



professional LEARNING

Do you believe in me?

One of the most popular videos circulating in educational circles these days is from the August, 2008, opening convocation of the Dallas Independent School District. Dalton Sherman, a ten-year-old student, spoke to 20,000 educators and other employees from the greater Dallas area and challenged them with the question, "Do you believe in me?" "If you do," the young man states, "I



can do anything, be anything, create anything, dream anything, and become anything." He goes on to say, "We need you to believe that we can reach our highest potential."

In his book, *Making Equity Work*, educator Stacy Scott looks at the various issues and studies around the achievement gap in schools and speaks to the significance of high expectations to the success of students. He states, "Whether the message comes from a low-level text, unchallenging teaching, being on the slow track, being pulled out for remediation, or simply being called stupid by your peers, nothing could be worse than hearing a message every day in school that you are less capable than others." (16) "Low expectations can have a profound, insidious effect on performance." (10) In a further review of those schools that "beat the odds" and where variables such as ethnicity, economics, and race have been neutralized, he addresses the question, "What is it that sets these schools apart? They overcame many of the factors that obstruct

other schools by refusing to believe that they are less capable than any successful school. Success, I will suggest, is often a question of belief. I will argue that their success began with fundamental changes in what educators believed about and expected of their students." (8)

Dalton Shepherd further asks the Dallas ISD employees if they believe in themselves and in their colleagues. "Believe in your colleagues," he says, "and they'll believe in you." Do you believe in yourself and your colleagues? Do you believe that both individually and collectively you have the power to make a difference?

This question seems to be critical to the success of any organization, but especially to that of a school. In professional learning communities, one of the key building blocks is collaboration. Without collaboration, we will not agree on the common learning focus for all students. Without collaboration we will not build the common assessments that will allow us to focus on results nor will we have conversations

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."

Board of Directors:

President:

Dan Jonker,
Allendale Public Schools

President Elect:

Gloria Waters
Oakland Schools

Past President:

Sam LoPresto
MAISA

Treasurer:

Dr. Amy Colton
Colton, Langer & Assoc.

Secretary:

Shug Brandell
MI Coalition of Essential Schools

Members at Large:

Dr. Irma Hamilton
New Vision Consulting

Bob Harris
MEA

Dr. Steve Hecker
MDE

Cheryl Poole
Eaton ISD

Dr. Rod Rock
Saginaw ISD

Kathleen McBroom
Dearborn Public Schools

Ted Gardella
Lakeville Schools

Gary Appel
MI Great Lakes East Regional
Comprehensive Center

Nicole Huff
Detroit Community Schools

Dave Swierpel
Carman-Ainsworth

Leisa Gallagher
MDE

Ben Boerkoel
Kent ISD

about the meaning of the data from such assessments. Without collaboration we will not have an opportunity for collective inquiry into the best practices that will allow us to meet the needs of students who don't know as well as those who do. Whether that collaboration is between teachers, administrators, administrators and teachers, or other members of the school staff, it is an indispensable component of success.

And collaboration is built on a culture of trust; without trust, there will be no collaboration. The more one collaborates, the more trust is likely to be built. If I trust you, I believe that you are being honest with me and that you mean me no harm. If I trust you, I believe that you are safe and I can rely on you...to give me honest feedback. If I trust you, I am likely to share important information with you...information about myself, my teaching, and data from my classroom or my school. If I trust you, I will be willing to be vulnerable with you ...and allow you into my classroom or my office. If I trust you, I place my hope in you. I have confidence in your truth and reliability. I take you at your word. I can count on you. I believe that you believe in me and have my best interests at heart.

And if I trust you and believe that together we can make a difference, I will do whatever I can to increase my own learning so I will be the best colleague I can be.

The late writer and management consultant, Peter Drucker, wrote, "The leaders (read "educators") who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say "I." And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say "I." They don't think "I." They think "we"; they think "team." They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don't sidestep it, but "we" gets the credit. This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done."

It seems that the comments made by the young man in Dallas regarding his peers can similarly be made about educators. If we believe in each other, then together we can do anything, be anything, create anything, dream anything, and become anything. Only by believing in each other can we reach our highest potential.

Our students are believing in us; can we do any less?

(Video is available at www.dallasisd.org)



Check out MSDC's
new web site at
www.msdconline.org

NSDC definition of professional development

National Staff Development Council www.nsd.org

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: The term 'professional development' means a comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement –

- 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 learning teams of educators, including teachers, paraprofessionals, and other instructional staff at the school;
 3. Is facilitated by well-prepared, school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders;
 4. Occurs primarily several times per week or the equivalent of three hours per week; and
 5. Engages established learning teams of educators in a continuous cycle of improvement that –
 - a. Analyzes student, teacher, and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance;
 - b. Defines a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of the data;
 - c. Achieves the educator learning goals identified in subsection (A)(5)(b) by implementing coherent, sustained, and evidence-based learning strategies that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement, such as lesson study and the examining of student work;
 - d. Provides classroom-based coaching or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom;
 - e. 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;
 - f. Informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning; and
 - g. May be facilitated and strengthened by external assistance.
- B. The process outlined in subsection (A) may be supported and strengthened 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 non-profit entities outside the school such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations.

Professional Development in Non-Traditional Places

By Irma J. Hamilton, Ed.D.

As we plan professional development initiatives for staff in the future, let us take a look at some non-traditional venues that not only host but also provide professional development activities. The Detroit Zoological Society, which consists of the Detroit Zoo and the Belle Isle Nature Zoo, offers an array of educational programs and exciting opportunities for staff and students. The educational staff also provides professional development outreach workshops and seminars for schools. The staff has instructors who are certified facilitators for *Project WILD*, an interdisciplinary conservation and environmental education program that emphasizes wildlife. Activities are developed around Ecological Knowledge, Social and Political Knowledge and Sustaining Fish and Wildlife Resources. The program is designed for educators of kindergarten through 12th grade students.



On August 26, 2008, the Detroit Zoological Society's Education Department hosted its first "Open House". Supported by DTE Energy Foundation and the Madeleine Berman Academy for Humane Education, Zoolastic - Achievement Explosion 2008! was held at the Ford Education Center for area teachers and administrators.



Participants received information on dynamic programs for all grades that teach important concepts about animals, habitats and ecosystems. All school programs are aligned with the Michigan Curriculum Framework and Grade Level Content Expectations. The Ford Education Center's interpretive studios simulate natural habitats that engage students and make learning fun. Guests spoke to staff about how to plan and optimize their school group tour with learning activities, interactive education programs and backpack programs.

The Belle Isle Nature Zoo presented information on unique all-day cross-curricular learning experiences that encompass the Conservatory, Dossin Museum, Blue Heron Restoration Area and the lighthouse on Belle Isle.

Educators were treated to tasty refreshments, tram rides, walking tours and a ride on the Wild Adventure Ride. The interactive displays in the interpretive studios and DTE Humane Science Lab engaged visitors and were an indication of how exciting the experience would be for students and staff. David Gakure, Educational Specialist

from Kenya, entertained guests with enchanting tales of Africa around a simulated campfire in the Handleman Discovery Studio. He is also available to come out to schools to do presentations for staff and students.

Guests received an eco-friendly bag to commemorate the night full of tips and take-away materials on ecological conservation and humane education through "walking softly and treating the earth's creatures gently."

Positive responses from over 200 participants have encouraged the Zoo to make this an annual event. Watch for upcoming information regarding next year's "Open House". The Detroit Zoo and the Belle Isle Nature Zoo are open 362 days a year and are available to provide school programs and tailor professional development workshops, meetings and conferences. For more information about these or any other Education Programs, please call the Education Department at 248.541.5717 ext. 3800 or visit www.detroitzoo.org/education.