

NSDC POLICY POINTS

INFORMATION FOR POLICY MAKERS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT IMPROVES STUDENT RESULTS



Key Points in NSDC's Definition

Get a deeper understanding of NSDC's definition of professional development.

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NSDC's Definition in Action

New Jersey district creates a path to continuous teacher learning.

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Advocacy is central to the work of the College Board. We promote programs, policies and practices that increase college access and success for all students. In a world of growing complexity and competing demands, we advocate to ensure that education comes first.

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Ensure great teaching for every student

“I am concerned that too few teachers experience the high-quality professional development and teamwork that would enable them to be more effective each day,” states Stephanie Hirsh, executive director of NSDC. “We must find ways to ensure good teaching on the part of all teachers.”

Recognizing the need for high-quality professional learning for every educator, NSDC advocates for a powerful new definition of professional development. Based on a model of continuous improvement, the new definition engages educators in a cycle of analyzing data, determining student and adult learning goals, designing joint lessons that employ evidence-based strategies, providing coaching to support improvement of classroom instruction, and assessing the effectiveness of educator learning and teamwork on student learning.



“With this definition in place, we can ensure great teaching for every student every day.”

— Stephanie Hirsh,
NSDC executive director

As part of its efforts to advance this new definition of professional development, NSDC seeks legislative amendments

DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

to Section 9101, subsection 34 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. These amendments will clarify what practices qualify for federal, state, and district funding, while stating that professional development needs to directly impact a teacher's classroom practices and student achievement.

Effective professional development must be measured by its impact on classroom and student instruction as well as its impact on many teachers as opposed to some teachers and on many students as opposed to a few. This new definition calls for every educator to engage in professional learning that occurs at the school as part of the workday. This new definition taps the expertise of the educators in the school and at the district office. Universities and other external experts are called upon to assist local educators to address needs specific to their students and school improvement goals.

“This definition of professional development offers a moral imperative,” Hirsh says. “With this definition in place, we can ensure great teaching for every student every day.”

NSDC is a nonprofit membership association representing more than 12,000 educators committed to effective professional development for every educator every day. NSDC recognizes the singular purpose of effective professional learning as ensuring great teaching for every student so that all students achieve at high levels. NSDC believes that one way nations ensure high-quality teaching every day for every student is by creating policies that support school systems in delivering on this promise.

NSDC'S PURPOSE: Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.

ABOUT NSDC

With more than 12,000 members, NSDC is the only education association working solely to increase student achievement through more effective professional development.

NSDC views high-quality professional development as essential to creating schools in which all students and staff members are learners who continually improve their performance.

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Key points in NSDC's definition of professional development

1. FOSTERS COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Because teachers have traditionally worked and sought professional development on their own, their learning opportunities have benefited only them and the students assigned to their classes. To achieve ambitious school performance and student learning goals, schools must strive to provide effective teaching schoolwide. Effective professional development fosters collective responsibility for all students rather than individual responsibility for some students. Professional development conducted in teams creates an environment of shared responsibility.

In the corporate world, team-based organizations are largely successful in having all of the people in the firm feel accountable and responsible for the operation and success of the entire enterprise, not just a few people in senior management positions. (Farren, 1999; Gregory, 1999).

2. PRIMARILY OCCURS SEVERAL TIMES PER WEEK

It is the responsibility of professionals to continuously improve their knowledge and practice every day. High-performing businesses understand this notion. Randy Nelson, dean of Pixar University, the professional development arm at one of the most successful movie production companies, explains that learning is the secret to the company's success: "We're trying to create a culture of learning, filled with lifelong learners. ... Every employee is encouraged to devote up to four hours a week, every week, to his or her education." This is part of everyone's work (Taylor & LaBarre, 2006).

In education, we need this type of workday learning, learning that takes place when teachers are at school and requires that districts make time for learning and improving practice. Many schools have schedules to ensure this. Before- and after-school meetings work for some, early-release days work for others, and fine-tuned schedules work for others. When teacher learning is a priority, schools can find strategies to put it in place.

3. CONTINUOUS CYCLE OF IMPROVEMENT

American business knows the importance of continuous improvement. Businesses compete

NSDC Proposed Amendments to Section 9101 (34) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

(34) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT— The term "professional development" means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement —

1 (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 educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders;

2 (3) **primarily occurs several times per week** among established teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff members where the teams of educators engage in a **continuous cycle of improvement** that —

(i) evaluates 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)(3)(ii) by

implementing coherent, sustained, and evidenced-based learning strategies, such as



lesson study and the development of formative assessments, that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement;

(iv) **provides job-embedded 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) that **may be supported by external assistance**.

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(B) The process outlined in (A) may be supported 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 nonprofit entities outside the school such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations.

for the recognition associated with the Baldrige Award and the company results associated with it. While most schools believe they are in the business of continuous improvement, the steps outlined in the definition describe a process that leads to results for students.

4. PROVIDES JOB-EMBEDDED COACHING

A preponderance of research in education as well as business shows that while adults are exposed to new ideas and practices in workshop settings and team meetings, they need on-the-job support to make the new ideas part of their daily routines (Joyce & Calhoun, 1996; Joyce & Showers, 2002). In evaluating this evidence, Odden et al. (2007) conclude that states reap greater benefits in terms of student achievement when they invest in classroom-based coaches as opposed to more costly and less effective innovations, including smaller class size or full-day kindergarten.

Similarly, businesses have found success in building employee knowledge by having experienced employees who demonstrate “deep smarts” — that is, those with a corporate understanding at a systemic level — methodically and individually share their insights about the company’s processes and problems (Leonard & Swap, 2004).

5. MAY BE SUPPORTED BY EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

Educators guided by data on their students and school are in the best position to identify the help they need to address their most important challenges. On occasion, answers are not available inside the school and must be sought from experts outside. King and Newmann (2000) found that “ensuring the constant interaction of great ideas inside and outside an organization promotes improvement for all.” Any organization enlisting external assistance must ensure that the help they seek aligns with the internal goals of the school or company.

When GE was looking to boost its leadership practices, CEO Jack Welch sought help from an outside expert, Noel Tichy. The result: the development of an organization-wide culture that embraced teaching and learning, an emphasis on results, and the ability to adapt and change (Rothenberg, 2003). The company achieved its goals under the skillful guidance of an outside expert.

To learn more about professional development, see the list of references for this article on p. 4.

ABOUT THE COLLEGE BOARD

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity.

Founded in 1900, the association is composed of more than 5,400 schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations.

Each year, the College Board serves 7 million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,500 colleges.

Among its best-known programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, and the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®).

The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities, and concerns.

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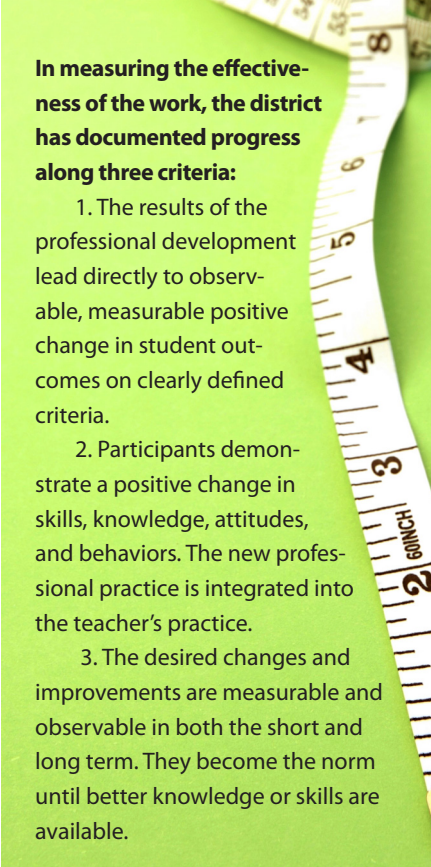
NSDC'S DEFINITION IN ACTION: Monroe Township's path to continuous teacher learning

In the Monroe Township (N.J.) Public Schools, teachers' learning occurs daily. Central office and school-level administrators support job-embedded teacher growth. Teachers have time to coach peers and observe in each other's classrooms. They meet during preparation time, stay after school to review, revise, and improve lessons, and implement lesson study groups. With structural changes that increase the number of professional development days and a cultural shift that fosters teamwork and collaboration, every day is a professional development day in the district.

But that hasn't always been so. How did the district become a system that typifies NSDC's new definition of effective professional development?

The district's path to continuous teacher learning started with extensive data analysis, including surveys of the staff about their learning needs. A professional development committee also studied research on what constitutes effective learning for adults and determined that one-shot workshops should be limited and that they should instead foster opportunities for ongoing learning for collaborative work teams connected to the work students do in classrooms.

The district began a shift to a new



In measuring the effectiveness of the work, the district has documented progress along three criteria:

1. The results of the professional development lead directly to observable, measurable positive change in student outcomes on clearly defined criteria.
2. Participants demonstrate a positive change in skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. The new professional practice is integrated into the teacher's practice.
3. The desired changes and improvements are measurable and observable in both the short and long term. They become the norm until better knowledge or skills are available.

type of learning with changes in the structure of learning days. In addition to a higher number of days allocated to professional development, the schools also use early-release days to give teachers more time for collaborative learning.

The transformation of the content of the learning was also critical. The district designed a differentiated structure of professional learning based on stages of teacher development, teacher interest, organizational goals, and research-based instructional strategies. Teachers in their

first three years have more structured learning options, while experienced faculty have more control over their learning based on their needs and the district's strategic plan.

The accountability and expectations for learning are much higher than before, and the results of the professional development have been impressive. Administrators have monitored standardized test scores, student grade point averages, numbers of students taking Advanced Placement courses, SAT scores, and college acceptance rates, and all indicators showed improvement since 2004-05.

Christopher Tienken, former assistant superintendent in Monroe Township, said, "We saw an increase in the percentage of teachers who used differentiated instruction strategies such as tiered lessons and a large increase in the amount of student-centered teaching that took place in the district. Based on formal classroom observations and walk-throughs, we saw approximately 86% of the teachers using strategies they learned during professional development sessions and professional learning community time. That represents an almost 30% difference since the program started four years ago."

For more information about Monroe Township's transformation, including extensive survey data from teachers who participated, see "When every day is professional development day" in the Spring 2007 issue of *JSD*, available at www.nsd.org/news/articleDetails.cfm?articleID=1443.

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