FOCUS ON
NSDC'S STANDARDS

Extreme makeover: Needs assessment edition

The assessment of needs is one of the most valuable types of professional development data to collect. It can be used to help determine the initial focus and goals of professional development as well as to identify ongoing support and assistance required to sustain new classroom practices. The problem is that there seems to be a misunderstanding of the word "needs." For many years that word has been synonymous with *wants, desires, or wishes* rather than **necessities** or **requirements**. The ubiquitous needs assessment survey, while not easy to design and administer, usually consists of lists of topics, programs, or strategies from which teachers are asked to indicate what they would LIKE to focus on during their professional development time. Not only are these surveys not clearly connected to student or teacher learning needs, most faculty members can complete them in less than a minute and rarely seem to remember them past the moment they hand them in. Yet, school and district staff development committees faithfully create catalogs and workshop sessions based on the survey results and educators, on the receiving end, wonder later, "Why are we doing this topic today — what were they thinking?"

Instead of this dartboard approach, the principal needs to **analyze relevant staff data to design teacher professional development** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 75). Let's remodel the needs assessment by collecting data focused on classroom practice. A number of tools are available to complete this task. Many principals are already familiar with the classroom **walk-through** (Richardson, 2006). But rather than thinking of it as a monitoring tool, what if the results were used to determine teacher needs for support and assistance while implementing new curriculum or strategies?

Teacher concern surveys, based on the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), help principals understand whether teachers need more information about new practices or programs, need to visit a demonstration classroom, or need to meet with grade-level colleagues to plan lessons or units (Hall & Hord, 2001). CBAM can help principals understand and support faculty as they journey through the process of change. In addition, **informal conversations or interviews** with faculty members can also yield critical data to determine next steps for professional development. These conversations are sometimes called one-legged interviews —hallway conversations that begin with "How is the new mathematics (or reading, science, social studies, or ELL) program going?" and end with a clear understanding of some of the barriers that might be blocking successful implementation of new classroom practices. Another useful tool from CBAM is the innovation configuration map that can be used as a self-assessment tool and pinpoint educator's next steps as they move toward high-fidelity implementation of new practices.

A needs assessment is critical to powerful professional development but let's make sure it actually assesses educator **needs** not their *wants*.

Data Driven:
Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.

Learn more about NSDC's standards:
www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm

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