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# Building A High-Quality Teaching Profession: Professional Development For Teachers and Staff

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BUILDING A HIGH-QUALITY  
TEACHING PROFESSION:  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
FOR  
TEACHERS AND STAFF

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## Introduction: Year Three

Looking back to where we started three short years ago, it is incredibly hard to believe the road we have traveled. The building climate and culture now defines us. The lessons of listening and observing have taught us well. Piloting the ship that is Millburn Elementary is nothing if not an opportunity for shared governance. We have evolved into a community of learners who are not content with the status quo, but rather seek opportunities of growth both in ourselves and in our colleagues.

I have acquired a new skill set. These past three years have taught me how to build a solid foundation by being an instructional leader. In providing an environment that encourages everyone in the building to be life long learners, I am fulfilling my responsibility as the instructional leader of the building. I have discovered that leading is about listening, teaching, and understanding. Reflecting on the professional development policy implemented at Millburn Elementary, I realize that it has become the practice that keeps us raising the bar higher to achieve greater.

It is imperative that teachers continue learning, and as the instructional leader of the building, it is imperative that the administrator makes that learning a reality. This is the philosophical basis with which my policy advocacy plan is based. New initiatives, changing curriculums, teacher evaluations, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning are aspects of education that need to be embraced. That being said, when a district expects their educators to implement such changes, then it is the responsibility of the district to support the educators by providing the necessary professional development. Whether I am the instructional leader at Millburn Elementary who provides professional development, or as years go by another administrator is at the helm, I am confident that the policy I am

advocating will remain because of the foundation that has been put in place. Teachers at Millburn Elementary are no longer hesitant because they are confident that with any new initiative come opportunities for professional development. My policy advocacy plan has done exactly what I set out to accomplish, I have encouraged teachers to continue learning, and I have proven to my district the value and impact on student learning with ongoing professional development.

When I started my journey three years ago, it was a personal journey. As I stand on the verge of this major accomplishment, I realize that others have played a significant role in getting me to where I now stand. To my staff at Millburn Elementary School who walk with me daily and inspire me to be my best, you have taught me the value of shared governance and the importance of being an instructional leader. To my husband and children who graciously took a back seat while I traveled on this journey, your support and encouragement has allowed me to realize my goal. Now, to you Dad, I've hung on every word, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." I have felt your presence with me as I traveled these past three years; this accomplishment is ours because while our time together was much too short, it has made all the difference in my life.

## CHAPTER ONE: VISION STATEMENT

Professional development activities take many forms in a school district and draw on knowledge, skills, perspectives, talents and contributions of all educators locally, regionally, and nationally. Professional development focuses on the knowledge and skill an instructional staff needs to create high levels of learning for all students. The goal of professional development is to improve student learning by supporting activities that are closely related to the work of teaching and the process of learning. Professional development opportunities should be provided to all employees that positively impact student achievement, effectively meet the needs of adult learners, and enhance the skills needed to successfully perform their responsibilities.

As a new principal in my district, I decided to spend much of the first year having conversations. My hope was that these conversations would give me insight to the building, the community, and the culture that defines Millburn Elementary. I knew that if I truly listened, I would gain much in my first year.

During my program evaluation I began looking at the impact of climate and culture in an elementary building. My program evaluation, in conjunction with my commitment to having important conversations, led me down roads that brought about interesting results.

The concept of the principal as an instructional leader has not been in practice at Millburn Elementary School. Historically, rather, the principal has handled discipline, talked with parents, and attended meetings. Traditionally, there has been very little teacher interaction with the principal throughout the day, and almost no student interaction with the principal, outside of discipline matters. The above statements were

brought forward in the analysis of staff surveys and direct conversations with teachers during my program evaluation.

An effective principal is someone who functions, not only as a community leader, but also more importantly as an instructional leader. Richard DuFour (2002) states that schools need the leadership from principals who focus on staff learning. Ed Finkel (2004) adds that principals have always been instructional leaders, but now that role is more prominent, and Billy Jenkins (2009) supports the two previous statements by adding that instructional leadership requires principals to focus their efforts on improving teaching and learning. Moving forward, this will be a different role for the building administrator at Millburn Elementary. For me, a visionary at heart, this is exactly what I have always wanted to be.

The teachers have expressed their disapproval for the lack of instructional leadership in the past. They have shared the desire for direction in the way that new initiatives like Common Core Standards and the Danielson Framework for Teaching are currently being implemented in our building. However, what is most exciting is that teachers are sharing with me the value they see in aligning all we do with the vision of where we are going.

Having a vision, that includes reflective thinking, is key when leading people. Listening to the needs of others, and truly leading “with” people, will make me a moral leader who will be a risk taker for the benefit of those I am leading.

The policy I am recommending centers on professional development for teachers and staff. As I stated, prior administrators had not considered themselves instructional leaders needing to provide ongoing instruction for teachers. An administrator cannot

continue to set policy and guidelines without also providing guidance. Prior to this year, that is exactly what had become the norm.

This situation has become critical within our building because the teachers and staff are communicating that things are no longer working. The new initiatives that I am initiating require ongoing teaching by administrators as well as the teachers. So now as the instructional leader, I am looking at what is the best way to accomplish this for the betterment of the Millburn community.

The vision that I have is to create ongoing, professional support for my teachers and staff. The teachers have done their part in communicating their desire to ethically support the change initiatives to the best of their ability. As an administrative instructional leader, I need to explore what will provide the level of support needed, as well as address the concerns of those directly impacted by the initiatives, and the practices that will evolve from implementing the new policy. The vision I have for Millburn Elementary is to assist my teachers and staff with the education they need to become self-assured with their knowledge base to become forward thinking individuals who will take risks to make our collective vision the new reality.

The implementation of a professional development policy will put learning into action. This policy will be instrumental in creating a practice where reflective conversations are the norm, where we learn as a community of learners through our actions. In the end, this professional development policy will allow me, the instructional leader of the building, to define the vision and the direction we need to take to learn through our actions.

## CHAPTER TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

In classrooms and school buildings everywhere, teachers are facing challenging situations. Teachers are struggling with deadlines and performance reviews, not to mention changes in state standards. Educators need continuous education if they want to excel in their career, as well as improve their abilities. It is very important for teachers to be constantly aware of growth opportunities, and teacher professional development is a recommended method to improvement.

When the focus of a school district includes providing quality opportunities to faculty and staff that will assist in their personal and professional development, that district is in support of life-long learning for all employees. Formalizing systems for ongoing professional learning are central to transforming our schools, and will serve as a major investment in teachers. Without such a system, districts continue to fail to maximize the potential of its' educators. A Finnish Government Official went so far as to state that empowering professional teachers to innovate allows them to find new ways to improve learning, Intel (2010).

Professional development is a strategy used by many schools and districts to strengthen the practice of educators throughout their career. Effective professional development will engage teachers and focus their needs on the student; this focus will involve teaching teachers to problem solve and learn together the strategies needed to ensure the success of all students.

Ask any parents and they will tell you that they expect their children to be in school daily. When it comes to teacher institute or professional development, families and employers are inconvenienced on in-service days that provide time for teacher

professional development. Yet when asked what they want for the students of today, those same parents and employers overwhelmingly agree that they want the highest quality teacher in the classroom teaching the workers of tomorrow.

When advocating for professional development for educators that meets the above stated standards, parents, policymakers, and the community as a whole are doing their part to ensure a successful educational experience for every child. John Dewey reminds us of the importance of our role as advocates when he states, “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children.”

Professional development refers to many different types of educational experiences that enrich ones career. In education, research has shown that quality and effectiveness of leaders, in addition to teacher quality, are the most important factors when it comes to raising student achievement (Jacob & Lefgren, 2002). Educators who do not receive professional development are not likely to improve their instruction, thus limiting the growth of the students. Advocating for educators and their needs for professional development, will for that reason, allow teachers to perform better in the classroom and assist in raising student achievement.

Many people think that professional development takes place in a rather formal environment such as a conference or workshop. While these are examples of professional development arenas, we should not overlook informal ways for professional development to occur. Collegial conversations and discussions, or independent reading, while not structured, often serve as means for improving learning for educators and students.

Teachers are likely to benefit most when learning in a setting where they can immediately put in place the skills being taught. For this reason, in school professional development opportunities should be given consideration. Training during the regular school day, before or after school on the teachers' own time, or even during a day set aside by the school district specifically designed for teacher development, will promote learning to take place in the work setting.

### **Educational Analysis**

It is commonly understood that professional development is designed to foster the growth and continued development of teachers. Providing educators with opportunities to learn in an active environment, supplying a means to enhance their content knowledge, as well as affording these educators an avenue for effective application, are a few examples of characteristics that can further the development of teachers. Today, teacher development is moving along a different path, changing from simple workshops and expanding into a more straightforward continuing education approach. Educators are actively pursuing learning opportunities that will broaden their understanding and align their teaching practices with standards and assessments.

How does the professional development of teachers' impact student performance? The connection may seem rather obvious. A report put out by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance found that teachers who receive considerable professional development could increase the achievement level of their students. In the quest for improved student outcomes, it is potentially promising that by implementing a professional development policy, teaching, and ultimately student learning, can be improved. Killion (1999) further supports this link by adding that well

prepared and trained teachers are more effective in the classrooms, continuing on to say that the best way to improve teacher effectiveness is through professional development. The impact of professional development can also be linked to The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) where researchers found the most important factor in student achievement was the quality of the teacher (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1998).

Professional development that has at its core, opportunities for active learning, planning, practice, and engagement in meaningful conversations is professional development aimed at teacher growth. Working together with fellow colleagues is likely to bring about a sense of professional community. For this reason, Gamoran and Godsky suggest that having professional development based in the school, and allowing for teacher reflection, will increase the likelihood of creating a tightly knit school community which ultimately benefits the educational experience for students (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993-1994). The idea of Professional Learning Communities and their benefits is not new to anyone in education. Richard DuFour (1998) spoke of the benefit of PLC's as a way to unite staff and lay a solid foundation to build a positive building climate and culture.

While research continues on the educational impact of professional development, what has been supported by researchers is the need for an effective educational system that consists of an infrastructure providing for on-going teacher instruction.

### **Economical Analysis**

Ideally, each district should have at its heart, a professional development strategy. But, how does a district continue to improve teaching quality during tough economic times? It looks at the relationship between teacher effectiveness and the financial impact

of higher achievement. Following on to the next step, districts have to consider the impact of low teacher effectiveness on economic growth. In order to provide students with the best outlook for career growth and job stability, districts must look at the teachers.

As a district begins its strategic plan, administrators must center their focus on clarifying a long-term professional development plan that is tied to improving student performance. Once clarified, the next step is to map out current spending as it applies to the long-term strategies and what is agreed to be best practice. Finally, with the current budget in mind, a district can look to reallocate funds that would provide financial support to the long-term strategies.

Those who advocate for school based professional development recommend that districts dedicate at least 10% of their budget for developing teacher skills. Suggestions also include that 25% of teacher work time be devoted to learning and collaboration with colleagues (National Staff Development Council, 2001). In support of this council, districts are beginning to add professional development time to the teacher workday. Learning during the school year allows educators to apply what they have learned, allowing students to benefit immediately.

### **Social Analysis**

Exploring teacher professional development from the social aspect is not something that is often studied. By definition, this analysis of professional development from the social aspect focuses on resources that teachers access from peer collaboration or from their own personal reflection. While a different lens, it will acknowledge the social aspect of teaching and professional development.

One such example of the social aspect of professional development is referred to as scenario building. This method will allow for strategic planning on the part of a district, school, or even a specific grade level. A strategic planning method allows those involved to understand the current situation, explore other options, discuss openly with stakeholders, and determine a pathway achieve outcomes.

We know that teacher learning can be modeled several ways. Halverson (2003) states that teachers need to share their practices, reflect upon and question these practices, and willingly accept suggestions from colleagues. This whole process underscores the importance of collaboration and could lead to districts restructuring their past professional development practices for newer ways to support staff.

In his advice to school leaders, Halverson also empowers teachers by giving teachers a role in making decisions about their professional development. When empowered to take the lead, teachers accept ownership of their work, which ultimately will set a path leading to self-advocacy and a true example of educational reform.

A recognized educational researcher and proponent of staff development, Michael Fullan (1995) contends that the investment in teacher professional development is of great importance not only for teaching and learning, but also for the teachers themselves. Furthermore, he notes that professional development is the sum of all informal and formal learning experienced by teachers in a learning environment under conditions of dynamic change.

Professional development will strengthen the knowledge base of teachers. Including the social aspect of professional development that underscores collaboration,

will allow for teachers to become part of the process off quality improvement of instruction.

### **Political Analysis**

In nearly every state in the country, the issues of educational reform and specifically raising student achievement are putting more and more demands on classroom teachers. In order to respond to the educational reform initiatives, teachers everywhere are changing their current practices and have the added the time consuming responsibility of learning new skills.

As teachers, schools, and districts begin to absorb the reform efforts and look to develop new practices, the first place attention is focused should be on the policymakers. Teachers require opportunities to deepen their understanding of new educational concepts. Improving teaching should be viewed as a long-term investment in a teacher's knowledge of pedagogy.

The importance of professional development and the need for school reform efforts to succeed are the very reasons why schools and district discuss best practices and factors that shape it. The elements necessary for the successful implementation of reform, or change, in schools have been well documented. However, political pressures have forced school change without allowing for any type of professional development. Without visible, meaningful support, reform efforts fail.

While most would agree that professional development is improving, most would also contend that best practices are not always the focus. For this reason, teachers often believe that professional development systems are more supportive of political goals rather than instructional goals.

It is of vital importance that our educational system provides effective education for our nation's students, because ensuring that every student has an effective teacher supports equity, democracy, and economic well being.

### **Moral and Ethical Analysis**

Teachers make a difference. Teachers are not only effective in promoting a strong social and emotional outlook, but they also have had a great deal of impact in turning around the educational setbacks of students. Educators influence the moral development of students by being a solid role model. When an educator solid in their beliefs and educational ability is teaching students, the teacher is modeling self-confidence.

Today with the many needs that students come to school with, teachers must have an opportunity to reflect and collaborate with other professionals and colleagues in order to cultivate an environment where all students achieve. At a time when schools are working so diligently to improve instruction, ethically, administrators should focus their instructional leadership on the development needs of their staff.

It is not logical to think that teachers have the innate ability to absorb all that is involved with the changes of educational reform. Administrators, while on a similar page with teachers, have the ability to improve the environment that many teachers find themselves in. By listening and observing their teachers, administrators can meet their moral obligation to provide the teachers support for aligning their teaching with the standards of the reform.

In addition to providing school development plans, districts are beginning to look at the development of individual teacher plans designed to enhance teacher careers.

Because the plan would be different from teacher to teacher, there wouldn't be one set plan. Administrators would create professional development targeted towards areas of challenge for each teacher.

The success of educational reform hinges on the effectiveness of teachers. For this reason, there is a clear need for new, alternative strategies for professional development.

### CHAPTER THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

Professional development consists of activities that focus on a plan that underscores goals and objectives of an organization. These activities are designed to promote growth in the field. As policy goals, I have focused on three specific goal areas continuous teacher education, student improvement, and the creation of a strong professional community.

Teachers of today find themselves dealing with more requirements than the teachers of old. As a result, continuous teacher education is a necessity if teachers are to continue to improve their skills and excel in their career. For these individuals, professional teacher development is a means by which this can be accomplished, as teacher professional development works to improve the complex skills needed to teach effectively.

Today, teachers must meet the ever-growing demand of higher academic performance for students. While teachers should not necessarily be held completely responsible for a decline in student test scores or student achievement, there does exist a correlation between teachers who continue to participate in professional development programs and improved student learning. When a teacher is knowledgeable and qualified, it means everything in regards to the performance level of the student.

As teachers look to professional development to improve their skills, at the same time, they also improve their professional community. When professional development opportunities are building wide and include all teachers, it is more likely that the morale of the entire learning community will increase. Shared values, common standards, and

shared expectations affect student and teacher outcomes, thus improving the overall school climate.

Millburn School District has a general personnel policy for staff professional development. The policy states that the Superintendent, or someone designated by the Superintendent, shall implement the staff development. The goal of the program is to update and improve the skills and knowledge of staff members in order to achieve and maintain a high level of job performance and satisfaction. Additionally, the staff development program shall be designed to assist the staff in accomplishing the District and School Improvement Plans so that student learning objectives meet or exceed goals established by the District and State.

In addition, the staff development program shall provide, at a minimum, once every two years, the in service training of all District staff on educator ethics, teacher-student conduct, and school employee-student conduct.

In August, just prior to the beginning of the school year, teachers and staff receive two days of professional development. During this time, administrators in the district provide opportunity for staff and teachers to be educated and brought up to date on various aspects of student learning. Some of the professional development sessions are whole group, while other sessions are more customized and involve specific groups of teachers. Either way it is imparted, these professional development opportunities allow for teachers and staff to begin their year taking purposeful steps in the direction of student achievement.

Once these two days have been completed, the only additional professional development received by the teachers and staffs throughout the school year are those that

they request and attend on their own. So while the policy is in place and practiced annually, concerns from the staff speak to the need for ongoing professional development, not only at the beginning of the year, but throughout it. Listening to the desire for ongoing learning from the teachers has shown me that although there is a policy in place, it is not sufficient. In order for a policy to have an impact, it truly needs to become a “living document,” rather than being a page in a binder that sits on a shelf.

Tinkering around the edges of staff development is insufficient. When the goal is quality professional learning opportunities that will benefit students who are in our schools, adding a day or two to the in-service calendar is not enough.

Professional development provides for an improvement in the area of teaching and learning. Ed Finkel (2012) brings an interesting point to the surface when he writes that teachers need to be guided. This paradigm shift of schools operating in this manner creates a shared ownership of student results. This way of professional development starts with the educator sharing their thoughts and ideas about what areas need guidance; this truly becomes an example of shared governance.

As part of my commitment to an ongoing staff development policy, due diligence will be conducted in the area of the following policy objectives: create a plan for continual growth, develop support for the staff, and cultivate teacher leadership.

Creating the kind of dynamic learning arena that will prepare students for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning requires teacher learning. The change in teacher focus brings with it the need for teachers to be supported and expected to continually develop their skills. The development of a teacher assessment would be one way to provide support and direction.

Continuous, meaningful learning opportunities must be upheld and built into a schedule, as it is the primary manner of supporting staff. When this is done, it sets the tone for expectations and serves as a guide for all staff. Administrators can coordinate outside expertise to come to the building with the needs and goals of the teachers driving the professional development topics.

Most often, the administrators of a building diagnose and address the needs of teachers, often looking past others who could offer input as teacher leaders. It is these teachers, once nurtured and developed, who can lead in school professional development activities. Principals can work collaboratively with lead teachers to identify particular areas that need improvement, and also create an avenue for communication and instruction with colleagues that address the identified concern.

Regardless the quality of a college or university attended, teachers cannot expect the knowledge imparted to sustain them throughout their career. For this reason, teachers need this policy to be advocated. Continuous professional development needs to be in the forefront in order to update the skills and knowledge of the educator.

Beyond their initial education, teachers will deepen their knowledge and flourish with professional development. The instruction of students today is recognized as complex. When teachers receive the support that they need, schools retain quality teachers in the profession and assist them in areas that require additional attention.

As with the students, teacher professional learning is also complex. Teachers' needs are supported when they are cognitively and emotionally tied to their learning. This will be accomplished when teacher learners are involved in the development topics

being discussed, the data that is gathered, and the reflection following the completion of the professional development.

Good teaching is not something that happens with luck. Teaching is the result of study, reflection, and practice. Whether a student is a high achiever or one who requires continued support, students' needs can be addressed through effective professional development. An educator will never know all the ways in which a student learns, but when teachers regularly engage in professional development, they gain the knowledge needed to continually meet the needs of students.

The requirements of teaching are constantly changing, which is the reason for teacher requests for professional development. Meeting the needs for professional development is of value to educators. In addition to updating their knowledge and skills teachers' value professional development because it enables schools to develop teacher expertise, create and apply new strategies, and assist teachers in becoming more effective in the classroom.

In meeting the needs and values of the educator, professional development programs also bring value to the schools that employ these educators. Professional development that is ongoing, directed at the needs of the student population, and supportive of practice and feedback, will also encourage learning communities for teachers, and bring with it added value to the school.

A shared vision in support of ongoing professional development will have a lasting impact on the teacher, the student, and the school. High expectations for educators will positively impact their careers. When teachers participate in sustained and

intense professional development, it is likely to have an impact on their knowledge and skills.

An important factor in student achievement is teacher quality. For this reason, student preference and needs areas are to be considered when creating professional development events. In addition, schools will benefit from evaluation procedures being included in the professional development activity. The evaluation will provide feedback to the effectiveness of the activity.

Schools realize that a “one size fits all” manner of designing professional development opportunities will not benefit teachers. Teachers, even those within the same school facility, have differing needs. Creating development activities with thoughtful preparation and specific outcomes will optimize the development experience. Schools that continually search for professional development events that are high quality and aimed at student outcomes will be beneficial for teachers, students, and the school.

The goals and objectives, which serve as the strategic plan for professional development, are created after identifying the needs of the educator. In order to give the presenter a method to determine the success of the professional development presentation, objectives need to be established - objectives such as continual growth, staff support, and cultivating teacher leaders. Professional development goals should be broad and abstract; such as continuous education, student improvement, and strong professional community.

As a result of the planning that has gone into this professional development policy, the teachers will have a clear idea of what professional development is, what it will do, and the challenges they may face. However, if the professional development

plan is followed, it will enhance the knowledge and pedagogy of the teacher, while enhancing the achievement and responsiveness of students, thus creating a beneficial school environment.

## CHAPTER FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

Successful teachers must have a solid understanding of the subject material they teach. High quality teachers are the most important asset of schools (Hanushek, 2010). Continuous learning, through teacher professional development opportunities, is necessary for those educators who want to excel in their profession. Through professional development, educators have the ability to learn and practice new strategies that assist in delivering subject material to students. Teachers today are expected to meet higher academic performance expectations, and through professional teacher development, teacher quality and understanding of pedagogy is enhanced.

School-wide opportunities for professional development play a role in an educator's sense of professional community. As Gamoran (2006) states teachers who participate in professional development report stronger professional communities. I have seen first hand, during professional learning with the staff in my building, that a stronger sense of community is built when individual teachers participate with other teachers. When teachers feel a sense of community, the building morale is increased, along with teacher commitment to the school and the students.

Teachers rarely have the opportunity to work and learn together. Professional development experiences can foster an environment for effective teacher collaboration. Whenever possible, educators should be encouraged to share their expertise and learning experiences with colleagues. Collaboration takes time to schedule; however, the effort will surely be worth it in the end. When professional development is organized well, educators receive value from it (Welsh, 2010).

The success of school improvement and education reform initiatives can hinge largely on the effectiveness and quality of teachers. Professional teacher development has an impact on enhancing the knowledge and skills of teachers, which directly correlates to student achievement. Schools will want to use an evaluative tool that follows the professional development to understand the impact on teacher competencies and hopefully also on student learning.

During this time period, professional development was often times conducted in ways that alienated educators rather than assisting in creating a collaborative learning environment. When teachers were expected to take part in a “one size fits all” approach to professional learning, they often have felt that topics did not address the real challenges that they faced daily, as individuals, in their schools and classrooms.

As pointed out earlier, families and employers are inconvenienced on teacher institute days or when school is dismissed early or starts late, in order for teachers to receive instruction. Parents expect their children to be in school and employers expect employees to come to work. Even with the understanding that professional development is the most effective means to educate the educator, disgruntled parents still voice their views. I remain hopeful that even with the inconveniences, parents will realize the benefits to teachers and students far out weigh the scheduling glitches.

A preponderance of the teacher training continues to take place at off-site venues. When educators participate in workshops that are not in their school or district they can be at a disadvantage. Off-site activities do not allow for teacher collaboration with peers, peer observations in the classroom, or benefits of coaching or mentoring from the expert

leading the workshop. A more advantageous option would be for professional development to take place in the school (Dove, 2013) .

On several occasions I have had conversations with teachers who share that, although they would like to attend a workshop, the time required to get ready to be out of the classroom for an entire day is simply not worth the effort. I understand their feelings because I know the complexity of arranging for such participation in professional growth; the seemingly simple preparatory task of locating and filling out the form can easily take most of their plan time. Then a substitute needs to be arranged to cover their class while the teacher is gone. The next day when the teacher arrives at the workshop, they spend an hour participating in “getting to know you” games, only to realize that the instruction is aimed towards middle school teachers, and they are Kindergarten teachers.

Unfortunately, this is the scenario that happens all too often. Not only have the educators lost an opportunity for their own professional growth, the students back at school are losing critical instruction time with their teachers. Too often, the high quality professional development that is so vital to teachers long term effectiveness just does not happen the way it was intended.

## CHAPTER FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Brookover and Lezotte (2009) stated that the idea of professional development focusing on improving teaching and learning was a relatively new concept that emerged in the early 1980's, sharing that effective schools usually had principals who stressed professional development. A change came only ten years later in the early 1990's, where attention to instructional leadership moved discussions to that of school-based management. More recently, we are beginning to see a return to instructional leadership with importance placed on academic standards and school accountability.

At one time, teacher professional development consisted of relatively passive educators coming together to be made aware of changes in education by individuals believed to be experts. Today, professional development provides data-driven decision making, on-going training, and intensive follow up. The paradigm for teacher professional development has shifted and continues to improve. As administrators, we now recognize that in order to make a difference in the advancement of teachers, students, and schools, quality professional development is needed.

Teachers are quick to report that professional development changes many of the practices they use in the classroom while also transforming the learning experiences for their students. Most believe that high quality professional development offers opportunities to practice shared ideas in their classroom, sustaining these practices over time, thus creating a community of resource rich collaborators.

In order for professional development to be effective, it should to be collaborative, focused on continued improvement, and supported by the best research based information available. Good professional development opportunities will allow

educators to adapt what is presented in ways that will bring about the most benefit for all participants. As I begin to advocate for professional development at Millburn Elementary I want to be sure that a skillful leader who will deliver the instruction in such a way as to guide continuous improvement would present the activities. In addition, it is important to ensure that resources that support the learning and collaboration of the group will be readily available.

Professional development should be a priority in all districts. Anyone who affects student learning, from central office administration, principals, teachers, student support staff, even Board of Education members must continue to improve their knowledge and skills in order to positively effect students; everyone needs to take on the responsibility for professional development. Today professional development has to include on going training with intensive follow up and support, which will allow for data-driven, decision making. Speaking from a design perspective, professional development, which has as its goal improved student learning, will use strategies appropriate to that goal. Ensuring that research based materials are used will not only improve the learning for all students, but will also prepare the educator to apply research when making decisions. When focused on data, staff development that improves student learning will disaggregate student data to determine the priorities for adult learning, which will assist in sustained continuous improvement.

If professional development is going to be effective, the plan that is created is going to need to be collaboratively developed. Through the collaborative process, change efforts for student improvement will include providing an avenue to support colleagues as they begin the process of blending new ideas and skills with current practices and

expertise. In creating a collaborative environment, high quality professional development will be laying the foundation where learning communities can begin and where all staff members are focused on improving student achievement.

Normally, the time provided for teacher learning is during the school day, with the location being at an off site facility. As I explained earlier, because teacher professional development is an integral part of their careers, adult learning that takes place during the school day within the school building is most effective. For this reason, I have taken advantage of the implemented block schedule in my building to provide monthly professional development during grade level team time, while the students are participating in their Specials classes. I chose this time and setting because the intent of the professional development for my staff is for teacher practice to follow instruction.

Challenges do exist for districts attempting to stay current with adult learning and perhaps the greatest challenge is funding. I have shared with my Superintendent that the guiding principle for the use of my professional development would always be to put in place activities that will lead to teacher improvement, student learning, and student achievement. Knowing that The Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 (SB 380) states that one percent of the foundation formula money received by each school district must be used for professional development that enhances student learning, funding at Millburn remains limited at best.

Funding is only one small way that a district shows support for professional development. Administrators in my district are fortunate to have the ongoing support of our Superintendent and Board of Education for professional development. They encourage learning opportunities that keep our educators on the cutting edge and our

students achieving at higher rates every year. For this reason when approached, my Superintendent fully supported the staff professional development plan implemented in my building during the 2012-2013 school year. The numerous components of my staff development plan are explained below in detail.

Millburn District 24 chose to implement a teacher evaluation program, for the 2012-2013 school year, that closely mirrored Charlotte Danielson's framework for teaching. In conversation with several staff members, I became aware of the anxiety and concern they felt over the idea of being evaluated, not to mention, the plan itself. I felt that the easiest way to walk the staff through a year that was going to bring about significant change was to walk right along with them. I knew that I could break down the teachings of Charlotte Danielson into a way that showed what good teaching looked like, while also bringing down their level of anxiety regarding the evaluation process.

My plan was simple; however, I now needed to create the framework for staff development lessons that would include educational activities designed to bring my staff along as the implementation of an evaluation plan was implemented district wide.

Since I knew that funding would be a factor, so I designed a plan that would permit instruction to take place in the elementary building, which also allowed for teachers to put what they learned into practice immediately. It was important to bring teachers who worked in grade level teams together at a similar time, without meeting too often and overwhelming them. The block schedule already in place in the elementary building provides for daily grade level team time while students are in their Specials classes. If I were to utilize this time, I had 45 minutes to meet with each grade level team of teachers. I maximized our time efficiently, sharing enough information that put the

staff at ease, while also providing for grade level team articulation on the days following the professional development. These meetings took place on the first Monday of each month.

Each of our learning sessions were introduced with a power point presentation that instructed the staff on an aspect of Charlotte Danielson's framework. I would begin the power point with the objective of the lesson, followed by the activity for the session, as well as a way of providing closure and teacher reflection following the professional development. I kept to this structure for all of the professional development activities during the year, so that the staff had consistency and knew how each development session would be presented.

Midway through the year, I surveyed the staff to gain feedback on whether the professional development instruction was applicable to their position, and did the staff feel anything needed to be added or removed from my instruction. The data received allowed for my planning for the remainder of the year to be targeted exactly where the staff felt they needed the instruction to be dedicated. While suggestions were given and changes were made, the overall feedback from staff and my Superintendent was positive.

## CHAPTER SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

Consistent with the belief of those in the field of education, students deserve high quality teaching. The same is true for the educators implementing curriculum with the highest of standards daily in the nations schools. Systems must be developed and put in place that will create a partnership between teachers and administrators, that will also allow for support of the educator, while providing opportunities for high student achievement.

A conversation with the Board of Education, to fully explain the need for the staff development, is the first step for the building administrator. This conversation will create an awareness while also laying out the overall information and a schedule for communication with the Board of Education throughout the school year. Information shared will also consist of a review of objectives, the activities planned, and data that will be provided at the year's end.

The professional development plan I began to implement in my building also involved the creation of a progress monitoring tool to ensure that I was aligning my instruction with the teachings of Charlotte Danielson, not to mention the mission and vision of Millburn District 24. I truly feel that the monitoring of progress should be a continuous process, essential for assessing the quality and effectiveness of the staff development. This tool will specify what is to be accomplished, a schedule stating when topics will be introduced to staff, and the manner in which to the staff development will be implemented.

Finally, a means to measure and to evaluate the staff development for outcomes will be reviewed. This final step is of substantial importance to ensure that the plan

aligns with student learning expectations, is documented with credible research, and will tolerate annual reviews conducted.

As the building administrator, and the primary person charged with the implementation of this policy, the role of the principal is monumental in the success of the plan. The administrator begins by identifying the professional development needs for the instructional staff. Once the need is established, documentation of the congruity between objectives and the district mission is documented. Moving forward the building principal will communicate the importance of the effective instruction that will be received over the course of the coming school year. The creation of a staff development plan, consistent with monitoring, is then put in place. As the year progresses, the building administrator will oversee the implementation, recommending modifications as the year and staff development is put in place.

In order for the Board of Education and Superintendent to be kept abreast of the policy implementation, the building principal will provide each member with an outline of the implementation, starting with the scope and sequence of what will be taught to the staff. The outline will specifically state the objective of the staff development, the method of instruction, and the closure activity for each staff development session. In addition, the schedule of meetings for the year will be provided. At the end of the school year, the Board of Education and the Superintendent will be provided with an assessment synopsis, complete with documentation of teacher feedback.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

In today's current educational setting, teachers find themselves facing stressful situations. In a world of teacher evaluations, ever changing curricular challenges, and having to meet high expectations regarding student achievement, there is no doubt about the benefits educators will receive from participating in professional development opportunities.

Teacher professional development is a recommended method of improvement, not only of teacher skill, but also of the classroom environment. Teachers and students both benefit from on going teacher learning. Continuous education is necessary for any educator who wants to excel in their career and improve their expertise. Making professional development readily available will assist in doing just that. Those who have participated in professional development opportunities speak to the correlation between professional development programs and student achievement. Knowledge obtained by the educator means everything in regards to student performance. There also exists the creation of a stronger professional community of high quality teachers where professional development programs are in place. When teachers have a strong sense of professional community, morale will be better and teacher commitment will be higher.

At the center of a policy that values professional development is the belief that teachers should continue to improve. Professional development is a strategy used to ensure that educators will continue to strengthen their practice. Overwhelmingly, parents and stakeholders want the best possible teacher in place in each classroom. The best way to ensure this is by supporting teacher professional development. Educators who do not experience effective professional development will not improve their skills, and in the

end students will suffer. The correlation between student achievement and professional development means that those who want to see schools making steady progress will be supportive of on going teacher education.

Reflecting on the implementation of a professional development policy clearly aligns with the district's vision. Focusing on ways to improve student achievement leads one to look directly at teacher improvement. Effective professional development will enable educators to learn ways to meet the needs and challenges of all their students.

Teachers belong in the classroom daily to impart knowledge. For this reason, and another point consistent with vision, speaks directly to professional development being most effective when conducted in the context of the educator's daily work. When development activities and learning occurs where teachers can immediately put in place what is learned, they realize the benefits much faster. As I lead the professional development in my building, the teachers have begun to analyze and articulate their thoughts and ideas among the members of their grade level team.

There are those in charge of organizing professional development that have not received any training. Professional development will not be effective unless it causes teachers to improve their instruction and causes administrators to become better school leaders; both of which align with the vision of my district.

The final reflection piece as I look to the impact that a professional development plan would have on the district, I look to the various stakeholders that make up my district. Beginning with the students, their needs are certainly being considered as I again state that student achievement is closely aligned with the educators continuing their pursuit of higher learning. As I reflect on the concerns of parents, providing professional

development during the school day ensures an uninterrupted routine that supports high achievement for their children. Community stakeholders, wanting to maintain high quality schools, are also focused on educator training as they seek to maintain quality schools within their neighborhood. Finally, the educator themselves want to continue to sharpen their skills, improve student outcomes, and participate in discussions with colleagues that will open their minds to new alternatives of imparting knowledge.

For me, the idea of professional development is much more than a policy. It speaks to the very heart of administrators being instructional leaders in their building; leading from a moral perspective while understanding the value of constantly improving student achievement. For a school to achieve all of this requires a shared commitment dedicated to the support of educators and the implementation of a professional development policy.

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