifying this pillar begins with a teacher's analysis of his/her ability to collect, analyze, interpret, and act on student data.

Instruction. DI instructors are like craftsmen with 112 piece tool sets. These master craftsmen artfully wield a variety of tools. They know *when and how* to employ cooperative learning, show a video, use flexible grouping, introduce problem-based learning, facilitate classroom discussion and give a lecture—often employing two or three of these in the same lesson.

Management. Let's review the requirements of the other DI pillars that inform the management pillar. DI instruction demands ongoing, multiple-forms of assessment, instructional

diversity and an array of teaming structures. Therefore, versatile DI managers must be competent at constructing environments, orchestrating groupings, controlling movement, and promoting interaction—all while making certain that their learners are engaged, motivated and accountable.

Educators can conceptualize success at DI as the progressive development of each block that is added to each pillar. Instructional leaders are obligated to help teachers see the big picture, clarifying for them that DI is the integration of a complex set of master teacher skills. Teachers can then use the framework to self assess and develop growth plans based on pillar construction.

This is an edited version. The full article appeared in Fall 2008 issue of PA School Administrator Magazine.

Getting to Got it: Teachers as Learners

Kathy Gibson

In an article published in the February 2010 issue of the Pennsylvania School Board Bulletin, PSDC Board member, Kathy Gibson describes the success of the Fort Washington Elementary School in the Upper Dublin School District.

This school prides itself in being a professional learning community. Last year, they decided to kick it up a notch! They realized that while they had a lot of talent on staff, they did not have enough quality time to share ideas. Over twenty teachers wanted to be involved in rich discussions focused on student achievement, and opted to join a focused study group.

After overcoming the first challenge by finding a place to meet, the next challenge was to figure out how to meet with twenty teachers in only 30 minutes. By starting at 7:55 AM, they were guaranteed to start on time. By sticking to a set format, they enjoyed lively discussions and learned about many new ideas.

The group chose *Getting to Got it: Helping Struggling Students Learn How to Learn*, by Betty K. Garner, and used the online study questions (ASCD) as a guide to prepare for the monthly discussion. They organized their notes, handouts, student work samples and lesson plans in a binder. The book turned out to be an excellent choice!

The group created opportunities to share ideas with a variety of staff members. Conversations occurred at lunch, on the playground, and in hallways.

Teachers responded enthusiastically to the experience. One teacher adequately summed it up in response to the question: What did you value the most from this experience?

"...being able to share with and talk to other teachers. I always got at least one good idea each session."

**Join us in Hershey,
PA
on
May 3, 2010**

PSDC Presents

**Active Responses
to Data:
Models for
Courageous
Coaching**

**A One-Day workshop
with**

Cathy Toll

Author and Consultant

**To register: Contact
Linda DeIvernois at
deivelin@eastpennsd.org**

Making Time to Learn

Kathy Schmied

Visit www.edweek.org for an article entitled *N.Y.C. School Built Around Unorthodox Use of Time*. The Brooklyn Generation School has created a schedule which has allows for smaller class sizes (14 students per class), fewer classes (teachers instruct three classes per day), and more time for teacher collaboration (two hours each afternoon). Yet, this innovative way of structuring the school day costs no more than running a customary schedule.

How is this accomplished? Teachers' roles are differentiated in order to enable instructional teams to have a common planning time while colleagues teach other courses. Teachers even get a month twice a year to vacation for three weeks and have a full week of professional development. They do not exceed the 180 days set by their contract – and students go to school for an additional 20 days.

This schedule has been over 10 years in the making and has the support of the United Federation of Teachers. Some of the advantages include:

- Ability to regroup students as needed due to the model's flexibility
- Faculty members' shared planning time which allows for exchange of instructional practices, data review, collaborative planning, and common goals
- "A greater feeling of peer-driven accountability"

For newcomers to the school, one of the biggest hurdles is overcoming the cultural norms teachers bring with them from other schools. Applicants are apprised of the elements of the school's model so the expectations are clear and all parties can make an informed decision.

There are plans to expand the number of Generation Schools. Check them out at www.generationschools.org where you can also find out more about the Brooklyn Generation School.

Is your school creating opportunities for job-embedded, sustained, and collaborative professional learning?

Let us know what works for your staff. PSDC recognizes districts and schools that successfully implement NSDC standards to enhance professional learning. Send a description with contact information to:

Dr. Fran Miller,
principalof2@gmail.com

SAVE THE DATE!

PA Staff Development Council Institute
October 21, 2010

Leadership for "Reculturing" Schools
Featuring
Dennis Sparks

Culture trumps innovation, and it is the responsibility of leaders to co-create with school communities cultures of continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

Please join us for another exciting and rewarding experience.