



—Andrii Zastrozhnov/Stock/Getty

Professional Development

EDITOR'S NOTE

Professional development provides essential support for school districts to grow and succeed. This Spotlight will empower you with strategies for strengthening collaboration between district and school leaders; promising findings on coaching early-career principals; advice for turning challenges from a crisis into an opportunity for professional development; insights into how teaching as a principal can offer valuable leadership experience; research on effective professional development; and more.

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—Jaclyn Borowski

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Teaming Up School and District Leaders: A Win-Win Approach to PD

By Denisa R. Superville

In the professional development world, principals head off to sessions tailored to their on-campus needs, while superintendents and others in the central office often take a different track.

But what if those two paths aligned? What if school-level leaders and those who create the overarching vision for the school system and hold the purse strings were on the same page, getting steeped in the same leadership, management, and school improvement strategies, philosophies, and practices?

While that kind of coordination makes sense, it's not always the case, meaning that principals returning from professional development sessions can find their enthusiasm for new initiatives thwarted by the central office. The inverse can also be true: Central office plans can hit the skids in school buildings because principals weren't in on the planning.

But some programs aim to break down the silos between central office and schools, acknowledging that both school and district leaders must have a shared vocabulary and understanding of their district's plans to fully support principals and transform their school systems.

"When there's a gap or a disconnect be-

tween the PD and the district's strategic plan ... there's not a place to implement because there are other conflicting initiatives, or just the day-to-dayness of the work," said Mikel Royal, the former director of school leader preparation and development at Denver Public Schools. She now works as a district adviser for the George W. Bush Institute's School Leadership Initiative.

That initiative's Talent Management Framework, which was piloted in four districts in Texas, Utah and Virginia, recognizes that principals are important levers of change in school districts, but that equally important is the evolution of the central office into one that creates the conditions and supports for principals to succeed. That involves changing district policies, compensation, and professional development for school leaders and those who work closely with them.

The program, which is offered at no cost to the participating districts, takes a team approach, with key players such as the districts' chief academic officers, principal supervisors and—importantly—principals working on areas such as revamping evaluation systems and compensation structures for principals.

The districts trying out this method to support and strengthen school leadership are the Austin and Fort Worth school districts in Texas; Chesterfield County Public Schools in

Virginia; and Granite School District in South Salt Lake City, Utah.

This type of cross-functional approach to professional development does not happen often enough in education, Royal said. But it increases the chances that what principals and central office staffers are learning will be successful and gets baked into the system.

Karen Molinar, an assistant superintendent in Fort Worth, said a key goal was getting departments in the central office to put principals at the center of their work.

That has meant including principals' voices in the district's effort to strengthen supports for school leaders.

The district-and school-level partnership has resulted in subtle and not-so-subtle shifts, including restructuring district meetings to ensure that teaching and learning are at the forefront. The school system has also developed incentives and stipends to keep principals on the job by creating mentor and peer-leadership opportunities.

"Ultimately, we work for the principals," Molinar said. "That's the hardest part—getting everyone to have that kind of buy-in, that campus leaders are the most important employees in our district."

Increasing leadership capacity

The leadership development program for district and school leaders at the Austin-based Holdsworth Center also takes a systemwide approach to professional development. Its goal is to help leaders and central office staff alike grow their personal leadership, cultivate leadership in others, craft their own definition of leadership for their school systems, and develop pathways for employees to move up the ladder. Twenty school districts have signed up to participate since the program launched in 2017, with 43 districts applying for six spots to start this year's five-year partnership, said Lindsay Whorton, president of the Holdsworth Center.

Funded by the H-E-B grocery store magnate, Charles Butt, the Holdsworth program also is free to districts and aims to help them create a pool of trained leaders who are ready to step in when vacancies arise, and ultimately, improve outcomes for students.

To lay the groundwork, the program starts with a five-member team from the central office—the superintendent and key central office staffers—who spend two years on personal leadership, talent development, and strategic planning.

The first of two groups of principals join two years after the central office cohort, and

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they're also accompanied by a school-level team, which can include assistant principals, teacher-leaders, and instructional directors.

Over separate two-year periods, school-level and district-level participants visit schools and businesses to see management and talent-development practices and innovation inside and outside of K-12.

Both the superintendents and principals are assigned executive coaches to aid their leadership-development journey, and Holdsworth provides technical assistance to help districts along the way. The School Leaders Initiative also provides coaches to the district teams, who connect educators with resources and help troubleshoot challenges that pop up.

"We start with district leadership because we know how important it is that the superintendent and key members of his or her team are building an environment in which principals can thrive, and that there is alignment, there is coaching, and there's support for principals," Whorton said.

The program also seeks to equip principals with the skills to surmount the "big on-the-job challenges that principals face," she said, an especially critical task right now as school and district leaders address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 60,000-student Arlington Independent School District, located about 20 miles east of Fort Worth, Texas, was among the first to participate in the Holdsworth Center's program.

Marcelo Cavazos, Arlington's superintendent, was looking to shore up gaps in the district's leadership development and pipeline strategy. For one, the district didn't have clear leadership pathways—employees didn't know how to get from one level to the next—and when school leadership vacancies arose, the district often had to resort to using interim principals because it lacked a bench of ready leaders.

"Many times, leadership development is something that is kind of ... another task ... , and if it's not structured or well thought out, it doesn't yield the results," Cavazos said.

The central office team members went through a 360-degree leadership assessment to understand their own leadership styles and how those approaches affect others with whom they work. That process was significant for A. Tracie Brown, Arlington's chief schools officer, who oversees principal supervisors and school leaders.

A visit to General Electric Co.'s corporate offices in New York to learn about the company's talent development system was pivotal to the district's focus in that area and the pathways to leadership it created as a result.



—Allison V. Smith for Education Week

Arlington's central office staff learned how GE spots, grooms, and retains talent, its culture that emphasizes developing talent, and the system it uses to evaluate employee performance and differentiate support, Brown said.

The visits to the business world helped district leaders gain insights into how the corporate world leverages its systems to bring out the best in employees, said Brown, who also traveled to Singapore to learn about that country's world-famous school system.

Arlington has since created a talent-management system and descriptions of the attributes it would like the person in the job to have.

It's started leadership pathways, which include teacher-leadership positions at the building level and a path to get from the school into the central office, Brown said.

As a result, the district now has three internal principal-candidates for every vacancy that pops up, she said.

"We are finding that we are able to fill positions because we have a bench, and we've poured into that bench," she said.

The staff, Brown said, now feels more engaged and involved. "They feel like they have a seat at the table," she said.

Brown has also seen an evolution in the way principals approach their jobs. School leaders are more aware of how they communicate and work with staff. And there's a common language around leadership between the central office and school sites.

"They see themselves as CEOs of their buildings," Brown said of principals. "They carry the weight of that. They are also developing talent in a way they were not doing before."

Even a longtime educator like Cavazos ap-

Natasha Harris, principal of Lynn Hale Elementary School in Arlington, Tex., is an alum of the Holdsworth program for school leaders.

“

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MARCELO CAVAZOS

Superintendent Arlington Independent School District, Arlington, Texas

preciated the assistance of a leadership coach, who helped him address his blind spots, one of which was improving how he gave feedback.

“If you are not providing effective feedback, you are not growing others as effectively as you could,” he said.

Looking for signs of progress

While all professional development is geared toward improving student outcomes, it’s been difficult to measure the impact of Arlington’s district and school-level changes on students because of the disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

But Natasha Harris, the principal of Lynn Hale Elementary School in Arlington, points to progress before the pandemic as evidence that this approach to professional development is yielding results.

Harris had expected to work as an assistant principal for four to five years before becoming a principal. But that timeline accelerated when Harris’s boss got a middle school job; Harris got the job after serving as an AP for two years.

Harris and a school team of three teachers—she added the dean of instruction in the second year of the program—formed the school-level team from Hale Elementary that participated in the Holdsworth program.

She admits to being initially skeptical of how applicable some of the lessons were to education, especially those delivered by some experts whose forte was not K-12.

“OK, I love it, I love what I’m hearing,” she recalled thinking. “However, you are not in education. How do you know what we go through?”

But she soon saw the value in a perspective from outside of K-12.

“Yes, we have to be strong instructional leaders,” she said. “But we also have to know how to navigate teams and understand who they are. That goes across all contexts—whether it’s in education, whether it’s in business, whether it’s in other industries.”

Over a two-year period, Harris and her team attended 12 in-person sessions throughout the state and also visited high-performing schools, including the High Tech High system in San Diego, to learn firsthand the ingredients that propelled those schools.

An important part of having the central office and principals participating in the program was that Harris could count on the district to ensure that her campus was staffed when the team was out of town.

That’s often a roadblock for principals, especially those leading elementary schools, who

sometimes pass up professional development opportunities because of inadequate staffing.

Forty-three percent of elementary school principals listed “insufficient coverage” of their buildings as one of the hurdles to accessing professional development, according to a 2020 survey of school leaders by the California-based Learning Policy Institute and the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

A central part of the Holdsworth program is helping principals work on a problem of practice with which they’d been struggling.

Harris and her staff chose an area of deep concern: writing. Only 39 percent of students at Hale Elementary had passed the state’s writing exam in the 2017-18 school year.

Beginning in December of 2018, Harris and her team took some of the tools from Holdsworth and conducted a root cause analysis. They pored over data and shared, grade by grade, why students were not meeting state standards.

“By the time we got through 4th grade, the 4th grade teacher was in tears,” Harris said. “She said, ‘We’ve done this to ourselves. We have not made writing a priority for our students. We are not giving them opportunities to write in math, science, and other areas.’”

They then identified specific strategies and practices to boost the passing rate. They devoted an entire PD day to preparing a plan of action to address the problem of coming up with common writing strategies from pre-K through 6. Harris divided teachers into teams, with one team looking at writing prompts that could be tied into the holidays, another crafting a rubric that could be scaffolded, and still another analyzing data.

At the end, they ensured that every teacher had a rubric to assess student writing, showing what students had to do to demonstrate proficiency and what they needed to know if they were not proficient. They ensured that students had writing exercises in all content areas, including in math and science. Students’ writing samples were posted on bulletin boards throughout the school and sent home to parents.

By the end of the 2018-19 school year, after months of putting the plan into gear, the passing rate had increased to 61 percent, Harris said.

Harris said she had learned about the root cause analysis method at Holdsworth and in her current doctoral program, but not in her principal-preparation program. She thinks that approach has been key to getting students to improve their writing before the pandemic interrupted schooling.

And there are also other key takeaways from Holdsworth participation that she’s infused into the school, including improving school

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NATASHA HARRIS

Principal of Lynn Hale Elementary School, Arlington, Texas

climate, providing leadership opportunities for others, and coaching and mentoring staff.

Several teachers have since left the campus to take district leadership roles. Four teaching assistants are working on their bachelor's degrees to become teachers. "It's a ripple effect," she said.

Such intensive professional development can be expensive. Very few districts could afford such a long-term financial commitment if they had to foot the bill or spare several central office staff for four to five days every five weeks.

One challenge: keeping the momentum going forward

Cavazos thinks the district's robust response during the COVID-19 pandemic was an outgrowth of the teamwork and collaboration the central office and school-level teams built over the years.

"Our school district was really well-prepared, without realizing what we were preparing for," Cavazos said.

Now comes the tough part: keeping the

momentum going after the five-year commitment from Holdsworth ends.

Cavazos is confident that many of the leadership lessons district and school leaders learned over the years are now embedded in the system.

The district plans to use some of the federal relief dollars that school systems received to blunt the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to continue investing in the leadership systems it built over the last few years.

The Dallas school system is one of the six districts to join the Holdsworth program this year, and Michael Hinojosa, the superintendent, is hoping that the initiative will help the district develop a robust pipeline of leaders, especially for its secondary schools, where the district struggles to fill vacancies.

Hinojosa is taking the chief of staff, the deputy superintendent, chief academic officer, and chief of school leadership—all of whom are intimately involved in the district's long-term strategic vision—as part of the team.

"That's very important to me," Hinojosa

said. "Those are the people we need right now to get us ready."

Dallas already has initiatives to steer employees into leadership roles, including one that taps high-potential candidates, who spend half-days learning from a central office staffer. About 15 of the highest-performing principals also get additional support.

But those in the highest levels of district management also must also be open to the benefits of professional development and carve out the time to take advantage of it, Hinojosa said. He recalls once suggesting that a finance officer get additional training, and the response was that the individual was too busy.

"That's the mindset that a lot of people have," he said.

But those at the top should set a tone that they place a premium on continued professional growth and development, he said.

"You have to have someone who is committed as a leader to show the long-term benefit of this," he said. "The longer the superintendent can stay in the chair, the better chance [you have] to put together a program like this." ■

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Coaching for New Principals Can Provide a Critical Pillar of Support

By Denisa R. Superville

Michelle Provo was leading her first instructional team meeting at Bleyl Middle School in Houston when a loud noise echoed in the building.

Provo, the newly appointed principal, and the school's director of instruction rushed out of the room to find out what was happening.

Her coach, Robert Borneman, who was observing and taking notes, had a simple, but pointed, question for Provo when the meeting ended: Why did Provo feel that both she and the director of instruction—the two people leading the meeting—had to leave during the commotion?

Provo and the instructional director both had spent years as assistant principals, where putting out fires comprised a huge part of their jobs. But as principal, Provo no longer had to be the first one out the door.

"That was a time I had to reflect and think, 'I am not the AP anymore,'" she said.



—Jaclyn Borowski

As one of the 14 coaches in Texas' Cypress-Fairbanks district, a school system of some 116,000 students, Borneman's job is to help new and early-career principals like Provo keep their eyes on the big picture as they dive headfirst into the challenges and com-

plexities new school leaders face.

"When you step through that door of the principal's office, you really don't know what you don't know," Borneman said. "There's so much. This program allows the new principals an opportunity to have somebody walk alongside them—[someone] who's been there."

While coaches can smooth the entry into school leadership, only 23 percent of elementary school leaders report having a coach or mentor, according to a 2020 report on the state of professional development by the Learning Policy Institute and the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Several factors—including funding—have inhibited school systems' ability to provide this critical support for all school leaders.

More school districts have started relying on their principal supervisors to coach principals in recent years. Research shows that these coaches can play an integral role in supporting school leaders, regardless of where those principals are in their careers.

Districts such as Cypress-Fairbanks, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, in Charlotte, N.C., and

Columbus City Schools, in Columbus, Ohio, have built up a cadre of trained coaches dedicated to helping principals navigate the early years on the job.

Cypress-Fairbanks launched its coaching program in the 2010-11 school year, when it hired 17 new principals—a crop of new hires that was beyond the capacity of one associate superintendent and two assistant superintendents to support.

While the district had a bench to draw from to fill most of the elementary school leadership slots, officials worried how they'd respond if they had such a large exodus again, said Roy Garcia, the chief officer for school leadership and associate superintendent.

The district started exploring what it would take to not only develop principals but keep them. It also saw an opportunity to capitalize on the skill and expertise of the school leaders who were walking out the door.

“We strongly encourage them to have six months off, and if they think they'd like to coach, let us know,” Garcia said.

Building a three-year relationship

New principals in Cypress-Fairbanks are matched with coaches for the first three years. (They're also assigned a mentor, a current district principal, in their first year.) Principals meet with their coaches weekly in their first semester, with the frequency of those meetings reduced to every other week the second semester and once a month in the second and third years, depending on the principal's needs.

The two-hour meetings involve an hour-long session, where coaches and principals discuss the school leaders' priorities, challenges they're facing, and upcoming projects. They also review what's happened since the coach's last visit.

Coaches then spend another hour with the principal in the school, walking the hallways, observing the principal's interactions with students and staff, and attending leadership or instructional team meetings. They then debrief the principals about what they observed: what went well, what didn't, what they would do differently, and changes they'd make the next time around.

In meetings, for example, Donna Sheppard, a former Cypress-Fairbanks assistant superintendent who now works as a coach, pays attention to things like whether the principal is including everyone in discussions, how others perceive the principal, whether the principal is listening—are they cutting off people too quickly, for example?—and wheth-



Michelle Provo



Robert Borneman

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ROBERT BORNEMAN

Coach in the Cypress-Fairbanks
Independent School District

er they are lingering too long on a particular agenda item.

She also keeps an eye out for how the principal praises teachers.

“It's amazing what you can learn just watching a principal in the classroom,” Sheppard said. “How do [kids] approach her? Are they comfortable? Is she greeting people as we walk through the hallway? ... All of those things relate to your leadership skills as a principal.”

The coaches don't direct principals on what to do. Instead, they use their wealth of experience to lead principals through a series of questions that help principals arrive at an answer, consider a different perspective, or settle on a course of action.

“We're not here to judge their decisions,” Sheppard said. “We reflect a lot, and sometimes that works well.”

In 2019, for example, Cypress-Fairbanks asked teachers to attend two planning meetings a week, which led to resistance from

some of the teaching staff at Hamilton Elementary School, where Sage Papaioannou is the principal.

As Sheppard and Papaioannou sat down for their weekly meetings, Sheppard tried to get to the root of the teachers' objection. How could Papaioannou convince teachers that they would benefit from attending the meetings?

To answer the first question, Papaioannou fielded a survey to find out what teachers liked or didn't like about the planning sessions. Teachers felt they had no say, didn't get the opportunity to develop their own lesson plans, and that not everyone had the chance to participate.

More questions followed.

Papaioannou used the feedback to change how the meetings were structured, with teachers now in charge and writing their own lessons plans. Everyone is responsible for a portion of the meeting. Though Papaioannou attends some of the meetings—something she does not think she would have were it not for the feedback from the survey—the teachers hold the reins.

“They were able to buy into it because they were part of the process,” she said.

Without the weekly meetings, Papaioannou would not have taken the time to dig into the source of the teachers' discontent.

“Let's be honest, she would have been running around the building, running the school,” Sheppard said. “I think that's what this weekly meeting does: It helps train the principal to stop and realize that I can't let the pressure of the moment make me make fast decisions on things that need deep thinking.”

Coaches are different from mentors, who help principals with day-to-day challenges. Questions about paperwork and compliance are more appropriate for mentors than coaches, who focus on developing principals' leadership skills, said Gracie Branch, the associate executive director of professional learning of the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

Coaches tend to concentrate on the big picture and the school's continuous improvement.

The principal-coach relationship is also a judgment-free zone for principals, where school leaders know that they can vent freely, be vulnerable, and have no fear that that vulnerability would end up on an evaluation.

“When you are getting judged from the community, from the staff, from students—everybody is judging because you are the new person,” Papaioannou said. “Just to be so confident that you can go and talk to somebody without that ... it's nice to not have that judgment.”

Cypress-Fairbanks coaches are retired

principals, who've undergone an immersion training and certification offered by the NAESP. The organization has trained mentors and coaches in districts including Prince George's County in Maryland and in the Miami-Dade school system.

In selecting coaches, the district looks for principals who themselves have stellar records in school leadership, good communication skills, and a history of growing leaders from when they were leading schools, according to Carla Brosnahan, the assistant superintendent for school leadership.

"We are pretty specific about our expectations on how many times they meet," Brosnahan said. "It's a system as well—it's not going anytime you feel like it."

There's also twice-a-year professional development for coaches where they review blended coaching strategies and keep abreast of district initiatives, strategies, and priorities. They're also kept in the loop with weekly district communication. During the pandemic, for example, coaches have had to stay on top of district COVID-19 policies, so that they're not surprised during school visits, Brosnahan said. That also positions coaches to help principals with some of the biggest challenges they face this school year.

In matching principals and coaches, the district considers a coach's background, and the principal's strengths, weaknesses, and areas in which they need to grow—information the district has because principal-candidates are asked about strengths and weaknesses during job interviews.

A relationship rooted in trust

The coach-principal relationship needs to be cemented in trust to be successful. And to do so, districts must ensure that principals know that there will be no ramifications for what they discuss with their coaches because the coaches have no role in their evaluations. Regular meetings at the start of the program also help to forge trust, Sheppard said.

"It allows you that time to build that relationship," Sheppard said. "You ask about family; you ask about the balance in their lives; you help support them if they are dealing with struggles that no other position on the campus can relate to. You get to be that voice and that ear for them that says, 'This is normal. This is what all principals feel that first semester, that first year.'"

Borneman likes starting meetings with celebrations—what's going well—before moving to specific challenges and campus culture.



Sage Papaioannou Donna Sheppard

“
He is very good at making you think and process on what is going to be the best direction. He doesn't tell you what direction, though. He keeps asking the questions.”

MICHELLE PROVO

Principal of Bleyl Middle School in the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District in Houston, Texas

They also discuss instructional initiatives and programs the campus might be gearing up to launch. Then he accompanies the principal through the building and at meetings, as an "objective third eye."

Provo is a fixer by nature, and she and Borneman had to work on her becoming a more methodical problem-solver.

"I don't know that I can put into words [the] value he brings to me in this role," Provo said. "He is very good at making you think and process on what is going to be the best direction. He doesn't tell you what direction, though. He keeps asking the questions."

She's become a more discerning and effective communicator, thinking through what needs to be said during a conversation and what can, and should, be held back. She also takes a more active role in building the school's culture by leading schoolwide announcements in the mornings, and running more effective meetings by planning ahead.

Provo appreciates Borneman's persistent questioning that leads her to answers she may not have considered.

"Even if I didn't deal with something well, he would be like, 'Why do you think that didn't work?'" Provo said.

She can't imagine her first year as principal without Borneman at her side.

She arrived at Bleyl Middle School in January 2020. By March, the pandemic had shut down schools across the country, and Provo, still learning the ropes, had to shift to 15-hour workdays to set up virtual schooling. Months later, in July, her son died by suicide.

It helped knowing that Borneman, whom she calls a cheerleader, was a phone call or text message away.

"You've got this," Borneman would text on some of those rough days, Provo said. "It's going to be OK."

If something doesn't go as planned or she's having misgivings about how she handled a situation, "I can call or I can text, and he'll be like we'll process through it," Provo said.

At Hamilton Elementary School, Papaioannou and Sheppard, her coach, gamed out difficult conversations that Papaioannou had to have with staff and parents to ensure that she got her message across while still preserving those relationships.

One of the key and early pieces of advice Papaioannou received from Sheppard was to slow down. That meant stopping and greeting people in the hallways and allowing others more time to speak in meetings.

"Give people time to think," said Sheppard, who was an assistant superintendent in the district when the coaching program was developed. "You don't want them to think you're super-stressed because you're wound up. Slow down."

Those morsels of wisdom have stayed with Papaioannou, and she often repeats them when Sheppard isn't around.

"Everyday, I would think about what would Donna do?" Papaioannou said. "Donna would stop. ... It doesn't matter how busy you are, she would stop and take care of those things. That piece of advice, or feedback, was perfect."

And while the coach-principal relationship can develop into a lasting one with principals continuing to seek counsel from their coaches, the formal connection still ends after three years.

"After three years, they are ready to be set free," Brosnahan said of the principals. "We have not had anyone say, 'Please give her to me for another year'—unless they're just joking around." ■

K-12 Action Plan

Provide Flexibility with Job-Embedded Teacher PD

The concept of job-embedded professional development has been gaining traction in K-12 education for over a decade—and for good reason. Numerous studies have proven the efficacy of job-embedded PD, including its positive impact on [teacher practice](#) and [student achievement](#).

Through job-embedded PD, K-12 leaders can provide additional flexibility—and choice—to teachers. This guide outlines steps that can be taken throughout the school year to make the shift to a job-embedded PD model.

What is Job-Embedded PD?

Job-embedded PD refers to teacher learning that occurs either during day-to-day instruction or shortly before or after such instruction. In the book [Instructional Supervision: Applying Tools and Concepts](#), author Sally J. Zepeda emphasizes that job-embedded PD “is always relevant to the individual teacher, has feedback built into the process, and recognizes that the goal is to allow the teacher’s new skills to translate directly into their practice.”

Launching a Job-Embedded PD Initiative

Step 1: Earn Teachers’ Trust

Job-embedded PD can be implemented in a variety of ways. Regardless of your specific approach. Before deciding what your program should look like, there is one feature that is absolutely necessary: **your staff must buy into the method or methods you offer.**

In a [column for Education World](#), Zepeda says, “For learning to occur on the job, teachers must be able to trust the process (e.g., peer coaching, videotape analysis), their colleagues, and themselves. Teachers need to know that feedback will be constructive, not personal.”

For this to occur, it’s helpful to keep the PD separate from teachers’ evaluations. This will encourage instructors to admit mistakes and remain open to possible solutions without feeling like each misstep is being counted against them.

Jim Knight, a senior partner with the Instructional Coaching Group, goes further, saying, “Our research has found that the most important variable in coaching is trust.” When he conducted [The Great Coaching Study in Florida](#), Knight found several key factors in building trust between teachers and coaches:

- Teachers must feel a coach is safe to be with
- Teachers must think their coach is competent
- Coaches must be reliable

Step 2: Enhance PD with Video

Teachers can use video to review their techniques, as well as students' reactions to their methods.

Video also provides an accurate look at what is happening in a classroom. A teacher's perception of a lesson might not match the actual class but having video evidence makes it easy for a teacher to notice even the smallest actions—like giving too much direct instruction to a specific student, repeatedly calling on the same segment of students, or even standing in one spot for too long.

While video can point out flaws, it also can capture effective teaching practices and allow those segments to be shared throughout the district. Teachers can identify which instructional strategies, activities or lessons resonate with students—and then share those insights with colleagues to implement in their own classrooms.

Step 3: Give Teachers Choice

An effective job-embedded PD program allows for flexibility and personalization. With this in mind, administrators should avoid taking a “one-size-fits-most” approach, and instead, provide multiple options for teachers to choose from.

Here are four PD models to consider:

Teacher Self-Reflection Model

Having a teacher commit to recording their class can feel like a big step. To help them get comfortable with this format, administrators can simply track metrics—such as noting that videos are being recorded and watched—and invite teachers to watch the recordings alone while noting areas that call for improvement.

Self-reflection is one of the greatest forms of professional learning. While teachers remain in charge of the process, administrators can suggest they concentrate on these four areas:

1. Students' engagement with the content, peers, and the teacher
2. Students' level of understanding
3. Students' behavior with peers and adults
4. The classroom's quality of discussion

Collegial Partnership Model

Moving a step past self-reflection, teachers are paired with a peer that they choose. These teachers can now view each other's lessons, not only learning an alternate way to deliver instruction but also offering pointers to their colleagues about potential improvements. Limiting who can watch a teacher's video is an important way to maintain trust in the process.



Team Collaboration Model

In this model, teachers work in teams to share best practices and discuss trouble areas. Not only are they expanding their expertise, but they are also growing a valuable library of best practices that can be widely used.

Video Coaching Model

Teachers learn from a personal coach in this model. A teacher's video is reviewed and a coach can address individual questions and create plans for improvement. This long-term plan not only allows for feedback, but for a teacher to try new methods and learn how effective these changes are. This plan, which again is not part of the evaluation process, allows for rapid improvement as teachers can tweak or overhaul lessons depending on the feedback from their coach.

Coaching works best when it follows these tenets:

- There's a clear purpose for each teacher
- There's a clear plan for each teacher to reach her goal
- There's an agreed-upon process between the coach and the teacher as to how reviews, suggestions, and questions will be handled.

Offer Flexibility

While each of these methods has its own advantages, flexibility is more important than which plan your school chooses. It's not unusual for teachers to start with lots of restrictions on their video review. But as they get more comfortable with the process, and as they see peers taking more chances, teachers usually want to expand who can watch their classroom videos and who can offer them advice.

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—Ashlee Rezin Garcia/Chicago Sun-Times via AP

Chicago Teachers Union members and supporters march in June 2020, calling for the Chicago Board of Education to vote to end a \$33 million contract between Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Police Department.

Published November 2, 2021

5 Ways for Principals to Turn Crisis Into Professional Development

By Arianna Prothero

Crisis, turbulence, and uncertainty are the new normal for school leaders navigating a pandemic, racial justice protests, and the politicization of issues as disparate as critical race theory and school masking policies.

But if and when the dust settles, are there lessons for principals to learn to sharpen their leadership skills for the next unknown crisis? The short answer, according to principals interviewed by Education Week, is: of course. Crisis can serve as a form of real-world professional development. The tricky part is cultivating the habits and mindset to learn the lessons those experiences bring and apply them in the future.

EdWeek narrowed the advice of these principals—who come from across the country—down to five ways for school leaders to take advantage of the lessons left by challenges.

1. Get feedback

School leaders shouldn't rely solely on their own perspective when determining what worked and what didn't in response to a crisis or challenge.

Feedback from the community can help principals crystallize important takeaways. What were the pros and cons of a particular action or policy?

"See what things can be moved forward, and what things can be left behind," said Jonathan Saiz, the principal of Governor Bent Elementary in Albuquerque, N.M.

For this exercise to be meaningful, it's important to gather perspective from many different groups, said Saiz.

"Just hearing from every person you can hear from before a huge initiative is implemented at the school," he said. "How will it impact all these stakeholders directly? How is it going to affect the families? It can be from a community event all the way to a homework policy."

That includes listening to students as much as adults, he added.

But getting honest feedback isn't as simple as it sounds and requires laying some groundwork.

Building trust is key, and one way to do that is through strengthening relationships with families, which Saiz did during the pandemic by increasing the number of home visits he conducted.

Another way to get honest feedback is

by showing vulnerability, said Manuela Haberer, the principal of Murray E. Boone Elementary in San Antonio. It's something she is conscientious about doing with her teachers, she said.

"Because then you become relatable and they are able to more openly share with you what they are concerned about and what's keeping them from performing their best," she said. "When you tell them, 'This is scary for me as well, but this is what we're going to do, and we're going to do it together, and we're going to get through it together,' you're going to build trust."

But to give meaningful feedback, people also need to be in the know, which requires thoughtful and frequent communication, said Haberer.

Prior to the pandemic, she used to send a weekly bulletin with school news and important dates and reminders. But once COVID-19 hit, directives and advice from the state and health officials were changing so quickly she started sending the bulletin daily to keep her staff in the loop as much as possible.

Having multiple avenues to share feedback with leadership is also important, said Kersensa Wing, the principal of Collins Hill High School, located outside Atlanta. To collect student feedback, she holds town halls, conducts regular surveys, and has standing meetings with several student leadership groups.

2. Focus on what you can control

For Trevor Goertzen, the principal of Spring Hill Middle School located just outside Kansas City, Kansas, an important part of developing the mindset to learn from failure or challenges is being deliberate in making head space to reflect on those difficulties.

That means making sure that he doesn't dwell on minutiae and negativity, or he'll miss the lessons that can be gleaned from a particular challenge.

"I have no control over the political climate, I have no control over the junk that goes on social media, the homes my students come from, but I have control over what I give head space to," Goertzen said. "If I am constantly

worried about every little thing, I am going to be a negative person.”

Admittedly, it can be hard not to become consumed with worrying about every little thing, especially, said Goertzen, at a time when principals are substitute teaching, serving lunches, and taking on custodial tasks on top of their regular duties because of labor shortages.

But cultivating that self-awareness—and keying into his inner dialogue—helps Goertzen home in on what lessons he can take away from a challenge.

“I have become a big believer that the thoughts we have will drive our actions,” he said. “If you let that be negative, and let the crisis be the thing that controls your thoughts ... you’re not going to be in a good place.”

3. Don't forget the main goal

Sorting through the fallout after a crisis or turbulent time can be overwhelming.

But Goertzen said that keeping his highest priority in mind—educating kids—helps focus his mind and prime it to learn from the crisis at hand.

“If you keep that priority, positive relationships with kids and educating kids the driving focus ... I feel like that’s something I don’t have complete control of as a principal, but I have a lot of influence over it,” Goertzen said.

That has also been the guiding star for Haberer and her staff. “Like most educators, we’re here because we love to see the students thrive and we love to see students progressing academically and socially,” said Haberer.

It has been difficult for her staff as their students have struggled academically after a long period of remote learning and navigating job loss and death in their families.

“We’re blessed with having two regular counselors, plus a program called Communities in Schools provides a third counselor that really helps families with those social and economic problems,” said Haberer. “So, we can get the kids here at school, get the academic interventions that are needed and ... more of a school routine. That, as a school staff, has been our focus.”

4. Lean on professional communities or networks

Formal or informal groups of peers can provide an important avenue for reflecting on what can be learned from a crisis and brainstorming ways to apply those lessons to the next big challenge.

“Yes, I think principal networks are critically important,” said Wing. In her district, Gwinnett County Public Schools, principals of the district’s more than 20 high schools meet at least monthly. She said that, and attending conferences hosted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, has helped her build a robust network of peers she can call upon to troubleshoot problems and learn from them.

“The principal’s job is unique in the building ... You need support as well as to be able to bounce ideas off of somebody,” Wing said. “In your building, sometimes when you say something everybody takes it as that’s what’s going to happen. But when you’re talking with another [principal] it’s easier to really do some brainstorming.”

Just as these opportunities are important for principals, it’s equally crucial that school leaders give their teachers and other staff the chance to collaborate and learn from challenges.

Haberer said she learned the importance of collaboration through her first career as a physical therapist, which required her to work closely with nurses, doctors, and the occupational therapist to care for patients.

She said while some schools put professional learning communities on pause to give teachers extra time to plan, she took the opposite tack because it gave educators an avenue to work through problems together and hopefully grow professionally from it.

“Nothing will build a team up more than being together in a struggle,” she said.

5. Prioritize self-care

It’s been said a million times throughout the pandemic: You must put on your own oxygen mask before you can assist others with theirs. This analogy to an in-flight emergency is used to argue for the importance of self-care. Principals can’t adequately support their students and staff if they are completely depleted themselves.

But self-care is necessary for another reason, said Wing. Having the space to reflect on a turbulent time is key to unlocking the lessons from a particular challenge, which is why time away from meetings and the daily churn is so important.

“It gives you quiet time to organize your thoughts and think through things,” she said. “One of my favorite activities is to go hiking because no one is talking to me, and no one can get ahold of me.”

Wing said if she could give two pieces of ad-

vice to other principals it would be to connect with their peers and make time for self-care.

What they learned....

As far as what these principals learned during the past year and a half, the lessons were as varied as the communities they come from.

Wing said that the racial equity protests following the death of George Floyd were a turning point for her in realizing she needed to take a more data-driven approach to rooting out inequities in her high school.

She and her staff now meet frequently to comb over data on student discipline, attendance, Advanced Placement enrollment, and performance on AP tests for feedback on how students from different demographic groups are doing.

And while Wing said her faculty members couldn’t be more done with teaching over Zoom, they all realized it could be a powerful tool for making after-school tutoring more accessible to students who don’t have transportation.

The primary lesson Haberer took away from the pandemic was the need for constant communication through a crisis. She is keeping her daily bulletins because when there’s a lack of communication, negativity fills the void, she said, citing a quote she had read from leadership expert and author Jon Gordan.

Goertzen said the biggest lesson for him was how focusing on the main goal, educating children, can serve as an anchor for a school leader facing crisis.

Finally, for Saiz, the pandemic brought home how vital a school is to the broader community.

“A lot of times, in a school building, we are doing our work ... and we forget to pick up our heads and see, wow, this is the impact we’re making,” he said. “That was my ‘aha’ moment.”

“Knowing that our work has a ripple effect, and knowing that whatever initiative is implemented in school, how it is affecting ... the community,” he said. Prime example: “Schools closing ... had a huge impact.” ■

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—Julia Wilkinson

A Baltimore principal finds that making time to teach has benefits beyond his classroom.

Published November 2, 2021

How Taking a Turn as a Teacher Can Sharpen a Principal's Leadership Skills

By Elizabeth Heubeck

Baltimore

Wearing a Baltimore Ravens jersey over his khakis and button-down shirt (in recognition of the season home opener that night), Steve McManus starts his 10th grade History of the Modern World class promptly at 12:05 p.m. from his perch on a front-row desk.

He leads the students during the 65-minute period with apparent ease: standing at the front of the room as he lectures, moving through the aisles during a brief period of small-group work, returning to sit on a front-row desk while listening to students share their opinions on the European attempts to take over the spice trade. As the students file out of the room, a few thank McManus before ducking into the busy hallway.

Their show of respect is to be expected. He is, after all, also their principal.

McManus, in his 11th year as principal at the private Friends School of Baltimore, has taught

one class every semester during his entire tenure. It's a perk he negotiated prior to accepting the job and one that he uses as a professional development tool to keep both his school leadership and his practical teaching skills sharp.

For principals, the benefits of teaching can transcend those experienced by even the most successful classroom teachers.

Not only do teaching principals have an opportunity to connect with students; they also can build trusting and empathetic relationships with their teaching staff members, as they experience similar classroom challenges and rewards. Further, they can apply what they observe in the classroom to the leadership decisions they make in their broader role as principal.

As McManus said, he actually thinks about his teaching as professional development.

Data on teaching principals, those who intentionally and routinely spend time teaching in the classroom, isn't readily available. But, given the demands of a principal's job, plus the extra work and pressure of the pandemic, "I can't imagine many principals choosing to take on a class in addition to their duties," David Morrill, spokesperson for the Associa-

tion of Washington School Principals, wrote in an email.

A study in "Research in Rural Education" from 1990 analyzing the practice of teaching principals showed it was common in the late 1800s, but began to wane in the early- to mid-1900s as principals' overall responsibilities increased.

The study did, however, identify 70 teaching principals in Nebraska between 1986 and 1987. Of those, more than 90 percent were asked by their supervisors to stop teaching because of competing priorities. Nevertheless, 80 percent of the teaching principals said they would recommend the dual position to others.

That same recommendation comes from the principals who shared with Education Week about their experiences in this dual role.

Benefits include deepening relationships, different perspectives

Effective leaders often point to trust as central to their success. And teaching, say principals who make a habit of it, is a concrete way to garner trust from their teacher colleagues. "They see me in the classroom struggling with the same challenges," McManus said. "They know that I'm going to be doing whatever the school is asking all teachers to do."

Building trust among one's teaching staff can feel particularly relevant in times of turmoil, such as the pandemic. Amy Fast, the principal at McMinnville High School in Oregon, learned this firsthand as she chose to teach 9th grade advisory for the entire 2020-21 school year. Each adviser acts as a point person within the high school for an estimated 15 families, a responsibility that, during the pandemic, included weekly meetings with students to teach lessons on navigating distance learning and other strategies for school success.

In stepping up to teach last year, Fast also took her own advice. During the height of the pandemic, when students were in remote learning and classes were being conducted through Zoom, Fast, a prolific user of social media, tweeted a "call to action" urging principals to spend some time teaching.

"We needed to know what it entails," she said. "It's easy to be kind of dismissive of [teachers'] concerns if you haven't lived them."

"It [teaching] helped me to understand teachers' struggles, especially at the secondary level—screens black, not being able to see your students," Fast said. "Trying to get kids to engage though that kind of platform was challenging, for sure."

Spending time in the classroom, principals

get a firsthand sense not only of the challenges teachers face, but also those affecting students. McManus said, for instance, that during his career he has witnessed increasing levels of mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. He joins school leaders nationwide in expressing concern about how the pandemic may have exacerbated these.

“I think this year’s going to be a really great action research project for us all. We’re going to see how much of what impacted kids during COVID is going to endure,” McManus said.

As a teaching principal, McManus will be able to see the impact up close. It’s particularly fitting that he teaches 10th graders. “That’s the grade that we as faculty have talked a lot about. They have not experienced high school in its fullest form,” he said. “They’ve not had the traditions, rituals, and community events that are so much a part of high schoolers’ acculturation.”

Time inside a classroom affects leadership decisions outside of it

Teaching in the classroom can make an impact on the broader decisions that principals make outside of it. Jessica Cabeen knows this from experience. Currently the principal at Ellis Middle School in Austin, Minn., Cabeen formerly served as principal at Austin’s Woodson Kindergarten Center, where a teacher suggested that it was important for administrators to spend time in the classroom. Cabeen, who had never taught kindergarten, heeded the advice. Almost immediately afterward, she began rethinking some of her practices as a principal.

“You barely have time to go to the bathroom as a kindergarten teacher,” Cabeen said. With this realization in mind, she began limiting the email communication to teaching staff. Rather than filling their inboxes throughout the workday, she transitioned to delivering a weekly email to teachers.

In her more recent stint teaching, this time to middle school students during the pandemic, Cabeen said it was the students who steered some of the changes in her decisionmaking.

“The students felt very comfortable speaking up about things that didn’t make sense to them,” Cabeen said. “They were blunt and made me see things in a new way.”

For instance, Cabeen’s students told her that her schoolwide announcements and updates, via email, were “long and confus-

ing.” She now uses Instagram routinely to get across important messages. Recently, Cabeen went so far as to be featured in a YouTube video to take a stance against poor “copycat” student behavior popularized by the social networking service TikTok.

Cabeen’s awareness of students’ communication preferences played into the decision to create the video, which likely resonated far more effectively with her students than lecturing from a podium or in print would have.

Making teaching-as-PD work

The “whys” of teaching as a principal are fairly evident, from the opportunity to form deeper relationships with teachers and students to gaining new perspectives on leadership decisions. The “hows” may be more baffling, especially given the increasing demands on principals and their subsequent rising stress. But principals committed to teaching find a way.

McManus acknowledges that teaching requires him to be highly organized. He says he does the majority of preparation for his class on weekends, as planning time for his class simply “doesn’t exist” during the weekdays.

He also acknowledges that he can’t do it alone. “I do rely on my team, my department,” McManus said. Cabeen concurs, explaining that in order to teach a class, she had to do a lot of delegating which, in hindsight, she acknowledges was good for the growth of those employees she leaned on.

These teaching principals recognize the sacrifices they’ve had to make to lead in the classroom, from giving up free time on weekends to relinquishing some control. But ultimately, they say, it’s about prioritizing.

“As a principal, you can fight fires all day,” Cabeen said. Intentionally removing yourself from the everyday chaos common to a school leader’s day in order to step into the classroom allows principals to recommit to their calling as a leader, explains Cabeen. “It’s not just more work, but it’s really important work,” she said.

McManus agrees, referring to the few hours he spends in the classroom each week teaching as “sacred time” well-spent. “I think I’m a better principal, more focused and deliberate and intentional about what I’m doing because of it,” he said.

He urges other principals to try it. “Do it if you can,” he said. “I think it preserves a little bit of balance and sanity.” ■

Published June 7, 2022

Principal Prep And PD: What Works and What’s Being Left Out

By Denisa R. Superville

Research on the types of training and support effective principals need has become clearer over the last two decades, but a new, in-depth report also shows that the application of those lessons varies from state to state.

The report, *Developing Effective Principals What Kind of Learning Matters?*, digs deep into the research on principal preparation and professional development and what principals think of it.

And the work isn’t done.

“This is still a young body of research on three things ... whether principals make a difference, how they make a difference, and how do you prepare principals to make a difference,” said Steve Tozer, a professor emeritus at the University of Illinois Chicago College of Education and one of the report’s authors.

Here are some key takeaways from the report from the Learning Policy Institute, done with the support of the Wallace Foundation. (The Wallace Foundation supports Education Week coverage of issues including education leadership.)

We already know the ingredients of high-quality principal prep

Some of the main ingredients of these programs include:

- A rigorous selection process for candidates;
- Cohorts or networks for aspiring principal-candidates;
- Curriculum that reflects real-world practices;
- Clinical experiences longer than 20 weeks;
- Mentors and coaches for the candidates; and
- Learning opportunities that give candidates a chance to address actual school-based challenges—for example, through role-playing or projects.

Principal Vernicka Rolle-Murray leads students to classrooms after breakfast on the first day of classes at Washington Elementary School in Riviera Beach, Fla., in 2021.

High-quality preparation programs also, of course, are grounded in teaching would-be principals instructional-leadership practices and about managing and leading people and change. And they include close partnerships between the provider (whether a university or a private organization) and the districts in which graduates will work.

High-quality professional development, on the other hand, should also include small-group support for school leaders, such as one-on-one mentoring, professional learning communities, and opportunities for principals to practice what they're learning.

High-quality programs are out there, but access can be spotty

Over the last decade, a higher percentage of principals who've exited their preparation programs are saying they've had exposure to the key parts of high-quality principal-prep, according to the report. Of course, the depth of that exposure varies from program to program, district to district, and state to state.

For example, 87 percent of principals who got their certification in the last 10 years said they had access to content on leading instruction that focused on higher-order thinking, compared with 80 percent of those certified more than 10 years ago.

Overall, however, about 70 percent of principals said they had minimal access to almost all the areas considered key to high-quality principal prep, the report says.

A higher percentage of principals from California, which changed its licensure and approval process, were more likely than their peers nationally to say they've been exposed to key program content.

While 83 percent of principals nationally, for example, said they got training on leading schoolwide change to boost student outcomes, 97 percent of California principals said the same.

Training on equity remains a challenge

The new report, led by Linda Darling-Hammond, the president and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute, cited research showing that exposing principals to just one



—Wilfredo Lee/AP

course on “meeting the needs of diverse learners” can help them work with students from diverse backgrounds.

But research in this area is still scarce, with most of the scholarship focused on students of color, according to the authors, who found only one study among those that fit the criteria centered on working with LGTBQ students.

About 82 percent of principals nationally said they were prepared to lead schools and support students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and racial, and ethnic backgrounds. But among recent graduates—those who were certified over the last 10 years—that number is 86 percent. And in California, 99 percent of principals said they were prepared to respond to the needs of students coming from diverse backgrounds.

And the ease of access to those programs varies, according to the report.

School leaders heading schools with large numbers of students experiencing poverty reported having fewer opportunities in their programs with exposure to some of the key content areas in their prep programs, such as the cohort-based model and real-world, problem-solving aspects of the job than their peers in schools with fewer students experiencing poverty. They were also less likely to have coaches and mentors.

The authors noted, however, that that was not the case in California, where nearly all principals—99 percent in the survey of California principals used in the report—said their program provided opportunities to work in a collaborative learning environment with various stakeholders and students from diverse linguistic, ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.

“

This program allows the new principals an opportunity to have somebody walk alongside them—[someone] who's been there.”

ROBERT BORNEMAN

Coach in the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District

State policy can make a big difference

While states wield huge influence over principal-preparation and -professional-development programs, not all are using that power, the report says.

One big area is adopting standards for school leaders, which all states and the District of Columbia have done, according to a 2015 report by the University Council on Educational Administration, a group of higher education institutions that offer leadership-preparation programs.

State policies were inconsistent in other important areas where they can make a big difference. Those buckets include the quality of the internship experience that aspiring principals get, the ability to promote and support strong partnerships between school districts and universities, and the power to increase the rigor of candidate selection and recruitment. The oversight of preparation programs is also another area where states have enormous leverage, according to the report.

Fewer than half the states had rigorous selection processes and district partnerships, and only Illinois and Tennessee met all the requirements laid out by the university council. Eleven states met none of the requirements, according to the UCEA report.

There are examples where principal prep and support changed drastically after robust state action. Since California changed its licensure and approval process, principals have reported they've felt better prepared to lead schools in a variety of areas, according to surveys.

In Pennsylvania, all new principals are required to participate in the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership Program within their first five years on the job. The program is tied to the state's school leadership standards. Results have been positive, including an 18 percent drop in principal turnover compared with turnover in the years before the program came along.

And North Carolina's Principal Fellows Program, which started in 1993, provides scholarships to aspiring principals. The program covers a master's degree in school administration as well as a salary in the second year to allow principal-candidates to work as an assistant principal under the supervision of a veteran principal.

Are things changing? Possibly. All 50 states and the District of Columbia said they planned to invest in school leadership when they submitted their Every Student Succeeds plans to the U.S. Department of Education, according to a 2018 analysis by New Leaders, the New York City-based school leadership development program. ■



OPINION

Published March 31, 2022

Want Successful Professional Development? Try Promoting Curiosity

By Larry Ferlazzo

What is the best professional-development session you ever participated in, and what made it so good?

'Collective Efficacy'

Tonia Gibson, a former teacher and school leader in Australia, is a senior managing consultant at McREL International and a co-author of Learning That Sticks:

The best PD I experienced as a primary school teacher in Australia was peer coaching with a particular twist: when I was matched with a colleague from a different grade level. Then we weren't obsessed with critiquing the quality of the content; rather, we could observe each other's classrooms based purely on what we'd discussed in our preobservation. It also prevented us from comparing one another's kids, which of course isn't the point.

Pairing teachers separated by at least one grade level, such as kindergarten and 2nd grade, was even better. That also removed another potential distraction, the temptation to judge one another for promoting under-prepared students. With that definitive break in content between us, we could concentrate on observing teacher use of effective practices and positive student learning behaviors.

Ultimately, the question we wanted to know focused on our students and their per-

ception of what they were learning through classroom activities—not, “What are you doing?” but “What are you learning?” We visited each other's rooms four times per quarter and focused on giving feedback on the learning behaviors of the students. I came to realize that the way my students would answer three simple questions told me more about what was happening in my classroom than any formal evaluation or teacher-focused observation: “What are you learning?” “Why is this learning important to you?” and, “How will you know when you've been successful?”

I should add that teacher quality is not assessed through high-stakes formal observations in Australia. When I was promoted to leadership, I was encouraged to continue to be visible in classrooms via the peer-observation model. If you're wondering how we managed to assess teachers without high-pressure formal observations, it was based on the effectiveness of their planning, knowledge about particular students/cohorts, and their depth of knowledge about teaching and learning, along with support-focused discussions about what we saw and heard through these more frequent, informal observations.

Now that I'm with an organization that produces in-person and online PD, I put a lot of thought into what makes such sessions valuable. Many districts in the U.S. and worldwide are still using the “sit and get” model that rarely translates into improved practices at a school or classroom level. Reflecting on my own experiences as well as the research of

Linda Darling-Hammond and others, here are the qualities I like to see:

- Job-embedded and collaborative—like those peer-coaching sessions I experienced earlier in my career.
- Supportive of professional curiosity. Curiosity is essential for effective learning to occur, yet traditional PD models skip it entirely. Just like students, teachers need opportunities to ask such questions of each other as: What do we need to improve? Why is this important? What evidence do we have that supports this need? Involving teachers in identifying their PD needs makes them partners in the process.
- Focused on collective efficacy. When we approach our work with the belief that together we can address and be successful in tackling our identified challenges as a school staff, then we are more likely to develop a culture of support and collaboration.
- Followed up with sustained support from school leaders. “One and done” professional learning needs to be a thing of the past. Most teachers will tell you that when they participate merely for compliance, they don’t learn much.

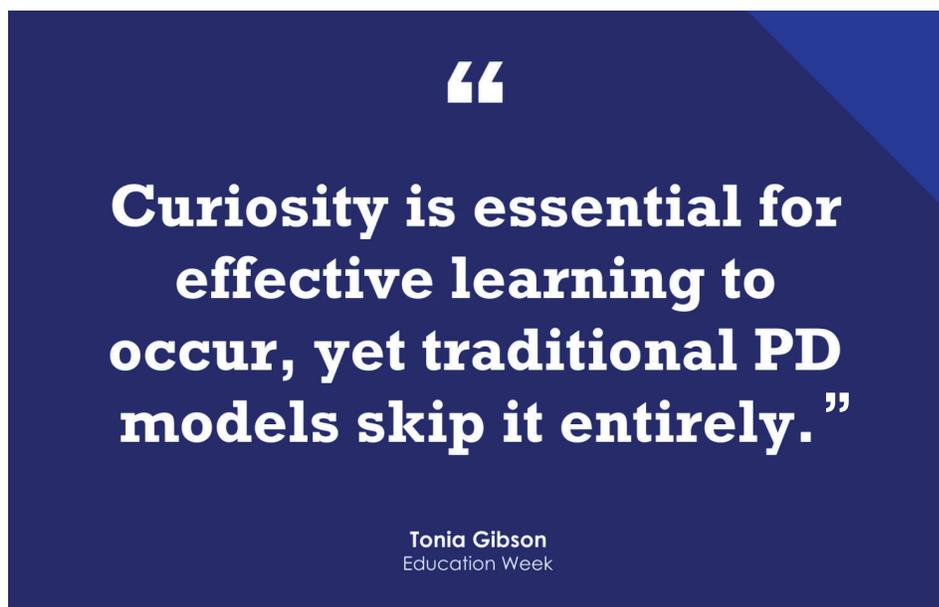
Professional development for teachers is a wonderful concept that must have seemed shockingly progressive at first, but it needs to keep up with the times. I hope we’ll move away from a compliance mindset and instead help each other grow curious and continuously learn, just like we strive to do with our students.

Student Panels

Becky Corr is an English-language-development team lead for the Douglas County school district in Colorado. In her role with DCSD as well as the owner of EdSpark Consulting, she provides coaching, professional development, and family-engagement opportunities:

Several years ago, my team and I facilitated a professional-development session centered on teaching multilingual learners that teachers have said was one of the best sessions they have participated in. The concept was simple, it elevated student voices, and was ultimately quite powerful.

The professional-development session began with an introduction to our multilingual learners. We provided some school and district demographics, including the top languages spoken by our students. We shared data



that illustrated the growth of our multilingual learners specific to the school. The heart of the session was a student panel where students responded to teacher-generated questions. About a week prior to the session, we had provided an anonymous opportunity for teachers to submit questions, which provided a safe space to ask about what they wanted to know.

Preparing students and teachers for the student panel was the key to success. Our teaching team screened the questions and then selected the top questions in partnership with the students. An integral step in the process was partnering with students to select the questions. This provided students with a platform to share their stories and elevate their authentic voices.

For the next week, we supported students in writing responses to the teacher-generated questions. Some students wrote full responses while others jotted down some notes or bullet points. Students practiced responding to the questions to become comfortable with the format and speaking in front of an audience. The questions ranged from, “What can teachers do to help you?” to “What do you wish that your teachers knew?” Another teacher also asked, “What can we do to help you feel welcome?”

During the professional-development session, we introduced the student panel and communicated the norms. Delineating the format of the session was especially important. Then, our team took turns asking students the questions, and students responded. To wrap up the session, teachers shared with each other in small groups about what they learned and what they would like to implement.

Teachers continue to comment that the

professional-development student-panel session was impactful for them.

Topic Self-Selection

Luiza Mureseanu is a secondary school teacher currently working as instructional resource teacher, K-12, for ESL/ELD programs, in Peel DSB, Ontario:

The most rewarding professional learning happens when given the possibility to select or self-register a topic of interest.

Recently, I participated in a few professional learning sessions about MCT (multicultural teaching) that I found equally interesting and rewarding. The value of these sessions got enhanced by a few specific factors.

First, the content was relevant and applicable to my teaching setting as I work with a large population of multilingual learners. These professional-development sessions provided me with instructional strategies and resources applicable to my daily teaching and learning.

Second, the sessions provided a good balance between theory and practice in using MCT. The reference list was extremely helpful and rich but also very practical.

Finally, the participants demonstrated a lot of enthusiasm and passion in addressing the topic, so the learning process was really enhanced by the desire to do the learning together. Teachers learn best when they are invested in the professional learning and share a plethora of resources with each other. These professional learning experiences eventually generated a strong PLN (professional learning network) among educators from various geographical areas and boards.

'Lightning Round PD'

Helen Vassiliou has been working with ELs for the Lakota Local school district in West Chester, Ohio:

The best professional development I have participated in was called "Lightning Round PD" held by teachers for teachers. Professional development should be taught by active teachers in 30 minutes or less, contain no fluff, be easy to implement, classroom-tested, and doable to implement the next day.

In the lightning-round session held via Zoom, each teacher was asked to prepare either an idea, tech tool, or strategy they use in the classroom and share it in no more than two minutes. This kind of low-stress, less-prep professional development is energetic, quick-paced, and lively keeping everyone engaged. There is a genuine element of competition and creativity that gets showcased, and the zero down time between each share-out pulls people in to learn more from a colleague without distraction. Each staff member leaves with a menu of ideas to try that piques their interest and warrants them to learn more from each other.

I implemented this style of PD this year, and two weeks later, teachers are coming to me and others with a newfound curiosity to try something in their instruction for the benefit of their students. The best teachers are still learning and igniting fires into their instruction, which brings about a contagious spirit that keeps students at the heart. When thinking about the "knowledge loop," teachers are learning, creating and sharing strategies and tools with each other, strengthening our practice, and not being stagnant.

As an educator, I expect to grow every time I come to a learning community. Learning from each other elevates our voice and our niche in the world. There is something imperative about teacher trust and the richness of our experiences that impacts us. ■

Larry Ferlazzo is an English and social studies teacher at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, Calif.

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