

Inventing Professional Development Schools

The Jefferson County, Kentucky, Public Schools have a long-term plan for “inventing” schools that will offer excellent programs for students, induct new faculty members, and serve as “exemplars of practice.”

The Jefferson County, Kentucky, Public Schools are developing and implementing a model for changing the way schools are organized and managed, the way the teaching profession is structured, and the way institutions of higher education relate to public schools. What is occurring in Jefferson County is a home-grown initiative that takes guidance and sustenance from the national reform agenda. Much of the reform effort in the county is directed by, or coordinated through, the Gheens Professional Development Academy. As part of the county school system, the Gheens Academy carries out many functions that in other systems would be assigned to a staff development unit, a division of school improvement, or perhaps a human resource development department.

At Gheens Academy, we have a threefold mission:

1. to coordinate technical assistance, training, support, and other developmental activities that are designed to increase the success enjoyed

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by teachers and administrators (We give special attention to increasing collegial interaction and support, assuring opportunities for intellectual and job variety, and providing recognition for achievement);

2. to develop leadership within the school system aimed at restructuring schools so that they become results-oriented, with satisfying work environments for educators and productive learning environments for students;

3. to serve as a focal point for moving our schools into national leadership in the development and implementation of improved strategies for recruiting, selecting, inducting, motivating, developing, and maintaining a high-quality professional work force.

Professional Development Schools

In keeping with this mission, the Gheens Academy has provided leadership in designing and implementing “professional development schools.” We conceive of these schools as an integral part of our systemwide improvement effort. What will distinguish professional development schools from other schools is not their exemplary status—all schools in the district are expected to be exemplary—but their dual mission of providing exemplary

programs for students while providing for the systematic induction of new teachers and administrators into the school system. Clearly, this twofold mission will require modified staffing patterns and supplemental resources. Our intent, however, is to assure that the quantity and quality of resources provided for students in professional development schools will not differ from that provided to other schools in the county.

A New Paradigm

The Gheens Academy proceeds on the assumption that it is not enough to identify exemplary schools—the real challenge is to *invent* them. The first step in doing so is to develop beliefs and standards that describe what an exemplary school looks like and how it functions. The second step is to develop a means of assessing schools in the light of those beliefs and standards and to design training and development activities that will help these schools and their faculties move toward the standards.

The ideas directing our program are simple. We believe that the primary *purpose* of schooling is to engage students in the forms of knowledge work most likely to produce results valued by the community. Further, we assume the *goal* of schooling is to assure that students are successful at doing the work they undertake and that the work they do produces valued results. Such a conception reaffirms Peter Drucker's view of the school as a workplace, a "knowledge workplace," and of students as workers, "knowledge workers" (Drucker 1969).

Given this guiding notion, the curriculum becomes the raw material upon which students work, rather than an assembly line down which they are shuffled. We view learning as an active process in which students are participants, not merely passive recipients of information provided by others. Teachers become leaders, somewhat like executives in the corporate world. The teacher's function, then, is to create conditions under which students are motivated to work and to assure that students have the instruction and support they need to work successfully. Teachers continue to provide corrective feedback, set clear expecta-

tions for performance, assign tasks, allocate resources (including time), provide instruction, and strive to assure continuous progress.

Such a view of the teacher is at once enabling and empowering. It enhances the status of the teacher; at the same time it requires the teacher to accept responsibility for what students do (or do not do) in school. This view does not, however, make teachers solely responsible for the results of what students do. All students know the standards for successful performance and are responsible for upholding these measures in their daily work. We view the results of schooling—student learning outcomes—as a collective responsibility of everyone in the school and/or the school system.

Of course, declaring teachers "empowered" does not make them so, any more than declaring principals "instructional leaders" has made them so. The kind of restructuring we envision requires the *reinvention* of schools so that teachers and principals can lead, can maintain direction toward their goals, and can effectively and enthusiastically pursue results.

Invitation to Invention

During the summer and early autumn of 1986, we prepared materials that set

forth our plans for professional development schools and then presented them to all faculty members in the school system. We told them that if they agreed schools should be organized to support such a view of teachers, students, and schools and if they and at least 51 percent of their colleagues were willing to take some risks, they were invited to help conceptualize and plan for the implementation of professional development schools. School principals also needed to indicate their commitment.

In September 1986, when we extended the invitation, no funds were available to support the planning activity. Thus, teachers and administrators who agreed to participate understood that they might need to work overtime with no pay and little additional support. However, we told them that we would make every effort to obtain funds for support, especially for released time.

Invitation Accepted

By November 1986, 24 schools, 1 special school, and 1 vocational school had indicated that their principals and at least 51 percent of the teachers were willing to accept our invitation to invention. And by December 1986, we had secured funds and resources to support the initial planning phase (from December through June). The Gheens Foundation provided \$32,000 in addition to a \$400,000 annual commitment to support the operation of the Gheens Academy. The University of Louisville Center for Excellence made contributions of \$60,000 in support of related cooperative efforts. The Norton Foundation, which had already provided a \$30,000 grant to support the curriculum resource center, provided \$15,000 for the planning activity.

During spring 1987, two teachers from each of the 24 schools, the principals from these schools, 7 teachers appointed by the teachers' union, 9 professors appointed by the Dean of the University of Louisville School of Education, 7 central office administrators and specialists, plus members of the academy staff (104 persons in all) met at least two full days per month to study relevant materials and to decide how the schools might best be con-

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Vision: The purpose of professional development schools is to help the Jefferson County Public Schools to become a place where every leader is a teacher, every teacher is a leader, and every student is a success.

Beliefs:

- I. Student success is the goal of all school activity.
- II. Students need to be challenged and need to learn to pursue difficult tasks and persist with tasks at which they are unsuccessful.
- III. Learning is an active process.
- IV. Teachers are leaders, and principals are leaders of leaders.
- V. The business of the school district and the state is to assure that each school unit operates under optimal conditions and produces optimal results.
- VI. Staff success results from motivated and competent people working in an environment that is committed to their success, continuing growth, and development.

Performance Objectives: To assure that the operating style of professional development schools will be consistent with these beliefs and to assure that these schools will attract and command the loyalties of persons who are willing to pursue these beliefs, it is expected that the staff of professional development schools will (a) regularly assess their performance in terms of the objectives listed below, and (b) continually seek ways to improve performance in terms of these objectives.

Shared Vision

1. ...
2. All staff will hold a common definition of what constitutes successful student and staff performance.
3. ...
4. ...
5. Each student will know the standards for successful performance and will assume increasing responsibility for upholding the highest standards of excellence in each task undertaken.
6. ...

Shared Decision Making

1. ...
2. Those who are affected by and expected to help solve problem(s) will be actively involved in identifying the problem(s) and making decisions about how the problem(s) should be solved.
3. ...
4. ...
5. ...
6. Those persons who disagree with a decision will understand the basis of the decision and believe that the decision was arrived at fairly. Furthermore, they will be willing to actively support the decision even though they would have preferred some other alternative.

Success Orientation

1. The range of tasks undertaken by students and staff will be sufficiently wide to assure that each person enjoys considerably more success than lack of success.
2. ...
3. ...
4. Rituals, ceremonies, rewards, and other forms of recognition will be in place to provide special honor to those who make unusual contributions to the success of others or who reach clearly marked levels of personal success.
5. ...
6. ...

Results Orientation

1. ...
2. Those responsible for making and/or implementing decisions will routinely have data available to them to assess the impact of their decisions on student and staff success.
3. ...
4. If the activities undertaken by students do not produce the results expected, procedures will be in place for identifying the problems that must be addressed. The indicators by which results are assessed will be of sufficient variety to assure that a wide range of student accomplishment is taken into account.
5. ...
6. ...

Flexibility

1. There will be a system in place to assure that when goal-enhancing decisions are made at the building level, policies and procedures that would preclude the implementation of the decisions can be changed.
2. ...
3. Policies, procedures, and decisions will be continuously reviewed in light of their impact on student performance and the results of student performance. When there is reason to believe that the results could be improved by changes in any of these, a mechanism will be in place to assure that such changes can receive expeditious review and approval.
4. ...
5. ...
6. ...

Support

1. ...
2. Staffing patterns and staffing assignments will be designed in such a way that all staff will have regular opportunities to engage in program evaluation activities and shared decision making without compromising the integrity of ongoing programs and without requiring individuals to routinely expend extraordinary amounts of personal time to carry out assignments.
3. Opportunities to enlist the support of parents and/or adults who can assist students and staff will be persistently pursued and developed.
4. ...
5. ...
6. ...

Fig 1. Excerpts from "Vision, Beliefs, and Standards for the Jefferson County, Kentucky, Professional Development Schools"

ceptualized, organized, and created. Among the books the planning group consulted were Lortie's *Schoolteacher* (1975), Deal and Kennedy's *Corporate Culture* (1982), Albrecht and Zemke's *Service America* (1985), and Bennis and Nanus' *Leaders* (1985).

After extensive discussions, we reached consensus that the professional development schools would become places where every leader is a teacher, every teacher is a leader, and every student is a success. To focus upon this "vision," we agreed to six foundational beliefs (see fig. 1, "Beliefs"). Another task of the planning group was to develop a set of "orienting propositions," that is, objectives toward which professional development schools should work and potential standards against which all schools in the system would be evaluated. The objectives we agreed upon are shared vision, shared decision making, success orientation, results orientation, flexibility, and support. For each objective, we developed six performance standards. In May 1987 the Board of Education officially endorsed these standards. Figure 1 contains excerpts from Jefferson County's "Vision, Beliefs, and Standards" document.

Little Tries

The kind of changes we visualize for the Jefferson County Public Schools will, in the long run, result in a radically different configuration of roles and responsibilities within the district. Our reinventions will require: (1) allocating resources in a fundamentally different way, (2) involving teachers in decisions that are not now available to them (see fig. 1, item 2, under Shared Decision Making), and (3) assuming a more sophisticated approach to assessment and planning (see fig. 1, item 2, under Results Orientation).

Change on such a grand scale does not occur overnight or even in a year or two. Rather, it proceeds in the form of many little tries, all aimed toward a common goal, and each judged in terms of its contributions to that goal. Changing institutionalized habit, or culture, is even more difficult than changing personal habits and individual behaviors. We, therefore, view our mission as a 10-year project. Each year

we will develop clear benchmarks to measure our progress over the next year.

Some of our "little tries" over the past two years have been noteworthy. For example, during the 1987-88 school year, a number of schools, including some professional development schools, participated in site-based budgeting. Although limited in scope, the project provided school staffs sound and reliable experience in the problems and prospects of site-based budgeting in particular and site-based management in general.

In addition, the Gheens Academy, in cooperation with the University of Louisiana, has developed and implemented a program to recruit minority teachers for the school system. This program sponsors a variety of activities involving middle school and high school teachers and students, undergraduates, and graduate students. These activities have substantially increased local awareness of specific, as well as broader, recruitment issues.

To promote management by results in the school system, the superintendent and the Department of Research Evaluation have developed "school profiles," which provide each school faculty with descriptive data on student achievement, parental expectations, student expectations, teacher expectations, and the congruence among these and other relevant outcome measures (e.g., dropouts, student and staff attendance). Schools are using these profiles to develop their annual school improvement plans.

In addition to participating in these and other activities, we are growing professionally as a staff. Over 300 school administrators have voluntarily participated in small-group seminars to study modern management literature. To provide adequate resources, we have substantially enhanced our professional library and our curriculum resource center.

Now, we are in the process of:

1. developing a staffing pattern for schools to support a systematic induction process, which will help new teachers and administrators maintain or develop the beliefs, attitudes, skills, and values necessary to pursue our beliefs and standards;

2. providing technical assistance and support for emerging exemplary practices ranging from interdisciplinary teaming and multi-age grouping to effective use of technology to personalize instruction;

3. developing an assessment system that describes the present status of a school in relation to our beliefs and standards to guide the creation of professional development schools.

4. creating training and support systems to assist school faculties in moving toward these standards.

The critical point is that these activities are not discrete and isolated and not short term. To prevent fragmentation, we regularly review each program in terms of our overriding goal of "increasing the rate and frequency of success enjoyed by each student and every staff member." We hope that these efforts will keep us on target toward the organizational learning necessary to develop the skill, the staff, and the style of operation essential to accomplish the changes we envision for Jefferson County. Such a radical restructuring will take time, but it will be worth the effort. □

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