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# *Preface*

## *Districtwide Professional Development: The Pieces of the Puzzle*

**E**very district across the nation is currently focused on teacher quality and student achievement. Recent landmark federal initiatives (e.g., Race to the Top) provide financial resources to school districts, which are then charged with measuring student achievement in relation to specific learning standards. These initiatives have one element in common: the recognition that powerful professional development plays a central role in the transformation of teachers who are committed to high levels of learning and performance for all students and staff members. These resources, including the Title I Elementary and Secondary Education Act (\$24.5 billion), the federal School Improvement Grants (SIG; \$3.546 billion), and the competitive federal grant Race to the Top (RTTT; \$4.35 billion), require school districts to design and implement a comprehensive, powerful, job-embedded professional development plan.

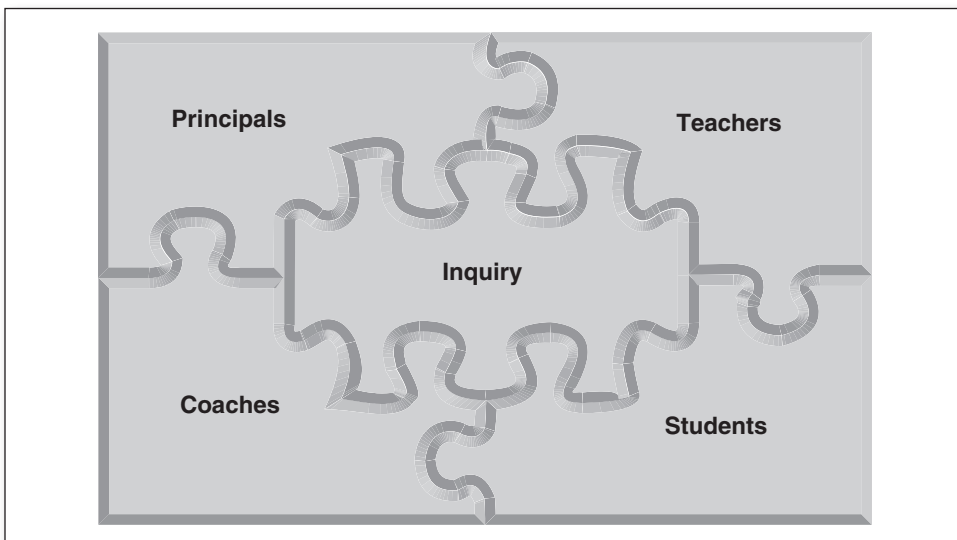
All school districts across the nation are held to the mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and its assurance that all students are proficient in reading and mathematics. A significant tenet of NCLB requires districts to develop, implement, and sustain a quality professional development plan in which all students and staff members are learners who continually improve their performance. By emphasizing the critical role of professional development, the federal government has signaled its belief in the importance of creating quality educators as central to improving student achievement. In addition, numerous states are involved in a federal initiative titled Differentiated Accountability (DA). This pilot program has been developed to assist states in differentiating between underperforming schools in need of dramatic interventions and those that are closer to meeting the goals of NCLB. Sixteen participating DA states (Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Tennessee) are required to vary the intensity and type of interventions to match the academic reasons that lead to a school's identification as

needing improvement. Comprehensive, systematic, professional development is a fundamental requirement of DA. DA states and districts must ensure that appropriate resources are provided to accommodate common planning time, job-embedded professional development, and professional learning communities. In addition, districts are responsible for providing technical assistance to identify job-embedded professional development and sufficient human resources to deliver a focused professional development model, including instructional coaches, lead teachers, and experts in coaching professional learning communities (PLCs). States participating in the DA pilot clearly recognize that a powerful professional development plan is critical for significant reform.

Focusing on teacher quality and student achievement through targeted professional development is an absolute necessity for districts across the nation. What is not certain is *how* to make this happen. Hence, this book was written to help districts define, develop, and implement a comprehensive, systematic approach to districtwide professional development targeted at the learning of all members of the system: adults and students alike. It is with a laser-like focus on adult and student learning simultaneously across a school district that teacher quality and student achievement can improve.

Although it is essential, the creation of a comprehensive, systematic approach to professional development that spans an entire district is a daunting and complex task, similar to putting together a very intricate and complicated jigsaw puzzle. For this reason, we use a jigsaw puzzle metaphor as an organizer for this book, to introduce components necessary to build a successful districtwide professional development program (see Figure P.1).

**Figure P.1** Building a Successful Districtwide Professional Development Plan



## ABOUT THIS BOOK

We begin by describing the core of the puzzle: inquiry. Although there are multiple models and iterations of the inquiry process (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), in this book we discuss one model we have found to be particularly useful to both scaffold the learning of a district's adults and students and develop a productive disposition, or stance, adults and students take toward their learning. The model of inquiry we describe involves educators and students in defining questions they are passionate about exploring, collecting and analyzing data to inform their questions, and sharing what they have learned in the process with others.

Although we present inquiry as an essential and core piece of the districtwide professional development plan puzzle, we recognize that there are multiple considerations districts must take into account. In fact, there are so many things to consider that it is easy for professional development across a district to feel like an endless bombardment of current initiatives coming at principals, teachers, and students, one after another in rapid succession. We placed inquiry at the core of the puzzle to demonstrate that the many demands across district, school, and classroom roles can be tackled and unified using a similar inquiry process. Hence, our discussion of inquiry in the Introduction is not intended to cover every single component in depth. Rather, our intent is to illuminate the ways inquiry provides a healthy and productive frame for all professional development that occurs in a district, providing a sense of continuity to the many piecemeal initiatives that are often mandated by state and federal powers.

Following the Introduction, we explore each of the puzzle pieces that interlock with inquiry, one by one. Parts I, II, and III of this book focus on the important constituencies in a district that benefit from engaging in the inquiry process: principals, teachers, and students. Although it might seem more logical to begin the discussion of professional development with teachers in Part I of this book, we purposely begin with principals. We chose to focus our gaze on the administrator in Part I based on our own experiences in cultivating and studying powerful districtwide professional development across the nation (see, e.g., Dana, 2009; Dana, Tricarico, & Quinn, 2010). From our work, we have learned that it is essential for administrators to understand and buy into the inquiry process in order for powerful professional learning to unfold across a district. Because the critical role the principal plays in the process is often overlooked, we decided to begin the book with these important educators.

Following the focus on principals in Part I, teachers and students are explored in Parts II and III of the book. Because the learning of all three of these constituencies (principals, teachers, and students) is directly dependent on the coaching they receive, Part IV of this text is devoted to a discussion of the role coaches play and how to develop strong coaches across a school district.

Each Part of this book contains two chapters. In each first chapter, we define the ways the inquiry process can play out specifically with each constituency, discuss the benefits and challenges of inquiry with this particular group, and discuss a generic plan for inquiry to unfold with this constituency in a district. Another important feature included in each of these chapters is the list of selected additional resources for further reading. It would be impossible in one book to cover everything an educator needs to know about inquiry, with so many constituencies across a district. The suggested resources take the reader deeper and further into the power and process of inquiry as an approach to professional development district-wide. It takes strong facilitation to build a district culture of inquiry, and further readings and participation in training offered by such national organizations as Learning Forward, National School Reform Faculty, and Coalition of Essential Schools are suggested to help the reader successfully carry out the work described in this book.

The second chapters in Parts I through IV of this book illustrate engagement in inquiry for each constituency with real stories from districts engaging in this work. Many of these stories are derived from our work with the Lastinger Center for Learning at University of Florida. This Center partners with four large districts in our state—Collier County Public Schools, Duval County Public Schools, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and Pinellas County Schools—to provide meaningful and powerful professional development with a particular focus on meeting the needs of teachers and administrators working in the most challenging contexts (high-need, high-poverty schools). Much of our work is in a job-embedded graduate degree program for teachers and administrators in these districts called the “Teacher Leadership for School Improvement Program.” Engagement in inquiry is the signature feature of this program, and our research has revealed the power inquiry holds to unleash the potential of teachers and administrators to enact school improvement (see, e.g., Adams, Ross, Swain, Dana, Leite, & Sandbach, 2011; Ross, Adams, Bondy, Dana, Dodman, & Packer, 2010; Wolkenhauer, Boynton, & Dana, 2011). This program was named the 2011 Distinguished Program in Teacher Education by the Association of Teacher Educators.

The stories we share in the second chapters of each part of this book, based on our award-winning work with four large school districts in Florida, are included simply to help concretize the ways inquiry can play out across a district; they are not meant to be replicated in districts across the nation. Rather, we hope that these stories of challenge and success will spark your best ideas and thinking for the utility and transferability of inquiry to your own context. To enable this process, Parts I, II, III, and IV of the book end with “Questions for Discussion,” to help apply what is illustrated in each part of the book to your own educational practice.

Finally, in the Conclusion to this book, we discuss the entire puzzle illustrated in Figure P.1 as a whole, highlighting what central office administrators

might do to create an inquiry culture: the glue that holds all of the puzzle pieces together and leads to enhanced teacher quality and increased student achievement.

## WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

Today's practicing professionals, whether they are based in a central office, school, or classroom, live in an era of accountability and top-down mandates that can quickly become frustrating and overwhelming. A common bond that unites central office administrators, principals, and teachers is the struggle to make sense of mandates and, at the same time, have ownership of and voice in what it takes to excel in their positions and ensure student success. This book was written for superintendents, curriculum directors, professional developers, principals, teachers at all grade levels, and professional development coaches. It is intended to help all members of a district reclaim their voices as educators in an increasingly demanding and critical education world. By developing one coherent approach to professional learning across a district, district and school-based administrators, teachers, and even students can tackle the real-world challenges and dilemmas they face every day. This book provides a roadmap for each of these constituencies to take control of their own learning.

In addition to the primary audiences for this book, school boards of education may utilize this text to develop a better understanding of the intricate nature of teaching and learning and the subsequent complexity inherent in the provision of professional development across a district. For board members, who often approve funding for professional development endeavors, this book helps to illuminate that the success of a district in meeting the needs of all of its employees and students cannot rely on a single professional development event offered once a year or the mandating of one specific training. With this knowledge, school board members can help garner support and resources for more effective and longer-lasting professional development that works.

Finally, this book is for faculty in higher education who have often suffered from the pervasive "silo effect" in education characterized by K–12 teachers isolated in classrooms (Schmoker, 2006), schools isolated in communities (Bundy, 2005; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009), faculty members isolated in offices (Cox, 2004), and departments conducting insular work within their disciplines (Cox, 2004). Because of the insular nature of education entities, some colleges of education have fallen out of touch with the current needs of schools, making all colleges of education vulnerable to the growing claim that teacher education programs are to blame for problems in the field (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010). This book can help faculty in higher education and their students reconnect with the current needs of schools and envision a better

educational system designed to constantly reinvent itself through the inquiry and action of all stakeholders: superintendents and central office administrators, principals, teachers, and students.

Whoever you are, a basic understanding of the inquiry process is essential. So, let us begin building the districtwide professional development plan puzzle from its core, with an examination of inquiry.