



professional LEARNING

March 2009

Investing in professional learning

By Dr. Dan Jonker

In this time of a depressed economy and budget crises, one of the first things for administrators to look to cut is professional learning for staff. Often the assumptions are (1) that such a cut will have little impact on the classroom and (2) the adult learning can always be made up in another year when funding improves. The fallacy of both assumptions is that reductions or elimination of professional learning result in greater isolationism for staff, maintenance of the status quo, and a lost opportunity to improve student achievement. In their recent report, Wie, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) found that “across the nine studies, the levels of professional development offered—an average of 49 hours in a year—boosted student achievement by approximately 21 percentile points” (p. 9).

What must be factored into the costs of professional learning? When administrators look at the professional learning investment, they should include the following components:

- The portion of a teacher’s salary paid for required professional development days at the beginning of the school year or during the school year when students are not in session
- Substitute teacher’s pay for professional development sessions during school days
- Teacher per diem pay for summer or school year non-contract days when professional learning occurs
- Supplies and materials for learning
- Presenter or consultant fees when necessary
- Staff to coordinate and provide professional learning to district staff

Miles and Hornbeck (2000) conducted a study of four districts and found that funding for professional learning varied from \$1,500 to \$5,000 per teacher per year. Current Title I requirements under NCLB stipulate that at least 10 percent of Title I funds must go to professional learning. While current

law in Michigan requires that school districts provide specific amounts of professional learning for staff, no commensurate stipulations are made on how much funding to allocate to that staff development.

Sparks (2002) stated that “school systems must clearly articulate standards for student learning, teaching, leadership, and staff development and then establish accountability and incentive systems related to those standards” (p. 5-2). If we follow the new NSDC purpose that “every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves,” what impact does that have on budgeting priorities? As we move through the budgeting process for the next school year, share the importance of professional learning with your administrative team. Show them the research on value of professional learning for student achievement. Lead the dialogue to rethink investment in quality professional learning.

High school redesigns with smaller learning communities

By Shug Brandell

In October 2007 the U. S. Department of Education awarded the Michigan Smaller Learning Communities Consortium over \$6 million for a Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) implementation grant. The Michigan Smaller Learning Communities Consortium includes Grand Rapids Creston High School, Grand Rapids Union High School, Marquette High School, Muskegon High School, Traverse City Central High School and Traverse West High School. Each school received approximately \$1 million for the five years of the grant.

The grant provides the resources to create school environments that support student growth and achievement by creating small learning communities and a more personalized environment within the six participating high schools.

The Michigan SLC Consortium was formed by The Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools (MCES) in an effort to bring significant financial resources to these large Michigan high schools to create school environments that are conducive to student growth and achievement; increase the achievement of all students; and sustain smaller learning communities through ongoing professional development and full stakeholder participation.

The first of its kind in Michigan, the Consortium represents a collective commitment by these high schools to create successful, personalized learning environments for each and every student, resulting in increased achievement and success following graduation for all.



The Consortium schools, representing four diverse geographic areas within Michigan, unanimously agree that a collective and collaborative effort dramatically enhances the likelihood of success as opposed to individual efforts to improve and reform. These schools share a commitment to improve student achievement for all students by personalizing the learning environment through creating smaller learning communities. According to national research, smaller learning communities within large high schools will result in improved academic performance, fewer discipline problems and reduced dropout rates.

Educators from each Consortium school come together with a shared vision of all students being engaged in relevant, intellectually vibrant pursuits of learning that will positively impact their communities as well as their futures. They have designed smaller learning communities that personalize the high school experience and create an environment in which teachers and other adults within the school know the needs, interests, and aspirations

of each student well, monitor each student's progress, and provide the academic and other support each student needs to succeed. Each school receives extensive support from the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools, which provides project management, technical assistance, and professional development.

Michigan State University's Department of K-12 Outreach and Educational Administration in the College of Education is extensively involved in the project by evaluating the implementation of the Michigan Smaller Learning Communities Consortium program. They collect, analyze, and report data related to the implementation of the Michigan SLC Consortium program and the impact of this program on student achievement.

The Consortium schools, along with the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools and Michigan State University have made significant progress towards the goals of the grant, and will be presenting updates on the project to the State Board of Education and at State and National conferences.

Thoughts on positive presuppositions

By Vicky Dearing, Coaching School Results

Effective school leaders demonstrate an “attitude of intention” in their thinking and actions as they interact with others. They:

- Listen by setting aside unproductive listening behaviors, such as judgment, criticism, etc.
- Use paraphrasing to convey three messages: I’m listening, I’m interested and I understand what you are saying or trying to say.
- Frame their thinking using positive presuppositions as they structure comments and questions so that their words have a positive influence on the thinking and feelings of others.

A presupposition is anything we assume in advance before specific proof has been provided or made known. Our language is full of embedded presuppositions through both the intentional and unintentional messages we

send to others. At times our presuppositions may be received by others as negative or demeaning, even when it is not our intent to speak from a negative perspective. Negative presuppositions, both the subtle and not so subtle ones, can be hurtful, can move people into a reactive or defensive mode, and can shut down a conversation.

Positive presuppositions send out a message that people are acting with positive intentions. Use of positive presuppositions helps create an environment of trust and respect where people feel safe to think out loud and interact in meaningful conversations. As leaders, we pay attention to our use of presuppositions and choose our words with care.

It is always our aim to impart messages that convey positive intent on the part of others. Effective school leaders hold numerous roles as they interact with staff. One of those key roles is that of a coach. They participate in conversations demonstrating an attitude of positive intent. They as-

sume: 1) prior planning, 2) thinking, 3) nobility of purpose 4) commitment to an expectation, and 5) positive intent on behalf of the staff.

Opening phrases used with positive presuppositions might include:

- As you ...
- When you ...
- While you ...

Consider the following positive presupposition. “What literacy strategy do you plan to use to make the greatest impact on student learning?” The standard for this presupposition is that the teacher knows literacy strategies, that she thinks and plans carefully for significant learning AND that she also knows which strategies have the greatest impact on her students.

Compare the following examples of negative and positive presupposition and consider how each might be received. Then, determine how you will best use the information presented in this article.

Negative Presupposition	Positive Presupposition
Why did you do that?	What were some of your reasons for making that choice or decision?
What percentage of time are you successful?	What are you seeing that indicates you are getting the results you expect on a consistent basis?
Do you have an objective for your lesson?	What objectives have you planned for your lesson?
Have you thought about doing...?	What options are you considering?
Don't you think you are wasting important instructional time by taking so long to get things done in your classroom?	Knowing that you're committed to finding ways to increase time for teaching and learning, how do you plan to reduce time spent on routine management issues?

Mission Statement:

"MSDC advocates for quality research-based professional development policies and practices to increase the capacity of those who work to improve student learning."

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Study compares PD in high-performing nations

The National Staff Development Council has released a new study on professional development (PD) that compares U.S. teachers' PD with that of other high-performing nations. "[Professional Learning in the Learning Professional: A Status Report on Teacher Professional Development in the U.S. and Abroad](#)" finds that while the United States is providing support and mentoring for new teachers and bolstering content knowledge, the type of support and on-the-job training most teachers receive is episodic, often fragmented, and disconnected from real problems of practice. The report also reviews promising strategies in high-performing nations and the United States.

"The research tells us that teachers

need to learn the way other professionals do – continually, collaboratively, and on the job," says Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford University and the School Redesign Network, and one of the report's authors. "The good news is that we can learn from what some states and most high-performing nations are doing." The study is the first of three that will examine professional development within the U.S.; following studies will measure the effectiveness of professional learning at the state level and investigate what it takes to enact and implement policies that result in improved systems for teachers' professional learning.

[Read more...>](#)

MSDC Board seeks candidates

The MSDC Board is looking for members of the Michigan Staff Development Council who would be willing to serve three-year terms on the MSDC Board of Directors as Members-at-Large. Each at-large board member is expected to be an NSDC member in good standing; attend and participate in four yearly board meetings and actively support NSDC's and [MSDC's mission statements](#) and activities.

In addition to contact information, all nominees are asked to list a minimum of three instances in which they

have worked to support professional learning within the last five years as well as a statement of an issue or direction they believe MSDC should address for Michigan educators. If you would be interested in nominating yourself or someone else, you can access the nomination materials at www.msdc.org. Completed nomination materials must be received by March 16, 2009. Questions about the board position or the nomination process can be addressed to Nominations Chairperson Sam LoPresto, lopresto@gomasa.org.