Indicator: Professional development for the whole faculty includes assessment of strengths and areas in need of improvement from classroom observations of indicators of effective teaching. (72)

Explanation: As with professional development for individual teachers, professional development for the whole faculty can include patterns of practice analysis of the degree to which specific indicators of effective practice are demonstrated in classroom observations. Observations may be by the principal or other teachers (peer-to-peer). Working with a common set of effective practices and their specific indicators reinforces sound practice school-wide. A pattern of practice analysis is prepared by aggregating observations of multiple teachers to determine the percent of teachers demonstrating specific indicators.

Questions: In planning for professional development, does your Leadership Team review aggregations of classroom observations (patterns of practice) to determine areas that need emphasis? In conducting the observations, do you identify teachers who are strong on particular indicators and might lead a professional development on them or coach other teachers.

In his article Maximizing Professional Leadership, Gradet (2006) discusses Breakthrough High Schools (BTHS), schools recognized for defying the odds and succeeding despite predictors of low student achievement. He said that principals and staff at these schools plan professional development centered on the premise that the best professional development must come from within the school and must focus on the needs of the individual teacher. He quotes Debra Pace, the principal of Poinciana High School in Kissimmee, FL, who said, “We brought in a few people from the outside, but we found that our most effective professional development comes from within, [by] identifying those teacher leaders who have effective information to share in a good way. There’s more value for the staff if they’re getting it from a colleague” (p. 17). Another principal, Keith Morris of Mabton (WA) Junior/Senior High School, said, “Our professional development has turned around because it’s pretty much all internal. Very few times will we bring in somebody from the outside—only if it’s a state requirement. And we noticed a huge, huge difference in both the buy-in and the ownership of that professional development. It’s all done by different staff people. I don’t do it by myself; I help facilitate. There are a lot of people involved” (p. 17). Additionally, Gradet mentioned the cost effectiveness of in-house professional development.

Goe, Biggers, and Croft (2012) found that classroom observations can be a valuable part of a performance evaluation as well as one of the best sources of information to guide teacher professional growth. Observations are particularly useful in providing relevant data on teacher–student relationships and the learning environment. They found that classroom observations alone are unlikely to lead to improved teaching and learning unless there are also discussions about the standards assessed and evidence obtained in the observations. Including evidence of student learning in these conversations has the added benefit of encouraging teachers to focus primarily on whether students are actually learning, as opposed to their focusing only on their own instruction. The authors said, “Examining aggregated data is less threatening to teachers because the discussion centers on data from multiple sources,
and problems and solutions are considered for all participating teachers as a group” (pp. 10–11).

Professional development should be based on either new skills that staff are required to utilize or implement in their classrooms or on classroom observations which indicate areas of weaknesses that need to be addressed. Professional development may be schoolwide or individual (as in coaching or mentoring for a teacher to address a particular area of need). Observations may also indicate areas of strengths which teachers can then be encouraged to share with other teachers. Redding (2007) says that “continuous improvement of each teacher’s skills is achieved through a variety of means including whole-faculty workshops, consultations with Instructional Teams, the principal’s work with individual teachers and with teams, and through collegial learning—teacher to teacher (including peer observations, study groups, coaching, and mentoring)” (p. 101).

References and other resources


