

## A Superintendent's Voice: Changing Skeptics' Minds *By Richard H. Bauscher*

Middleton, Idaho—about 20 miles from Boise—bills itself as the “City With a Future.” Helping to ensure a bright future for Middleton’s 2,650 students is the job of Richard Bauscher, superintendent of the rapidly growing six-school district. Bauscher, who holds a doctorate of education in administration, was named the 2003–2004 Idaho School Superintendents’ Association Educational Leader of the Year. You can find evidence of that leadership in the collaboration plan that Bauscher has guided: Now starting its third year, the plan is paying off for students in a number of ways.



Middleton School District #134, like all other districts throughout the United States, is addressing the 2001 federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law and the individual state expectations resulting from its implementation. Our district has always endeavored to help individual students meet their highest academic potential; NCLB, which requires all children be proficient at their grade level, gave us a new perspective on our goals.

Back in 2002, the school board members, district administration, leadership team, and I began researching successful academic programs implemented in other school districts. We concluded that collaboration time for teachers to meet regularly with their colleagues was the most effective and efficient way to improve our students’ academic achievement levels. This collaboration time would be used to:

- Review data and share information
- Map curriculum to the instructional calendar
- Develop lessons aligned to the state standards
- Monitor growth of individual students on assignments and assessments
- Evaluate state test data and other assessments for the purpose of implementing action plans
- Consult with current educational research experts

A major challenge of implementing teacher collaboration was selecting the best time for it to occur, in order to meet the needs of our students, parents, day-care providers, transportation, district staff, and the state minimum instructional hours requirements. After much deliberation and discussion with representatives from *all* our stakeholder groups, we decided an early release time every Wednesday

provided the best possible scenario as it protects the “prime” learning time for younger students, is less difficult for parents arranging day care, maintains the breakfast program, and promotes high school students’ attendance. At the conclusion of all this research, school board members approved a one-year trial weekly collaboration time (in 2003–2004) for our teachers.

Our district was one of 15 in Idaho selected to receive a J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation’s Creating High Performance Schools (CHPS) grant, which provided funding and support for our weekly collaboration efforts. With this funding we were able to hire four one-year instructional coaches—master teachers selected from our staff—to assist with the implementation of collaboration time. The coaches received extensive training, including Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman’s work on *The Adaptive School: Developing Collaborative Groups*. These coaches supported our building teaching staff by providing training, studying current research, analyzing data, mapping the curriculum, and increasing assessment literacy. It became apparent early on that our paraprofessionals should be included in this collaboration effort, and soon these sessions were redesigned to assist them with their areas of expertise. Our administrative team members began monthly collaboration meetings to guide their efforts through the initial stages and full implementation of collaboration.

During this first one-year trial period, some skeptics doubted the value of the collaboration efforts. However, after reviewing the weekly written reports submitted to the administrative team, getting feedback from our staff members, and seeing the

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from the usual sink-or-swim, trial-and-error ordeal,” writes Inger in *ERIC Digest*. “For experienced teachers, collegiality prevents end-of-year burnout and stimulates enthusiasm.”

Inger goes on to list six dimensions that support meaningful collaboration, particularly in the face of departmental boundaries and a traditional culture that respects individual privacy. Those include leaders who convey why collaboration is important; teacher teams that have decisionmaking powers; protected time for collaborative work; the availability of material support; the ability to receive training; and distributed leadership among teachers and administrators.

In the end, says Inger, interdependence and opportunity are the most critical factors in making collaboration work. “The practices of colleagues are most likely to make a difference where they are an integral, inescapable part of day-to-day work. Teachers’ main motivations and rewards are in the work of teaching. To the extent that they find themselves interdependent with one another to manage and reap the rewards of teaching, joint work will be worth the investment of time and resources.” ■

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academic needs of our students being met in new ways, the administrative team and board members all concluded that our collaboration was a successful endeavor. The school board unanimously approved the continuation of weekly collaboration for the 2004–2005 school year.

At the end of our second year of weekly collaboration, we have irrefutable data that this is time well-spent. It has made a difference for our students in many ways:

- Focused time concentrated on students leads to better meeting individual and group needs
- Monitoring of student growth allows instruction to be adjusted to increase group and individual student learning
- Instructional teams analyze data such as the ISAT, IRI, and teacher-made assessments to better identify student need
- Current academic research is reviewed to create action plans
- Interventions are planned for struggling students
- High-achieving students are being challenged

Although lack of funding has not allowed us to continue with all four of the original instructional coach positions, we continue to provide additional support to our teachers and students with a certified reading coach, a second gifted and talented facilitator, and Title I teachers whose focus is improving the core skills of math, reading, and language in our lower-scoring students.

Recently, the school board unanimously approved the continuation of collaboration for the third year (2005–2006). I would encourage other school districts that are considering the implementation of collaboration time to strongly consider this new collaboration plan. ■