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GOING SMALL and GETTING SMARTER:
Small Learning Communities as Platforms for Effective Professional Development
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James P. Connell
Adena M. Klem
Julie M. Broom
Mark Kenney
Institute for Research and Reform in Education

with contributions by
Milbrey McLaughlin,
Stanford University

B. Overview of Critical Elements of Effective Professional Development

- 1. Sufficient time must be available for teachers to work with the right people under the right conditions.** Substantial amounts of time are needed to properly institute and sustain professional development. Collaborative models provide the means to both educate new teachers and offer sustained training for experienced teachers. To use these models most effectively, teachers need to have regularly scheduled time during and outside the school day to work with other teachers who share their same students over more than one year, and other teachers who share their same content area.
- 2. Professional development activities need to be guided by shared instructional goals.** Activities toward these goals will have to include building teachers' content knowledge and facility with that knowledge and their repertoire of instructional strategies to deliver it. The goals need to be clear and meaningful. What individual teachers do in their classrooms should be consistent with what their peers are trying to accomplish in their classrooms. Shared understanding and valuing of these goals among district and building staff creates and sustains collective responsibility for achieving them.
- 3. Ongoing information on student performance and teaching practices must be available in useful forms and from credible sources.** Sources of information need to include ongoing assessments of student and teacher work. Student assessments must be common within content areas, closely aligned with the district and state standards, frequently administered and consistently graded across teachers, and must provide information that will guide instruction. Teaching practices must be viewed through a common, well-understood lens that clearly focuses on key practices known to lead to improved achievement with students from diverse backgrounds. Tracking student learning with tri-annual or annual high-stakes assessments and teaching quality through annual, pro forma teacher evaluations are not enough.

4. **Instructional leaders need to build their collective capacity to do whatever it takes to improve teaching and learning at the individual teacher and professional learning community levels.** The challenge of designing, planning, implementing and monitoring the full set of activities required to change teaching and learning at scale in large, underperforming schools is immense. Meeting this challenge requires a system of leaders at the building and district level with differentiated skill sets (e.g., use assessment tools and data to analyze patterns in student outcomes and teaching practice, model effective instructional strategies, facilitate professional development activities) and open communication pointed toward meeting shared instructional goals in every classroom, every day. These leaders must not only build their own knowledge and skills, but must do so in a way that models the focused, collaborative professional learning behaviors expected of all teachers as well.

5. **Timely, credible and persistent outside technical assistance must be accessible to get all of the above off the ground and help make sure it's sustained and strengthened over time.** Just as no individual is expected to know and be able to do everything it takes to improve teaching and learning, no system—within or outside the field of education—has the capacity to “heal itself by itself.” Initial reconnaissance, helping create the sense of urgency and possibility, bringing the best learning from research and practice, providing specific training and coaching, supporting the development of the internal leadership capacity to drive the work and ongoing monitoring and reflection are critical roles outside providers can and should play.

From page 22: Instructional leaders need to build their collective capacity to do whatever it takes to improve teaching and learning in every classroom every day.

“Doing whatever it takes” to turn around instruction in large, underperforming secondary schools demands a complex profile of skills. This profile includes:

- Expert use of assessment tools such as those just described to analyze and synthesize patterns of student outcomes and teaching practices
- Diagnosing and articulating instructional content and strategy “gaps” in a wide range of disciplines
- Having command of multiple strategies for addressing those gaps for use with individual teachers as well as entire departments
- Being able to “walk the walk” by modeling effective practices through simulation, demonstration and co-teaching
- Facilitating professional development activities such as those described earlier
- Assessing the results of targeted interventions and ongoing professional development activities