

2013 CEREMONY BREAK-OUT SESSION: ADDING YOUR VOICE TO THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING



DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Sixty-six educators (one-third teachers, nearly three-fifths administrators, and the remainder equal numbers of unidentified participants or state education representatives) attended the Roundtable Discussion on Professional Learning as part of the National Blue Ribbon Schools 2013 Ceremony. Lisa Clarke, 2013 Washington Teacher Ambassador, U.S. Department of Education, facilitated the discussion with Gillian Cohen-Boyer, Director, Teacher and Principal Ambassador Fellowships, U.S. Department of Education.

Participants were asked to discuss issues related to building effective professional development systems for teachers and principals, then write responses in terms of the following questions:

- What professional learning are you receiving or providing that is helping educators to teach to rigorous standards that prepare students for college and careers?
- Describe the most effective professional learning that you have participated in. What made it so effective?
- How is your professional evaluation contributing to your professional learning? How should it be? What would need to be in place for evaluation to truly guide professional development at your school?

Participants were grouped at tables of teachers and administrators. Following discussions within each table, Clarke asked a representative from each table to distill the ideas raised. Ideas and discussion points are grouped under each of the three topics.

What professional learning are you receiving or providing that is helping educators to teach to rigorous standards that prepare students for college and careers?

Sample administrator comments are provided first, followed by sample teacher comments.

Transition to Common Core Standards.

Administrators described district, state, and regional supports for the transition to Common Core standards. Some of this professional learning focused on specific training while other was more task-oriented, such as realigning curricula, sharing strategies for lesson development, setting performance goals, and modeling and coaching support for teachers. For example:

- South Dakota is launching a wide-ranging effort on the CCSS for teachers. Our major concerns are building bridges between grades and curriculum content areas and filling in any gaps that have been identified.
- Authentic Intellectual Work—state initiative. Task/ student work/ instruction> rubrics to assist. Moving to unit planning. Work ties nicely with Common Core IA Core. District-wide. RTI at building/ district level

- Best practices for CC implementation—building level: close reading, word study, guiding reading, diff. math instruction.
- CCSS curriculum academies
- Grade level math academies focused on teaching strategies aligned with CCSS
- K-12 vertical alignments—liaisons led. District level.
- MDE provides regional training on common core through gulf coast initiative

Collaborative Learning.

Administrators also described different approaches to collaborative learning. Professional Learning Communities figured strongly, with many schools structuring regular early release time for PLCs. Most PLCs described were weekly; a few were monthly, with release time for meetings structured into the school schedule. Groups were typically structured by grade level or department/content area. Sample comments:

- Double-plan/ rolling subs to get teachers in each other’s classrooms and allow time for extended conversation/collaboration
- Flipped meetings around texts/ short videos for whole staff, grade levels, and interest groups
- Staff run all of our staff meetings now
- Small learning communities, Center for Inquiry, teachers at literature readers and coaches
- Year-long faculty-identified topics of study, self-selected participation. Entire staff, including support teachers, shape and form the direction of our school
- Book study and professional articles specific to grade level
- Professional Learning communities analyze ITBS—team selects focus for learning
- NOSIT faculty meetings: Needs, Opening, Stimulation, Innovation, Teaching. Model engagement and facilitate discussion among professionals.
- Conversation across grade levels to see that curriculum is being taught correctly with fidelity and rigor AND talk about when we need help to assist struggling students.
- Twitter chats and IC Talks (like TED talks but with our people across and within district)
- Conversations around data and intentional analysis/ stories.
- Professional learning communities are crucial to most education initiatives in my district: it provides a system and a venue for collaboration.
- Teaming to focus on un-packing standards, drafting essential outcomes, ensuring understanding, etc.

Instructional Coaches and New Teacher Mentors.

Many administrators also cited the use of coaches and teacher mentors, including cognitive coaching and professional portfolios and 2+2 mentoring

Some administrators named specific programs in use at their schools, including [Nextpert](#), Teachscape and the work of Charlotte Danielson, PD 360. ASCD, [Project Lead the Way](#), Spalding Journey 2020, CTC training, Whitaker: *15 Things Great Teachers Do Differently*. They also mentioned ongoing training in specific curricula such as Singapore Math, Junior Great Books, and PBIS.

Other topics of professional learning administrator mentioned:

- Math and literacy, such as one-to-one exploration of literacy, professional discussions based on literacy data walls, improving writing across the school, and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) in math.
- School culture: “A vibrant environment for kids must be vibrant for adults,” noted one administrator.
- “Learning walks” to observe best practices using a form developed with Charlotte Danielson’s work in mind
- Videotape, both to tape model teachers as exemplars and as opportunities for teachers to be taped and debrief with exemplary teachers.
- Early childhood education
- Choice Theory/ Reality Therapy (William Glasser)
- 21st century technology: technology in students’ and teachers’ hands
- Thinking maps
- Learned centered problems
- Problem of practice
- “Unconference” model
- RTI training through state

Teachers had similar responses to the first question. They identified training in technology, in curriculum mapping related to the Common Core standards, and Student Learning Objectives as targeted forms of professional learning. Some named specific programs, such as conferences on Direct Instruction, group study of School-Based Intervention Team (SBIT), Tim Elmore’s *Habitudes*, Daily 5, CAFÉ, and NCTM institutes. Comments included:

- Currently my state is mapping history with CCSS: schools sent teams of two (Social studies and ELA) and learn how to incorporate literacy skills and strategies. We are seeing the importance of cross curricular collaboration and its impact on student learning. In the past we have addressed student engagement, thinking strategies, and best practice shares.
- RTI training: help teachers see each student’s potential; looking at more effective ways to use staff to enable us to meet needs of all students
- District offers summer institutes. For the past three years the focus has been on math; earlier it was literacy.
- Following a needs assessment based on district literacy plan, we provide monthly tailored PD based on district training. Grade levels meet twice a month based on needs assessment. Co-teaching and co-planning is another method for professional learning. The coach and teacher together plan and track; discuss debrief; share feedback.
- Our school has spent almost two years training us in a new evaluation program.
- We receive ongoing training in programs to measure student achievement (edmodo, canvas, Study Island, Accelerated Reader).

Describe the most effective professional learning that you have participated in. what made it so effective?

Teachers and administrators both agreed broadly on the **characteristics of effective professional development**, naming qualities such as: interactive, dynamic, collaborative, frequent, relevant and of high interest, personalized/tailored to identified needs, immediately applicable, long-term, and sustainable.

Some specific comments:

- Bring learning on site. Open each other's classes to gain insight and see specific strategies.
- Broad participation creates buy-in.
- Teachers must have choice.
- Asynchronous. Job embedded, vision driven not deficit driven. Face to face but also digital.
- Participation as a cohort over time.
- Staff led: comes from needs our teachers have identified. Individual learning plans through converted PD days.
- Less content more depth, ongoing, follow-through; PD planned to vision.
- New material is presented but adequate time allowed for sharing and networking.
- Learn strategies, such as use of primary sources, take on "student role," then learn how to apply skills in classroom.
- PD needs to open up to practices through the nation and world. Funding is crucial: many times we have as a district discussed training by experts in the field but the funding to bring in professionals is very limited. W trainings needs to be time to process, discuss and how we as staff can and will incorporate the information.
- Detail is what makes improvement. Follow through is necessary. Once teachers try something from PD they share at next meeting and are required to turn it into a lesson plan.
- Case studies, scenario studies.

Some named specific programs or presenters:

- Tim Elmore's Growing Leaders program. My faculty loves his approach and his methods.
- Annenberg Institute. Facilitative Leadership. Learn by doing/ using.
- Johnson and Johnson model of cooperative learning with ongoing support from Roger and Dan Johnson; did not depend on material; depended on building expertise of all staff.
- AVID, IB. active engagement and participation for all.
- IB/PYP has changed school environment.
- DI conference: many strategies and new ideas for reaching students with low ability.
- Jim Wright.
- School improvement team works with an educational researcher a day a month on best practices; then back to school for follow through and homework. AMAZING. Follow Marzano best practices.
- Successful for All (SFA): training, follow up, refinement, continuous training

How is your professional evaluation contributing to your professional learning? How should it be? What would need to be in place for evaluation to truly guide professional development at your school?

Sample administrator comments are provided first, followed by sample teacher comments.

- If by evaluation you mean teachers' evaluation, then I believe that there must be a strong link between evaluation and learning in the classroom. The discussion should be more about what students are learning rather than what the teacher is doing.
- We are currently revamping our evaluation tool to be a more comprehensive measure of good instruction, solid curriculum, and professional responsibilities. A results-based evaluation plan will create some urgency to continue growing and changing as a profession. However, I have concerns about valid implementation (grade inflation, manipulations of common assessments, etc.).
- In KY we are currently transforming our evaluation system; my school is a pilot this year. We are able to truly see the connection between evaluation, professional learning, and growth. The new system is designed to promote professional growth through reflection on current practices.
- Based on annual professional learning goals, teachers self evaluate, administrator observes, teacher and admin share data. Therefore appraisal is collaborative.
- Targeted to school improvement and/or strategic planning goals, plus areas of instruction valued by district.
- Not much. Superintendent approach is check off, a task that needs to be done. There should be more accountability for positive growth and more time spent on visit meetings.
- We have conversations throughout the year. Teacher use self-evaluation forms and prepare professional portfolios. Team assessments occur at mid-year; summative evaluations occur with teacher and principal.
- Evaluation is based on six standards: teaching, learning, community, teacher support, parental support, student advocacy.
- Contribution of evaluation is enormous! New system, BEEP, in place. Measures teacher growth, improvement, and needs. As educators we never stop learning.
- Evaluation forces individual to focus on particular areas, to research, and problem-solve.
- We routinely survey staff for needs and review areas for growth in evaluation system. Both teachers' needs and principal observations should be part of school plan.
- Professional learning should be included as part of formative evaluation system for teachers and instructional leaders (principals).
- Educate Alabama is all about PD. I feel you need to evaluate teacher practice and this should lead to PD.
- Educator effectiveness systems: tripod surveys, core professionalism, SLOs (semester/yearlong), Danielson Framework (observations): instruction, classroom environment.
- You must have developed capacity and a common language, common understanding of best practices.
- Evaluation must be supported by administrators and instructional coaches working in teams.

Teachers' responses include:

- Evaluation should contribute to our professional learning. It hasn't in the past. To truly guide PD we would need a great evaluation system in place with follow through.
- To have evaluation guide PD I would need a more personalized coaching model, more strategies identified by objective, and a knowledgeable observer to help me plan, deliver, assess.
- Currently in my district, professional learning is often mandated by district office and not connected to professional evaluation and teacher needs.
- For true growth from evaluation I believe teachers need to observe and be observed weekly yet our school systems do not support such practices.