



professional LEARNING

December 2008

Building a climate for professional learning

by Dr. Dan Jonker, President, MSDC

Recently, I took the position of Superintendent at Allendale Public Schools. The district had been in the process of developing a 3-year Strategic Plan and I was coming in as the Strategic Plan goals were created. One of the key goals of this Strategic Plan was to “develop a systematic approach to professional development” that would “create a collaborative process to plan, implement, and evaluate professional development.”

To initiate this systematic approach, we asked for staff volunteers to join a Professional Learning Steering Committee. This committee was made up of 11 teachers and administrators which included representatives from each building. One of the first tasks for this committee was to establish parameters for professional learning. What follows are the nine parameters they felt were critical to success:

1. Agendas ahead of time
2. Need a focus
3. Need for reflection and practice
4. Need more follow-through
5. Teacher input on where they need support

6. Some choice—to insure that PD is applicable to the person
 - Tiered levels (differentiation)
7. Communication on the continuum of PD
8. Emphasis to show application to teaching, sharing of sample lessons, time to work and play with the strategies or equipment
9. PD divided by departments and grade levels

A second task they undertook was to survey the staff members to determine their professional learning needs based on a district focus on technology integration, school improvement goals, and grade level or department needs. The key findings of this survey were that staff members wanted “more chance to practice with targeted guidance” and opportunities “to see examples of what others are doing in their classrooms” for improving their technology integration skills. Staff members wanted training delivered “in small group sessions specific to needs” or “in department or grade level sessions.” Finally, staff members wanted training scheduled in “staff meeting times” or in “half-day sessions with subs provided.”

The Professional Learning Steering Committee has taken that survey information and asked for a “menu of opportunities” to be provided to staff. This menu would include one-to-one trainings, small group sessions, and grade level or department sessions on specific topics. In addition, they have asked for ongoing communication to be provided to staff members on what is available, when it is available, and suggested staff meeting “previews” (15 minute intro sessions) to give information about what software and hardware trainings they could attend.

The final element is evaluation. We are collecting data from participants on the process and content of the professional learning sessions. We are collecting data on how often staff members take advantage of the opportunities to learn together. We are also asking building principals to collect data in their regular walkthroughs regarding how often they see technology being used by staff and students. Over time, we hope to see improved student achievement. Stay tuned to see if this approach to systematic professional learning has a positive impact on teacher practice and student learning.

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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It's About The Quality Of Our Teachers, Not Quantity

Many governments have found that major increases in investment, reduced class sizes, increased teacher salaries and new facilities have not had any significant impact on student performance as measured again and again by the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The students from the same countries, Canada, Finland, Japan, Singapore and South Korea, continue to outperform the rest each time the tests are done. Some of the countries with the best performing school systems are not noted for expenditure on education.

Indeed Singapore spends less on primary education than do 27 of the 30 OECD countries and the student teacher ratio in South Korea, at 30:1, is higher than in Ireland. McKinsey and Co, perhaps the world's most reputable consultancy firm, was commissioned to examine the situation and identify what are the common characteristics of the best performing school systems. Their findings were published last year and identified the three factors that matter most:

- Getting the right people to become teachers.
- Developing them into effective instructors.
- Intervening early and often to help those students who are lagging behind.

In the best school systems teachers continue to undertake training in their schools and routinely remain on in school after the students have gone home.

- Singapore appoints a senior teacher in each school to oversee professional development and teachers do some 100 hours of training each year as part of their routine professional work.
- In Finland, groups of teachers visit each other's classrooms to do curriculum planning together for an afternoon each week. In the best school systems special attention is given to those students who may be falling behind. In Singapore, the bottom 20% of pupils remain behind after school to receive special additional attention from their teachers.

The McKinsey findings concur with those in South Korea, where the view dominates that the quality of an educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. This view is highlighted by studies that show if you take students of average ability and provide them with teachers who are from the top fifth of their profession, the students end up with the top 10% of performers. On the other hand, if you give average students the teachers from the bottom rankings, their performance sinks to the bottom. The McKinsey report concludes: "The countries with the top performing school systems demonstrate that the quality of an education system depends ultimately on the quality of the teachers."

<http://snipurl.com/4vpnc>

Source: NSDC's *PD in the News*,
November 2008

Have you tried podcasting to enhance your professional development efforts?

By Sam Lopresto, Past President, MSDC

With funds becoming scarcer and scarcer for Released Time professional development workshops and conferences, MSDC is interested in learning how many of our members are using technology to bridge the gap. This month's question on the MSDC website,

www.msdconline.org, is asking, To



what degree are you or your instructional staff using Podcasting to deliver or enhance professional development?

Choices include: a) Use Podcasting for internal communication; b) Use Podcasting for direct professional development delivery; c) Use Podcasting for direct professional development delivery and follow-up; d) Exploring Podcasting but haven't used it yet; e) Knowledge of Podcasting but no plans for district use; and f) No clue what Podcasting is.

Log on to www.msdconline.org and let us know if and how you and your district are using podcasting. This month's online survey results will be reported in the January 2009 MSDC Newsletter.

Michigan Merit Curriculum online courses now available

Do you have teachers that need to be brought up-to-speed on the requirements of the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC)? Do your teachers have a full understanding of the High School Content Expectations and their connection to the MMC? In an attempt to assist school districts and their teachers to gain a better understanding and grasp of these new requirements, Michigan LearnPort® has designed nine new online courses.

Each course provides an overview of the new High School Content Expectations (HSCEs), identifies "challenging concepts" in each of the core content areas (English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies) and includes significant elements for teachers to incorporate into their classrooms instruction.

Michigan LearnPort offers these MMC courses on a bi-monthly basis beginning next month. Courses that will begin new online sections on December 1, 2008 are:

- Algebra 1
- Algebra 2
- Geometry
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics
- U.S. History & Geography
- World History & Geography, and
- English Language Arts, 9-12

Each of the courses is content specific and is for all teachers, not just online teachers. In addition to emphasizing the relevant HSCEs, these courses reveal how technology enhances content and how teachers can engage students when technology is used to help deliver course content. These online professional development courses will help teachers gain a deeper understanding of the new High School Content Expectations so that they are better equipped to assist their students.

Another course starting on December 1, 2008 is Integrating Blended Instruction into Your Classroom. Blended instruction is an instructional strategy that combines the interactive learning environment of the face-to-face classroom with the content-rich resources of the online environment. Using Career-Forward® as an example course, teachers will learn what blended instruction is about and have the opportunity to create a lesson plan based on blended instruction strategies.

Since Michigan LearnPort® is supported by MDE Professional Development funds, there is no cost for these MMC online courses which are taught by experienced, Michigan certified teachers. Participants may earn from 2.5 to 3.5 SB-CEUs, depending on the specific course.

Are YOU Ready for *Extraordinary Results?*

MSDC in cooperation with
Coaching School Results
has what you need!

Join us for our upcoming
Professional Learning Seminar

Our staff of highly trained educators
and certified coaches can help you
develop stronger teams, reach
important goals, and enhance your
leadership skills.



Leadership Coaching for High Performance

Coaching has long been acknowledged as a potent intervention for improvement of teaching and learning. Now, coaching is recognized as the key leadership factor for leaders who wish to transform relationships, increase learning and dramatically change school cultures.

This seminar is designed specifically for district and school leaders who are committed to engaging in conversations that lead to transformational changes.

Essential components of this highly successful seminar include:

- Principles of effective leadership coaching
- Coaching language that produces reflective practice and increased performance
- Effective coaching behaviors of committed listening, paraphrasing and positive presuppositions
- Feedback that empowers, encourages and effectively communicates
- Coaching labs designed to accelerate knowledge and skill acquisition

Experience for yourself the power of this transformation learning experience. It is a must have for all leaders who are serious about providing a collaborative culture focused on high performance.

Lansing, MI 4 day training February 2 & 3, and March 2 & 3, 2009
MSDC Members \$350 Non-Members \$390

Location: MELG Building, 1001 Centennial Way, Lansing, MI 48917

www.msdconline.org for more information



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