



## Next Steps

**W**hat Works in the Middle: Results-Based Staff Development is another step in the journey of demonstrating the link between staff development and student achievement and ensuring teachers have access to quality staff development that advances their content knowledge and content-specific pedagogical processes. To take this work to the next stage requires the support of staff development leaders, both at the school- and district-level, and staff development providers, evaluators, and researchers. This last chapter outlines some of the next steps needed to move forward.

### **1. Provide content-rich, intellectually challenging staff development.**


Teachers deserve quality staff development that relates to their subject area content and content-specific pedagogical processes. They are eager to delve deeply into content, understand it, and use that understanding to make decisions about how to teach local, state, and national standards. In selecting, designing, and delivering staff development, content must be given more prominence.

### **2. Create powerful learning experiences.**

The learning processes used in staff development must challenge teachers' belief systems and knowledge constructs. Staff development must be structured to create cognitive dissonance in the learners, strengthen their efficacy and will to succeed, to challenge their understanding of the content area. It should help teachers understand how the content is best taught and how students learn in the discipline. Teachers have the right to expect for themselves what they provide their students: intellectually rigorous learning experiences.

### **3. Use appropriate models of staff development.**

Many of the programs highlighted in *What Works in the Middle: Results-Based Staff Development* use training as the core model of professional development. In developing staff development plans, school and district planners should incorporate other models of job-embedded staff development. Too often, training is equated with staff development. In reality, other models of staff development that are more closely related to the real work of teachers may promote higher levels of learning for both teachers and students. These models include coaching, action research, examining student work, collaborative planning and development, study groups, and others.



#### **4. Provide long-term follow-up support.**

Changes in teachers' understanding of their subject area and in their instructional practices require ongoing, long-term classroom-based support. Frequently, staff development is followed by inadequate support. Classroom-based support systems that include coaching, collaborative planning, examining student work, co-teaching, and other forms of personalized follow-up need to focus equally on teacher knowledge, practice, and student work.

#### **5. Gather evidence to demonstrate the impact of staff development on student achievement.**

Both providers and coordinators of staff development must clearly state their expectations and hold themselves accountable for achieving the intended results. They must gather and share evidence of the impact that staff development has on student achievement. Past evaluations of staff development have too often focused on qualities of the design of the staff development experience and what participants have learned, rather than the ultimate result: how well *student* learning improves. Measuring student achievement results is complex; yet, despite these challenges, this type of evidence of the impact of staff development must be collected.

#### **6. Explore new evaluation methods to link staff development and student achievement.**

Researchers and school and district leaders need to collaborate to identify the best methods to link staff development and student achievement. Current evaluation methods require considerable time and cost and are impractical for most schools and districts to use. The combined efforts of researchers and practitioners should yield other, more practical, ways of demonstrating the link between staff development and student achievement.

#### **7. Become savvy consumers of staff development programs.**

Staff development leaders need to ask more questions and demand more information prior to selecting teacher enhancement programs. Rather than selecting staff development programs solely on the quality of their design, they should select programs based primarily on their alignment with local needs and on the quality of their results with students. *What Works in the Middle: Results-Based Staff Development* provides guidelines to help schools and districts select staff development programs that have evidence of their impact on student achievement.

## **8. Create organizational structures to support ongoing teacher learning.**

The link between teacher learning and student learning is clearer now as a result of *What Works in the Middle: Results-Based Staff Development* and the initiative from which it evolved. Staff development is necessary, but by itself cannot effectively increase student learning. Higher levels of teacher learning occur in collaborative, supportive school structures that value continuous improvement and that allocate time and resources to teacher learning.

## **9. Create systems and structures to sustain programs once they are in place.**


Schools and districts often expend a tremendous amount of energy designing and developing staff development initiatives. As a result, little effort remains to guarantee in-depth implementation. Staff development leaders need to balance effort, resources, and attention to both the initiation and implementation phases if the initiative is to be successfully integrated into the educational system. Particular attention must be given to sustaining the focus on the initiative by reducing competitive programs; continuing the training and development for newly hired teachers; providing tiered assistance; aligning other systems such as the compensation, supervisory, and recognition systems to support the initiative; providing frequent formative assessment; and using the assessment data to make adjustments.

## **10. Use *What Works in the Middle: Results-Based Staff Development* to advance the conversations.**

This resource guide is provided as a tool for a variety of purposes and must be used appropriately. It provides model staff development programs that have evidence of their impact on student learning. It offers models of how to evaluate the impact of staff development. It offers examples of current staff development programs. It will surely spark conversation about a number of issues related to linking staff development and student achievement. Staff development leaders should use this resource guide to stimulate more conversation and continue the search for answers to the critical questions posed in the guide.

### **Measure of Our Success**

Further study and analysis of the relationship between staff development and student achievement are necessary. If *What Works in the Middle: Results-Based Staff Development* generates more dialogue about the link between staff development and



student achievement, it is successful. If schools gain ideas about how to evaluate their staff development and student achievement efforts, it will have made a contribution. If experts in research, evaluation, and measurement join in the search to identify and design new evaluation tools and methods that schools and districts can use to demonstrate the link between staff development and student achievement, all schools will gain tools for continuous improvement. And, if the quality of staff development increases and students achieve at higher levels, the intended results will be realized.