



# professional LEARNING

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## Are We There Yet?

By Dr. Judy Schaftenaar

Many of us have said or heard others voice this very thought. We want to “get there” and finally know how to support student achievement successfully and learn how to teach effectively and efficiently and do the job well. Administrators want to get the mess (distractions) out of the way of teachers and support their work with the appropriate resources.

MSDC does not claim to be the guru, to have the answers, or to dispense the word. We are a learning community in which we collaborate to make quality professional learning our goal in the service of student achievement. To that end we use the NSDC Standards for Staff Development and the Innovation Configurations as touch points for analyzing the work and learning sessions in which we engage and for furthering our understanding of quality.

Our website, [www.msdconline.org](http://www.msdconline.org), and online newsletter offer ideas for discussions that building and district teams can engage in for enriching the professional development within their context.

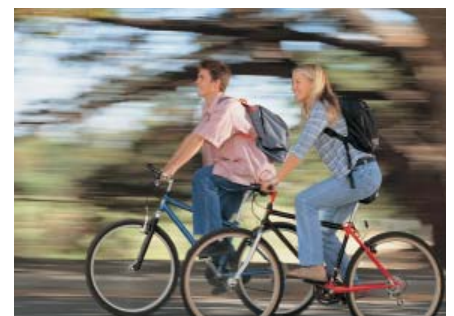
As an example, one of the NSDC Standards that needs more focus is DESIGN: Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal.

NSDC points out that teachers and administrators learning can occur through means as diverse as collaborative lesson design, the examination of student work, curriculum development, immersion in the work of mathematicians and scientists, case studies, action research, study groups, and professional networks. Each of the strategies needs to be matched with the goal of student learning chosen by the staff. Reviewing the work of Susan Loucks-Horsley and others could help inform design issues. Check out the NSDC website, [www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org), under the standards list – design and strategies – for more references.

An analysis of professional development experiences related to building goals for staff learning can prove invaluable. Choose a student learning goal, analyze it and then develop a profile for staff learning that matches past and future planned experiences in professional development. How many experiences were only informational, how many engaged staff in learning communities, and how many lead to transformational learning? What percent of staff are at the level of competency with methodologies and practices to which they aspire? What learning and experiences will fill the void? Which staff members need which learning experiences?

If this analysis is accomplished and these questions are discussed, we will perhaps be better able to answer the question of “Are we there yet?” Additionally, we can look to NSDC’s *Moving NSDC’s Staff Development Standards into Practice: Innovation Configurations*. This tool offers behaviors and practices for teachers, principals, central office staff, superintendents, and school boards that show progress towards achieving the standards. The continuum of practices and behaviors help practitioners move toward learning goals.

The ultimate answer to the question of “Are we there yet?” comes from analyzing students’ growth and learning in response to our teaching. In the continuous improvement sense we are always “getting there”. We will never “get there”.





# KEYS 2.0: A Foundation for School Improvement & Professional Learning

By Bob Harris

## 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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At the heart of school improvement is professional learning; at the heart of professional learning is school improvement. The circular nature of these processes reminds us that both are continuous and ongoing processes. But both require a foundation on which they are built; and the building is never completed. So how do we establish a foundation on which to build and make changes as needed to assure future success in meeting our needs and the needs of the students?

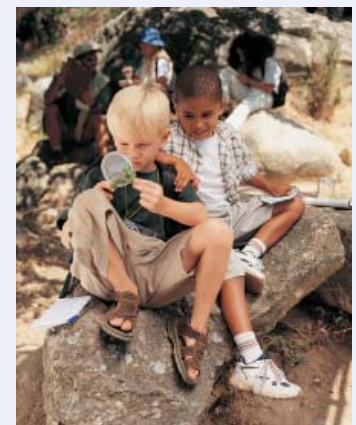
One answer is in the use of KEYS 2.0, “Keys to Excellence in Your Schools,” a customized, research-based approach to school improvement developed by the National Education Association (NEA). It is an excellent addition to a school improvement process. It helps check a school’s organizational profile and climate in areas such as staff interaction, decision making, parental involvement, professional learning, assessment, and curriculum. In fact it provides data on 42 indicators that make up a quality school. In effect it gives baseline data to help guide decision making. It doesn’t give answers; it doesn’t tell what is right or wrong. But it does provide a wealth of data, supported by lots of research and resource material to help make decisions.

KEYS 2.0 begins with an online survey taken by teachers, administrators, support staff, parents and community members. It was designed and written by national experts and has been used by thousands of schools across the country. The survey is completely anonymous so no one can trace responses to any individual or small group of individuals. And it is completely unbiased, not weighted in favor or against teachers, administrators or anyone else. It is a fairly lengthy survey and will take 30-45 minutes to complete. It is available in both English and Spanish, and the survey is generally open for about 21 days.

Following the close of the survey, results are generated for each school almost instantly. If the whole district takes the survey, results are generated for each school and for the whole district. That is when the real work begins, and where the value is realized. Schools then sit down with the results, examine and analyze them, compare them with other data, talk about areas of concern, look at research and what other schools may be doing to address similar concerns, and develop school improvement plans. Then two or three years later the school retakes the survey to see what progress they have made and where they might want to go next. The data and the process become an integral part of the learning community.

KEYS 2.0 is a great professional development tool that is built on all the principles of quality professional learning, and it comes with the right price tag. For all schools that are NEA affiliated (MEA members) there is no charge for KEYS 2.0. The only cost to the schools is the staff time it takes to take the survey and follow through on it. And we all know that this kind of time, though not free, is the basis of quality professional learning.

For more information on KEYS 2.0, contact MSDC Board member Bob Harris at [bharris@mea.org](mailto:bharris@mea.org) or 517 333-6219. Or go online and view a demonstration at [www.keysonline.org](http://www.keysonline.org).



# Resources for Title I Priority Schools

by Sam Lopresto

The Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators entered into a partnership three years ago to create and deliver a coherent and coordinated Statewide System of Improvement for Michigan's High Priority Schools.

An abundance of work has been done, and pieces of the system have been implemented in stages over the past 3 years. A new piece of the system that is being implemented for the first time during the 2007-08 school year will be free resources and professional development for Title I High Priority School principals and personnel. These resources are being provided with the goal of helping leaders in high priority schools proactively address the challenge of staying off the high priority school list in the future.

Title I High Priority School Principals recently received the following complimentary 1 year memberships:

- ASCD - Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Comprehensive Membership
- Michigan ASCD – Michigan Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- NSDC – National Staff Development

ment Council Principal Leader Membership

- MSDC - Michigan Staff Development Council
- Districts with Title I schools identified for improvement have been offered complimentary registration for two program staff to attend the Michigan Association of State and Federal Program Specialists (MASFPS) Fall Conference.
- Title I schools identified for improvement in 2006-07 that are no longer identified for improvement in 2007-08 will receive a \$1,500 gift certificate to ASCD to purchase professional development resources to help sustain their improvement.

We want to welcome principals of High Priority Schools to our organization. MSDC is an organization committed to supporting your efforts to make substantive change in your buildings. Please take advantage of the expertise of our Board of Directors and members to support your professional learning efforts.

Take the opportunity to check out [www.msdconline.org](http://www.msdconline.org) to learn more about this organization. Contact us for resources and support in planning, delivering, and applying learning to affect school-wide change.

## Sharing Best Practices

MSDC's Professional Learning e-newsletter is a monthly publication of the Michigan Staff Development Council. MSDC members are encouraged to contribute articles that showcase effective practices in staff development occurring around Michigan. If you have an article on an effective staff development practice you would like to share, please send it as an electronic file to Dr. Dan Jonker, MSDC e-newsletter editor, at [djonker@oaisd.org](mailto:djonker@oaisd.org). Articles should be between 150-300 words and digital photographs are welcome. The MSDC Communications Committee reserves the right to edit articles to meet publication standards and guidelines. Articles must be submitted five days prior to the first of each month during the school year (Sept-June).



## NSDC 39th Annual Conference

Join us December 1-5, 2007, at NSDC's 39th Annual Conference in Dallas, at the Hilton Anatole, and imagine the impact your professional learning will have not only on the dreams and the futures of our students but also on your legacy as an educator. Whether you are a first-time conference participant, a new staff developer, an expert who wants to deepen your understanding of a topic, or a return conference attendee who knows what NSDC learning communities have to offer, the 2007 annual conference is for you.

Some of the nation's most highly regarded speakers-Simon Bailey, Parker Palmer, Jennifer James, James Gilmore, and Sonia Nieto-will deliver provocative keynote messages. Our Texas scholars will challenge you to think and question your craft, and our in-depth, extended sessions are sure to expand your knowledge. The Dallas location promises a fun time for you and your colleagues. Get in touch with history: visit the Stockyards, tour the Sixth Floor JFK Museum, and see the Science Place. You may also celebrate the holidays and do your once-in-a-lifetime shopping. Whatever your interest, Dallas has it waiting for you.

# The Adaptive Schools Approach: A Toolbox for Effective Learning Communities

by Mark Ravlin, Via Mandala Educational Consulting and Training

For schools to provide quality learning for all students and respond to the press for accountability, they must simultaneously address two priorities. The first is sustained professional development of individual educators; the second is the development of the organization's potential to learn and be adaptive. Professional Learning Communities equipped with a toolbox of Adaptive Schools ideas, lenses, and methods can effectively address both, and raise the learning levels of all students.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been advocated as an approach to school improvement since the early 1990s (DuFour et al., 2005). As schools implemented versions of the PLC idea, it became clear that it would require more than advocacy and teacher meetings labeled "PLCs" to assure improvement in the learning of all students. Effective PLCs must focus on student learning and its relation to teachers' instructional practices. They must engage in sustained collaborative inquiry using methods designed to support such work, and they must be intentionally equipped. The Adaptive Schools approach provides PLCs with the tools they need to improve the learning of all students.

## **We Know What is Needed to Impact Student Learning**

Researchers and advocates for professional learning communities have identified five elements that are essential for generating measurable improvements in student learning: shared norms and values, focus on student learning, collaboration, public practice, and reflective dialogue (Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996). The research of these authors and others (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000; Lee & Smith, 1996) demonstrates that when teachers' professional communities exhibited these characteristics, measurable improvements in student learning result.

More recent work in Cincinnati and Philadelphia demonstrates that "structured, sustained, and supported instructional discussions that investigate the relationships between instructional practices and student work" are the hallmark of the learning communities that generate improvements in student learning. The essentials for such communities are "the tools and training to develop structured routines in which [teachers] systematically inquire into the relationships between their practices and the learning of their students" (Supovitz and Christman, 2003).

## **We Know How to Do What is Needed**

If professional learning communities constitute the "what" of school improvement that can positively impact the learning of all students, the ideas and practices of the Adaptive Schools approach serve as the "how." The organizing idea of adaptivity is borrowed from the

biological sciences. Adaptivity calls for clarifying identity while shifting form. NCLB brings statutory muscle to the expectations that schools must serve all students. This expectation defines an identity that differs from earlier times, when some students were served while others were not. Serving all students requires new ways of working: collaboration has become a must, in contrast to earlier times, when teachers worked in isolation.

## **An Adaptive Schools Toolbox**

The Adaptive Schools approach includes the tools, lenses, and organizing ideas that provide for the "structured, sustained, and supported instructional discussions" that generate improvement in student learning. Following is a sampling of items in an Adaptive Schools toolbox.

### **Adaptivity**

An organizing theme, the identity work of becoming adaptive is guided by a series of focusing questions.

- 1. Who are we?**
- 2. Whom do we aspire to become?**
- 3. Why are we doing this?**
- 4. Why are we doing this, this way?**

Community only develops through the discovery of shared interests; conversation in response to these questions is to develop the connections of individuals to their common work – a cultural phenomenon that diverges substantially from the history of rugged individualism dominant in many America's schools. An effective learning community is likely to focus on these repeatedly, deepening its understanding of the identity which defines its commitments.

### **Two Ways of Talking: Dialogue and Discussion**

Think of everyday talk as conversation: those engaged may be learning from one another or simply enjoying one another's company. For our purposes, this is the overarching term for talking together. When conversation begins to organize around a purpose, a choice is in order. The purpose of dialogue is understanding; of discussion, sound decisions that "stay made." Understanding is at the heart of the study of student learning and instructional practices. Effective learning communities seek multiple perspectives on student learning, and on the relationships of their methods to the outcomes they observe. Decisions affect the work of learning communities – from when to meet to instructional approaches to implement. The point of discussion is quality decision-making.

### **Norms of Collaboration**

Adaptive Schools develop the skills of dialogue and discussion through the use of a set of explicit norms that support these two ways of talking. Norms influence the ways that members of a group interact with one another, by defining expected behavior in the

group. Norms exist in all groups, whether a classroom of kindergartners or a state board of education. In most groups they remain tacit and unspoken. Defined and supported openly over time, seven particular norms combine to provide essential support to the development of collaborative cultures among communities of learners. The seven Norms of Collaboration of the Adaptive Schools approach draw extensively on decades of experience in Cognitive Coaching (Costa and Garmston, 2002). They are: (1) promoting a spirit of inquiry, (2) pausing, (3) paraphrasing, (4) probing, (5) putting ideas on the table, (6) paying attention to self and others, and (7) presuming positive intentions. A Supporting Toolkit for the Seven Norms of Collaboration may be found at [www.adaptiveschools.com](http://www.adaptiveschools.com).

### **Two Types of Conflict**

Conflict is often inherent in meaningful conversation about teaching and learning. The Adaptive Schools approach teaches about two types: cognitive and affective. In the first case, disagreement focuses on substantive, issue-related differences of opinion and perspective. Cognitive conflict can actually improve the performance of a PLC. Affective conflict focuses on personalized matters, often focused on one or more individuals. It tends to reduce a group's effectiveness.

### **Effective Meetings**

Successful meetings, those whose outcomes are accomplished and whose members experience satisfaction, do take place. Yet meeting memories are often of negative experiences. The Adaptive Schools approach equips PLCs with a number of tools for effective meetings. These include four Meeting Success Structures.

- 1. Decide who decides.**
- 2. Define the sandbox.**
- 3. Develop standards.**
- 4. Design the surround.**

A second essential set of tools for effective meetings are five Meeting Standards.

- Address only one topic at a time.**
- Use only one process at a time.**
- Balance participation.**
- Engage cognitive conflict.**
- Understand and agree on meeting roles.**

These and other tools of the Adaptive Schools approach (Garmston & Wellman, 1999) – such as Group Member Capabilities, Group Energy Sources, and Tools for Wicked Problems – provide the structures and processes which PLCs need to undertake the conversations that are essential to improving learning for all students. They constitute the "how" of effective professional learning communities. More can be learned at [www.adaptiveschools.com](http://www.adaptiveschools.com).