

*Remarks of Hayes Mizell on July 18, 2004 at the National Staff Development Council's "Learn and Lead Week," the organization's annual mid-year meeting for representatives of NSDC state affiliates and trustees. The meeting used a baseball metaphor for its theme, "Going to Bat for the NSDC Goal," and for individual conference sessions. About 65 educators attended the meeting which was held at the Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel in Baltimore, Maryland. Mizell is NSDC's Distinguished Senior Fellow.*

### **Runners on Base: But Will They Score?**

Many people in this audience will remember an event that has long since receded into the mists of history. In October 1989, President George H.W. Bush and the National Governors Association (NGA) met at an education summit convened by the President, and at its conclusion they issued a joint statement making a commitment to "establish a process for setting national education goals." This was an historic event, prominently featured on nightly newscasts of major television networks and reported in weekly national news magazines.<sup>1</sup> During the next four months, there were intense negotiations between the staffs of the President and the NGA, and in February 1990 the National Governors Association adopted a statement committing itself to "a clear set of national education goals that are worthy of our people and our times and that provide a measure by which elected officials can be held accountable for results."

Originally, there were six goals. Congress added two more in 1994. The eight goals were ambitious, and it is useful to recall them, particularly when the national dialogue about the future of public education has descended to such a low level. Here are the goals:

- By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.
- By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
- By the year 2000, American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
- By the year 2000, the nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.
- By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
- By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
- By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

- By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequent to this declaration, the President and governors created the bi-partisan National Education Goals Panel to issue annual reports on the progress of the nation and states toward meeting the goals. In 1994, President Clinton signed national legislation, the “Goals 2000: Educate America Act,” and in the same year Congress reauthorized and strengthened Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

By 1999, it was clear to everyone that the nation and states were a long way from meeting the goals. Prominent education leaders put various spins on what had and had not been achieved during the decade since the President and governors committed themselves to the goals. One said, “You improve education by staying focused on the fundamentals, and these national goals help keep us focused.” Another said, “It’s a mistake to take the goals literally...Symbolically, they are part of other efforts to say American kids need a stronger preparation in academics.” A staff person deeply involved in the goals initiative since its inception said, “The discussion and debate of standards was the consequence of setting goals.”

You may well wonder what happened to the goals, because neither the nation, nor your own states and communities, succeeded in meeting them. But there was never a public accounting for not meeting the goals and there was no national wake. No one acknowledged that the nation’s most vulnerable children suffered yet another blow because so many state and school systems fell far short of meeting the goals. There was no interest in continuing to use or revise the goals. The nation’s leaders simply abandoned the goals, as well as their vigil to measure and learn from efforts to reach them. Attention to the national education goals simply faded away, eclipsed by the election of President George W. Bush and his own education reform agenda. By early 2002, the National Education Goals Panel was in the process of shutting down and its executive director lamented, ““The goals have slipped from people's consciousness.”<sup>3</sup>

The nation’s flirtation with education goals provides a useful object lesson as the National Staff Development Council pursues its goal: “All teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work by 2007.”<sup>4</sup> During the 1990s, we learned that the President, Congress, and governors could not achieve the national education goals by themselves. Likewise, we must keep in mind that NSDC’s small, full-time staff cannot achieve the organization’s goal by themselves. It is, after all, state education agencies, local school boards, superintendents, central office staff, principals, teachers and their unions who determine the type and quality of professional learning teachers experience. No matter how many presentations Dennis, Stephanie, Joellen,<sup>5</sup> and others make, or how many workshops they lead, no matter how many miles they travel, how many days they are in the field, or how many lonely nights they spend in hotels, they cannot reach the NSDC goal. Only active members of NSDC’s active affiliates, working in their respective states, school systems, and schools can make this goal a reality for the nation’s teachers. Of course, some NSDC members are more active than others, as are some affiliates (and in my view, if an affiliate is not represented at this meeting, it should not be an affiliate; but that is another issue). By your presence here today, you bear witness that you are among the *most* active, and therefore you bear the greatest responsibility for ensuring the NSDC family achieves its goal.

Before you begin, be sure you and your colleagues back home understand the goal: “All teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work by 2007.” Do you really *believe* it? Do you really *understand* its implications for your work and your affiliates? If so, you will have to face the fact that all teachers in all *your* schools—not the schools of someone else, but *your* schools—are probably *not currently* experiencing high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work.

Some people in your school systems and schools will not respond kindly to your advocacy on behalf of the goal because they believe teachers *are* experiencing high-quality professional learning, just not all the teachers, not in all the schools and not every day. They will say the NSDC goal is not possible because there is not enough time in the school day or it will cost too much. That is because they are locked in outdated, unproductive mental models of professional development that assume teachers are incapable of learning except when they leave their schools to become objects of direct instruction. In spite of scant evidence that this approach causes teachers to become more instructionally effective, you will have to deal with friends and colleagues who insist this is the only realistic approach to professional development.

You will also want to have a clear, operational definition for what constitutes “high-quality professional learning.” In other words, if you cannot explicitly describe it, you cannot expect your colleagues to engage teachers in it, and you will not be able to distinguish high-quality professional learning from any other kind. It should not be acceptable for educators to pass off any variety of staff development as “high-quality professional learning.” In this regard, it is important to be clear about the meaning of each word and phrase of the goal. I want to suggest that we do not use the phrases “high-quality professional *learning*” and “high-quality professional *development*” to mean the same thing. They are not synonymous. We should not use them as though they are.

High-quality professional development takes us where we want to go, but high-quality professional learning is the destination. High-quality professional development is an essential interim step towards achieving high-quality professional learning. High-quality professional development is the *process* of acquiring new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors. High-quality professional learning, on the other hand, so profoundly impacts the learner that he/she is driven to *incorporate* the new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors into daily classroom practice. People will be confused about this distinction, but your job is to seize upon that confusion as an opportunity to stimulate thinking and conversation about what each of these terms mean, and how each of them translate into practice in different ways.

Some people may also be confused about a related issue. The National Staff Development Council has standards for staff development and one might argue that activities that meet the standards should qualify as “high-quality professional learning.” However, I believe NSDC’s standards and high-quality professional learning are different things, related, but different.

The NSDC standards delineate the conditions or the inputs that must exist to ensure the quality of staff development experiences. High-quality professional learning refers to the *outcomes* of staff development. We all know what low- quality or mediocre-quality professional learning look like. Teachers participate in experiences that *do not* benefit them. The teachers are *not* substantially better off *after* the professional

development experience than *before* they participated in it. They came, they saw, they listened, and they spoke, but they learned little. They did not increase their commitment or ability to perform more effectively. The teachers can tell you about their professional development experiences in terms of what they discussed and what they ate, but then they return to their classrooms to interact with their students much as they always have.

High-quality professional learning, on the other hand, produces positive results manifest in teachers' classroom practice and the performance of their students. Staff development may, for example, increase teachers' knowledge of their subject content, but it is high-quality professional *learning* that causes them to use that knowledge to beef up their curricula and help students perform at standard. Staff development may increase teachers' knowledge of effective pedagogy, but it is high-quality professional *learning* that causes them to translate that knowledge into more focused and engaging classroom instruction. While professional learning communities and school-based coaches may represent notable advances over other types of staff development schools have used in the past, in and of themselves they are not necessarily "high-quality professional learning." The form cannot be divorced from the results. What really counts is whether the purpose and effect of these approaches is to spark learning that produces demonstrably more effective teacher practices.

The NSDC standards for staff development, then, provide the *means* to achieve the *end* of high-quality professional learning. Implicit in the NSDC goal is the intention that teachers will participate in staff development experiences their schools specifically organize to produce high-quality professional learning. The NSDC *standards* provide the guidance school systems and schools need to create those experiences, but the NSDC *goal* ups the ante to emphasize that the result must be high-quality learning that improves teachers' practice and student performance.

Understanding the NSDC goal is one thing; taking action to achieve it is another. What can NSDC's affiliates and members do to make sure schools in their states meet the goal? Remember that most people, even most educators, are not familiar with the term "high-quality professional learning," and almost certainly they have not thought about its practical implications for their schools. Therefore, the first task is to make sure the goal statement is visible and the subject of discussions, even controversy. Is the goal statement prominently featured in each issue of the affiliate's newsletter? Is there an article about some aspect of the goal in each newsletter? Is the goal statement on a large banner or screen above the podium at the affiliate's annual or semi-annual conferences? Is it *discussed* at the conferences? Has the affiliate prepared a cogent, readable op-ed column about high-quality professional learning and sought to place it in daily and weekly newspapers throughout the state? Has the affiliate produced buttons, perhaps reading "All Teachers, All Schools," to provoke questions from and discussions with people who see NSDC members wearing the buttons? Has the affiliate created a simple, one-page, three-column handout, with columns headed "Ineffective Staff Development," "High-Quality Professional Development," and "High-Quality Professional Learning" that helps people understand the distinctions implicit in the goal? Has the affiliate created alliances with other education organizations to create an event, such as a five kilometer race and walk, with an appropriate theme such as "Striding Towards High-Quality Professional Learning"? Anything you can do to give the goal visibility and to create interest in and discussion about the goal can be useful.

While it is challenging even to foster awareness and provoke discussion, the more difficult task is creating a mechanism for assessing individual schools' progress towards meeting the NSDC goal. In other words, how will your affiliate know the extent to which schools in your states are embracing the goal or progressing towards achieving it? One approach is to work with your respective state education agencies. You may find they already have systems in place to collect data about the nature and quality of staff development at each school. If a state education agency does collect this information, it may do so primarily for compliance purposes, rather than to leverage program improvement. The data may be so extensive that the agency staff does not have time to review and analyze it. If that is the case, and if your affiliate believes this data provides sufficient information to determine if a school is meeting the NSDC goal, you may want to negotiate with the state education agency to obtain this data and have a group of affiliate members analyze it. This could be a project that would be useful to both the affiliate and the state education agency.

Conversely, a state education agency may have *no* system for collecting data about the quality or effects of staff development at each school, and it almost certainly does not collect information that provides reliable, qualitative data about teachers' professional learning at individual schools. Where either is the case, there is a need and opportunity for NSDC affiliates to be aggressive in playing an advocacy role. Because of the growing recognition that high quality professional learning is essential to increase the impact of teachers' instruction, and also because of the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, every state education agency should at least be collecting, analyzing, and acting on information about the essential interim step of schools providing high-quality professional development. NSDC affiliates should be insisting they do so, not only because it is the right thing to do, but because if your affiliates do not do it, no other group will.

But that is not enough. States need to commit to moving increasingly larger numbers of teachers towards experiencing high-quality professional *learning* as part of their daily work. Towards that end, states need to expect and support schools to provide the high-quality staff development and time that makes this possible. When state education agencies develop systems to obtain data about schools' efforts to engage teachers in high-quality professional development, states must use the information those systems produce to increase the quality and results of teachers' learning. These things are necessary to realize the NSDC goal, but they will not happen unless your state affiliates act.

Your task will be difficult if your affiliates act alone. It will be somewhat easier if you persuade other education organizations to act with you. In states with Staff Development Leadership Councils (SDLCs), the alliances are already in place for this kind of collaborative action. However, your affiliates may not have sought to engage the SDLC specifically in activities that will bring the NSDC goal to fruition in your states' schools. It may take some effort to help education organizations understand that it is in their interests to get behind the goal. Other education groups may initially view the goal as a proprietary NSDC project that has little potential benefit for them and their constituencies. That will make it necessary to spend time discussing with them the vision of what high-quality professional learning as part of teachers' daily work could mean to public education in your states, and to the interests of the organizations' members.

In states without a SDLC, serious pursuit of the NSDC goal requires affiliates to reach out and create alliances with other education organizations, and even non-education organizations. Reach out to the education committee of the Chamber of Commerce, your state and local Parent-Teacher Associations, local education funds, and community-based activist organizations seeking to improve public schools. There is little to lose and much to gain by affiliates engaging these groups in dialogue about collaborating on behalf of more useful and effective professional development represented by the goal. Staff development has been abused and wasted for too long because educators and citizens have expected and demanded so little of it. The NSDC goal is an opportunity to engage diverse education organizations in forging a new vision, and generating new demands that, if realized, can produce powerful outcomes for teachers and students.

Affiliates must also take more fundamental action. Individual members of NSDC affiliates live in communities where they are citizens and taxpayers. Most of these members work in a school or school system. Do *their* schools understand and are they embracing the NSDC goal as their own? What are affiliate members doing to move their *own* schools toward the NSDC goal? What evidence can members of your affiliates provide that *all* teachers in *their* schools are experiencing high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work? Someone who is skeptical about the NSDC goal might well observe that unless the organization's affiliates and members take action to meet the goal in the communities and schools where they live and work, why should other educators do it? If NSDC affiliates and members cannot achieve the goal, who can?

Will a single affiliate be able to come to NSDC's 2004 annual conference in Vancouver, and subsequent conferences, prepared to stand on the stage before the 3,000 conference participants and declare:

“In our state, we know there are (number) schools actively seeking to have *all* their teachers' experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work. Our affiliate is committed to helping them reach this goal and to making sure they do. We also know there are (number) schools that are *not* progressing towards this goal. Our affiliate is committed to making sure that all schools in our state understand the goal, embrace it as their own, and use it to leverage improvements in teacher and student performance.”

It would be wonderful to have a parade of affiliates make such statements from the stage throughout out the conference, but how many will be able to do it?

Each affiliate will have to decide for itself whether achieving the NSDC goal is *the* program priority for the affiliate, or simply one of many items on the affiliate's program agenda. Some affiliates will take their extant program interests and twist them, bend them, and rationalize how they relate to the goal when, in fact, there is little or no connection, and pursuing those interests will not bring the affiliate any closer to achieving the NSDC goal. The ultimate test of your commitment to the goal is whether your affiliate is actively seeking to achieve it; perhaps alone, perhaps in collaboration with the state education agency and/or other organizations. If an affiliate can produce data that indicate the status of individual schools in relation to the goal, and if that data can be (not necessarily will be) verified by observations in the field, the affiliate will make an important contribution to its state and to NSDC. On the other hand, if an

affiliate can only point to a series of program activities but cannot demonstrate that those activities are having an impact on achieving the goal, the affiliate, its state, and NSDC will have gained little.

Actions NSDC and its affiliates take now will determine the result in 2007. If they do little more than state the goal, write about the goal, and talk about the goal, we can predict the outcome. If, like the National Education Goals Panel, you do not come to grips with the measurement issues inherent in the goal, the result will likely be the same as for the National Education Goals. Like the education leaders who rendered final judgments on the National Education Goals, you will only be able to say that the goal should not have been taken literally, or that it helped keep you focused, or that discussion and debate was the product of the goal. There may be many ancillary benefits to having the goal and paying attention to it, but keep in mind what this goal is really all about. Many, many teachers in your states' schools would like to experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work. They do not now have that opportunity and as a consequence they flounder or they become professionally stagnant. Teachers work harder, they work more inefficiently, and they are less productive because they do not experience high-quality professional *learning* on a daily basis. In the most extreme cases, they lose the vision and hope that brought them to teaching. Their teaching suffers and the public loses confidence in them. Many of them leave teaching, or, more tragically, they continue teaching. This is why the NSDC goal is more than just organizational window-dressing. If achieved, the goal can make a major difference in the lives of teachers and the quality of public education itself. Indeed, the goal can revolutionize NSDC. As a beginning, should the National Staff Development Council change its name, perhaps to the National Council for Professional Learning?

But the goal is not for teachers alone. While the goal statement does not mention students, they *must* be the beneficiaries of all teachers who experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work. Professional learning that does not lead to improved student performance is self-indulgent, misdirected learning. Schools exist for students, not for educators, and everything educators do, including professional learning, must be focused on supporting students and helping them achieve. Students and their families assume that schools have their best interests at heart, but unfortunately that is not always the case. The interests of students often get lost in the professionalized and bureaucratized educational process. You cannot, however, allow this to happen in your efforts to bring the NSDC goal to fruition in the daily operation of your schools. High-quality professional learning must *always* be shaped not by teacher's generic needs, but by teachers' specific needs to help students achieve more. Unless there is evidence, sooner or later, that *student's* benefit when all teachers in all schools experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work, the NSDC goal will mean very little.

The Scriptures tell us, "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few." Those of you here today are among the very few laborers. It would be nice if there were a mass movement to make high-quality professional learning a daily experience for all teachers in all schools, but that is not going to happen. Making the NSDC goal more than a nice statement depends on you and your colleagues back home. The work is hard, but how wonderful it is that there is great work to be done and that we have the commitment,

knowledge, and skills to do it. Labor on. Go, and reap the harvest of all teachers and all students engaged in high-quality learning, every day.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> “Text of Final Statement Issued by President, Governors,” Education Week 4 October 1989, 5 July 2004 < <http://tinyurl.com/ywvb4> >.

<sup>2</sup> “Text of Statement on Education Goals Adopted by Governors,” Education Week 7 March 1990, 5 July 2004 < <http://tinyurl.com/3gcr5> >. “Goals,” National Education Goals Panel, 6 July 2004 < <http://www.negp.gov/page3.htm> >.

<sup>3</sup> David J. Hoff, “With 2000 Looming, Chances of Meeting Education Goals Iffy,” Education Week 13 January 1999, 5 July 2004 < <http://tinyurl.com/2nf4j> >. Hoff, “Goals Push for 2000 Falls Short,” Education Week 8 December 1999, 5 July 2004 < <http://tinyurl.com/2lo6q> >. Hoff, “Mission Imponderable: Goals Panel to Disband,” Education Week, 9 January 2002, 5 July 2004 < <http://tinyurl.com/2m4c7> >.

<sup>4</sup> Home Page, National Staff Development Council 5 July 2004 < [www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org) >.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Sparks, NSDC Executive Director; Stephanie Hirsh, NSDC Deputy Executive Director; Joellen Killion, NSDC Director of Special Projects.