Professional Practices

For the 21st Century Leader

Making PSEL Come Alive!
There Is No Need for "Guess What's on My Mind... or Theirs"

About the Author

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Recently, I've been thinking about my first days as a principal. The enthusiasm and optimism I had is observable across the country as principals begin to reflect on the year that is closing and consider the new one approaching. I wanted to spend some time on **Professional Standards for Education Leaders 2015** Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel and **Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers and Staff**. The areas of focus in this issue of **Professional Practices for the 21st Century Leader** are:

- The necessity of assuming the leadership of a new school with strongly held and clearly communicated priorities
- How to know if you really have a professional learning community or are just faking it
- Insights on mentoring with practical resources galore
- The implications of PSEL for professional development for principals

What's a Principal to Do?

One beautiful spring day the district superintendent came to visit my school. I was pleased, but surprised. I had invited her many times, but not on this particular day. I was eager to have her visit classrooms with me and see the growth in teaching and learning that I saw every day. That wasn't her plan. She wanted to discuss my reassignment to a new school for the coming year. She began, "Because of the turnaround work you've done here, the School Board and I would like you to do the same at Sunshine School (fictional name) What do you think?" Hmmm, I thought. This wasn't a really a question or a matter open for discussion, was it? Nope, it was a request. Once I wrapped my head around the change, I was able to focus on letting go of the old and moving on to the new challenge.

What do you do when you find out that you're being moved to a new school next year, perhaps one that the district and state has deemed failing, or you are a getting your first school? Where do you start? Read on to see where I begin.

Marcia's Priorities When Assuming Leadership of a New School

- **Understanding the Attitudes, Skills, and Knowledge (ASK) of the Staff**
- **Establishing Organization and Structures**
- **Setting the Culture of the School**
- **Supporting Professional Learning**

Priority #1: Understand the Attitudes, Skills, and Knowledge (ASK) of the Staff

I was introduced to the new faculty prior to school letting out for the year and was able to leave them with a letter. In the letter, I offered a bit about me, my family, and my commitment to them and the students. I invited them to a series of getting-to-know each other lunches I would hold throughout the summer. My goal for the gatherings was to ease fears about change and try to understand their attitudes, skills, and knowledge (ASK) around their learners, their content, and their pedagogy. I developed a series of questions that I used with each lunch group and, as time went by, I began to see patterns in their responses that gave me insight into their thinking and possible moves forward. The questions I posed were:

- What are three things that we should change about our school right away?
- What are three things we should not change?
- How would you describe the students? The parents? The teachers?
- Why do you believe the school is underperforming?
- What do you need from me to better do your job?

Priority #2: Establish Organization and Structures

Communicate core values in a variety of ways through direct communication and non-negotiables embedded in organizational structures. For instance,

- Instructional Scheduling
  - Large blocks for uninterrupted instructional time.
  - Reading and mathematics blocks with detailed lesson components posted on doors allowed for ease of monitoring instruction.
  - Expectation that instruction would be bell to bell, active, and on-target.
- Leadership Teams and Shared Decision-Making
  - Representatives have a responsibility to communicate to team.
  - Representatives have a role in making resource decisions.
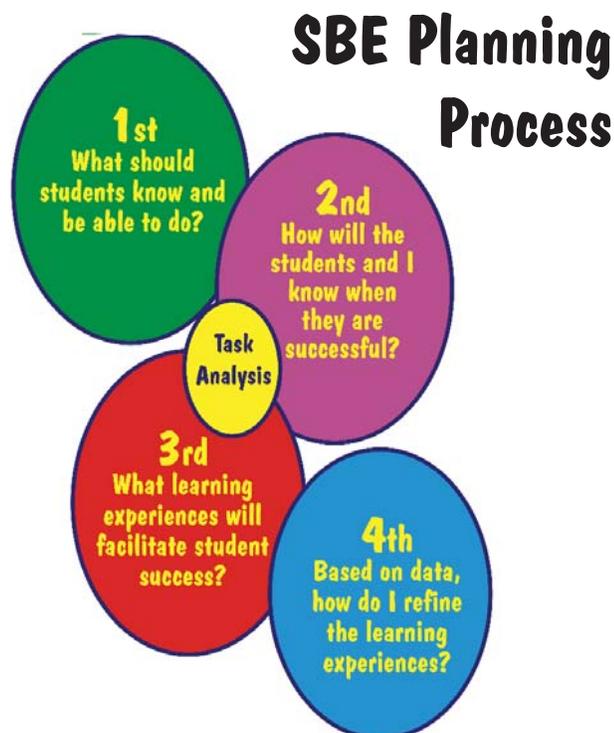 - Representatives have accountability for follow-

through with the team.
- Behavior Management and Support is Student-Centered
  - Frequency of referrals and reasons for those referrals are monitored and evaluated (For example, teachers sending students out of class for minor infractions).
  - Establish the expectation that when office referrals are made the principal goes to the student. Students should not be sent to the office holding a referral. Consider setting up an in-school suspension program that has a mentoring/counseling component.
  - Examine data on retention and failures; make a plan to drastically reduce year one.
- Communication is Open, Honest, and Clear
  - Set expectations that parent communications will be prompt, within 24 hours.
  - Call parents for good reasons too.
  - Keep an open door policy.
  - Listen without judging and ask follow-up questions.
  - Give timely, honest feedback that is goal directed.
  - Meet with parents; include teachers and child when appropriate.

Priority #3: Set the Culture of the School

- Norms of Behavior are Modeled and Communicated
  - Facilitate shared beliefs to shape the normative environment of schools--an important aspect of the culture of the school. Common norms include collegiality, trust, traditions, honesty, high expectations. Recognize them when you see them.
  - Hold people accountable to adhering to the norms
  - **Tip**: My Just ASK colleague, Julie McVicker shared her perspective on leadership for change. She communicates key actions that need to be taken followed by what she expected from her staff and what they could expect of her. (See page 42 in *Creating a Culture for Learning*.)
- Expectations are Clear in Words and Acts

- Be clear about your non-negotiables. What will you not bend on?
- Every child deserves an excellent education delivered by an excellent teacher. See to it that this happens!
- Develop Individual and Collective-Efficacy
  - Self-efficacy is the confidence a teacher has in their own ability to improve student performance.
  - Collective-efficacy is the perception of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students. The faculty in general agrees that they can get through to the most challenging students.
- Feedback and Growth for All is Key
  Keep in mind **Michael Fullan's Implementation Dip** for yourself and others. With the introduction of new materials, new behaviors and practices, and new beliefs and understandings, things get worse before they get better. As the leader of the change, expect it and try to minimize it as you continue the journey. Manage the dip by providing resources; support and train staff; monitor their progress and give feedback; and look for and analyze the newly emerging gaps.

Priority #4 Support Professional Learning
- Isolation is not an option
  - Expect teachers to work together to plan, share ideas, and support each other..

- Personally attend meetings and professional development to learn, scaffold, and support.
- Standards-Based Planning is Required
  This involves what we at Just ASK call the **SBE Planning Process Ovals**. (See the graphic below and **Chapter V: Best Practice in Teaching and Learning** in *Creating a Culture for Learning*.)
  - Oval 1: Identify what students need to know and be able to do.
  - Oval 2: Identify how the students and you will know when they are successful.
    (with a task analysis completed at this point)
  - Oval 3: Identify the learning experiences that will facilitate their success.
  - Oval 4: Refine new learning experiences, based on data.
- Use Data to Drive Instructional Decisions (See **Chapter VI: Data Gathering. Analysis, and Use** in *Creating a Culture for Learning*.)
  - Using data to make instructional decisions requires a cultural shift in thinking that must be nurtured so all stakeholders are committed to this effort.
  - Establish structures and protocols for:
    - Collecting data
    - Analyzing data
    - Reporting data
    - Using data for school improvement

SBE Planning Process

1st What should students know and be able to do?

2nd How will the students and I know when they are successful?

Task Analysis

3rd What learning experiences will facilitate student success?

4th Based on data, how do I refine the learning experiences?

You Want Your School to be a Professional Learning Community!

My Just ASK colleagues and I often hear questions from school leaders that are some variation of "How do you get people to buy-in to and be part of professional learning community?" "How do you get them to see the benefits of working together in collaborative teams?" After asking the question, they usually tell us what has happened, what they have done, and a description of pushback they are receiving. They believe they are doing everything they know to do, but they just aren't gaining any traction.

As I watched Simon Sinek's TEDx presentation *Start with Why—How Great Leaders Inspire Action* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF_VuA), it occurred to me that leaders who are still struggling with establishing collaborative practices as the norm are beginning with the **What** and **How**, and not the **Why**. As with most change initiatives what helps create buy-in and excitement isn't the **What** or the **How**; it is the **Why**. Sinek uses Apple as an example of the Golden Circle. Apple's **What** is the creation of electronics. Apple's **How** is the design of their electronics, which are beautifully designed and easy to use. Apple's **Why** is their belief in challenging the status quo. Apple starts with the **Why**!

Apply this notion to PLCs. The **What** of collaborative teams in PLC's would include a common formative assessment plan, identified best practices, and team action plans. The **How** of PLC's would include data protocols, prioritizing standards, and responding to students who need additional support. The **Why** of PLC's is based upon your personal beliefs and core values, but may include a statement such as, "collaborative processes empower individuals." How does this stance square with reality in your school or district? How do the priorities I outlined earlier in this issue support this approach?

There is significant consensus among these researchers and practitioners on the essential elements of professional learning communities. In *Learning by Doing*, DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker wrote that professional learning communities:
- Have a focus on improving student learning and student experiences.
- Involve collaborative teams.
- Engage in collective inquiry into best practice and current reality.
- Are action oriented.

- Focus on results aligned with goals for student learning
- Have a commitment to continuous improvement where members collectively:
  - gather evidence of current levels of student understanding,
  - develop strategies and ideas to build on strengths and weaknesses in that learning,
  - implement those strategies and ideas,
  - analyze the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not, and
  - apply new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement

In *Building Professional Community in Schools*, Kruse, Louis, and Bryk wrote that professional learning communities demonstrate:
- Reflective dialogue
- De-privatization of teaching practice
- Collective focus on student learning
- Collaboration among members
- Shared norms and values

In *Creating a Culture for Leaning*, the Just ASK team presents the following non negotiables:
- We act on our belief that all students can learn!
- We accept learning as the fundamental purpose of the school and examine all our practices in light of their impact on learning.
- We engage in and assume leadership for promoting collaborative practice.
- We believe that all students belong to all of us.
- We collectively develop and adhere to clearly articulated norms.
- We establish and maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.
- Isolation is not an option. Collaboration is a right and responsibility.
- All adults are committed to the success of all other adults.
- We focus on results: That means we analyze assessment results and all other relevant data together, make data-driven decisions, establish goals for specific measurable skills and knowledge, identify improvement strategies, and adapt instruction to meet student needs.

This guide is a fabulous resource in getting started or enhancing PLCs already in place. The following excerpt is based on DuFour's three big ideas.

Embrace Learning for All
We embrace as our fundamental purpose the learning at high levels of every student in Tucson Unified. We further champion the idea that we ourselves are also learners. Therefore, we are willing to examine our teaching practices, policies, programs, and everything we do in our school and district through this lens: Does this impact learning for each and every student in a positive way?

Build a Culture of Collaboration
We take collective responsibility for the success of all of the students in Tucson Unified. We can achieve our fundamental purpose of high levels of learning for all students only if we work together. Therefore, we cultivate a collaborative culture through the development and support of high performing teams.

Focus on Results
We assess our effectiveness in achieving high levels of learning for all students in Tucson Unified on the basis of results rather than intentions. We use results to drive our efforts, to let us know whether our actions make a positive difference in the learning of each and every student. We are results-driven and evidence-based practitioners using outcomes to inform and improve our professional practice and to respond to the needs of all of our students for assistance or enrichment.

Access the guide at http://www.tusd1.org/contents/depart/pd/Documents/PLCGuide.pdf

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)

- **Mission, Vision, and Core Values**
- Ethics and Professional Norms
- **Equity and Cultural Responsiveness**
- **Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**
- **Community of Care and Support for Students**

- **Professional Capacity of School Personnel**
  Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

- **Professional Community for Teachers and Staff**
  Effective Educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being

- **Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community**
- **Operations and Management**
- **School Improvement**

Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Competent	Partially Competent	Not Yet Competent
Develop conditions for teachers and other staff that promote effective professional development, practice, and student learning.	Professional development is tied to improved practice, but not to student learning.	Professional development is not connected to improved student performance.

5 --------------------------- 4 --------------------------- 3 --------------------------- 2 --------------------------- 1

Goal:

Competent	Partially Competent	Not Yet Competent
Empower and entrust teachers and staff with collective responsibility for meeting the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student.	Teachers and staff are entrusted to improve student learning, but lack skills and knowledge to affect student needs.	There is no individual or collective efficacy for meeting the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student.

5 --------------------------- 4 --------------------------- 3 --------------------------- 2 --------------------------- 1

Goal:

Competent	Partially Competent	Not Yet Competent
Design and implement job-embedded and other opportunities for professional learning collaboratively with faculty and staff.	Norms for collaboration are missing. Professional development is provided to staff on site after or before school, with some follow-up.	Professional development is planned by district and delivered on planned days with little follow-up and follow through.

5 --------------------------- 4 --------------------------- 3 --------------------------- 2 --------------------------- 1

Goal:

Competent	Partially Competent	Not Yet Competent
Provide opportunities for collaborative examination of practice, collegial feedback, and collective learning.	Collaborative learning among staff is expected, but structures and norms are lacking.	Teachers teach in isolation and apart from each other.

5 --------------------------- 4 --------------------------- 3 --------------------------- 2 --------------------------- 1

Goal:

Competent	Partially Competent	Not Yet Competent
Encourage faculty-initiated improvement of programs and practices.	Some evidence of faculty-initiated improvement programs and action research exists.	Improvement initiatives and plans are determined outside of the school.

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Goal:
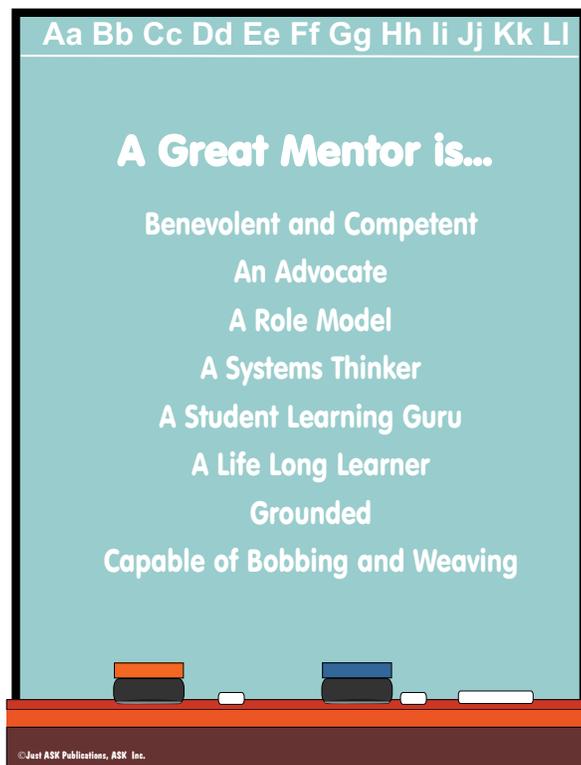
Everyone Is a Mentor! Everyone Needs a Mentor!

Last week I spent three days in a Just ASK **Mentoring in the 21ˢᵗ Century**® Institute with an amazing group of teacher mentors who came together to deepen their knowledge and understanding around:

- Who are the new teachers?
- What are their challenges and concerns?
- How can we support our new teachers?
- What constitutes growth-producing feedback?

Here are a few take-aways:

- **Consider the life cycle of the first year teacher**. Encourage them to focus on building classroom expertise and to avoid excessive committee, extra-curricular, and coaching involvement. This gives them time to grow in the profession. Do help them understand that the bumps along the road are to be expected and are normal.
- **Assess Needs and Set Goals**. Just ASK's **New Teacher Needs Assessment and Goal Setting Tools** by Paula Rutherford helps the new teacher identify and prioritize needs around personal, professional, curriculum, instruction, and assessment, organizational systems, getting to know and working with students. (See Resources and References section.)
- **Develop a Mentoring Team**. Identify areas of new teacher professional needs and recruit staff members who have interest and expertise in each of those areas. These teachers would serve as experts-on-call for a novice teacher. Some categories might include: standards-based planning, assessment, instructional strategies, second language learners, rigor and relevance, organizational systems, technology, looking at student work, differentiation, active learning, classroom organizational systems, working with parents as partners, etc.
- **Identify Communication Styles**. Complete the Just ASK **Information Processing Styles Survey** to identify your preferences for processing information. Compare your choices with you mentee's. Discuss how the similarities and differences can help or hinder your relationship. As the mentor, be willing and able to shift to meet the needs of your mentee. (See Resources and References section.)
- **Pay It Forward**. Speak at a college class for beginning teachers or principals. Support a new principal by asking him/her to lunch and sharing some ideas or materials. Be inclusive and offer to meet up with a new principal before the next big meeting and go in and sit together.

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll

A Great Mentor is...

Benevolent and Competent

An Advocate

A Role Model

A Systems Thinker

A Student Learning Guru

A Life Long Learner

Grounded

Capable of Bobbing and Weaving

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Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) Update
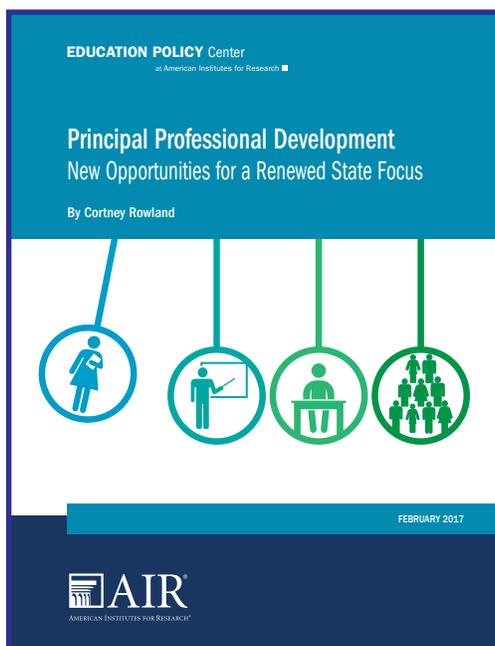
In "Principal Professional Development: New Opportunities for a Renewed State Focus," Cortney Rowland of American Institutes for Research's (AIR) Education Policy Center writes that **PSEL** should be used as a guiding light for principal learning.

Rowland, a member of the advisory group that approved these new standards for school leaders, notes that they "put more emphasis on principals' responsibilities to promote rigorous instruction, build individual teacher and leader capacity, foster a collaborative work environment, ensure the development of equitable and culturally responsive schools, and engage families and communities."

Rowland further writes, "These new standards suggest that professional learning for principals should focus on factors including:
- Equity, inclusiveness, and social justice
- Supporting and empowering teachers and cultivating leadership among staff
- Integrating the school with the community

The twenty-five page report also includes case studies on how professional development of principals in West Virginia, Missouri, and Iowa is evolving to include the components found in the **2015 Professional Standards for Education Leaders** **(PSEL)**.

Access the report at
www.air.org/resource/principal-professional-development-new-opportunities-renewed-state-focus.

Resources and References

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*Access a survey based on this article at www.nsrfharmony.org/system/files/protocols/plc_survey_0.pdf This survey can help you think about and assess the extent to which each of the major factors associated with professional learning community, critical elements, human resources, and structural conditions is currently present at your school.