Professional Development: Assisting Urban Schools in Making Annual Yearly Progress

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Under the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), all schools are required to demonstrate that all students make annual yearly progress (AYP). This can be difficult, particularly for students in urban schools and even more so for students with disabilities. The authors report on one large urban school district's attempts to provide support to 140 schools that did not meet AYP in the 2003-2004 school year. Two years worth of support through professional development are described, as well as the achievement results for all schools with a particular focus on two case study schools.

The premise of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is to "ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic

assessments…holding schools, local educational agencies, and states accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students" (US Department of Education, n.d.). According to the Education Commission of the States (2004), NCLB is a "potent blend of new requirements, incentives, and resources, and it poses significant challenges for states" (n.p.).

Adequate Yearly Progress and Student Performance

One such requirement is having schools meet "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) for all subgroups of students (i.e., economically disadvantaged, limited English proficiency, students in major racial and ethnic groups, and students with disabilities). AYP is a state's measure of a year's progress towards achieving state academic standards and the minimum level of improvement that schools must achieve annually. Performance on reading and math assessments is the main indicator of whether AYP is being met, but graduation rates, and other determined criteria as set forth by individual states must be included (Education Commission of the States, 2004). All subgroups, including students with disabilities, must meet performance targets of the percentage of students scoring at or above "proficient" as identified by each state. If students with disabilities do not meet AYP, the school is identified as not meeting AYP. In measuring AYP, the state establishes a baseline, and then sets forth a higher bar. Each year, the bar is raised, until the school year 2013-2014, where all students are required to be proficient.

Florida's Plan

In Florida, a school makes AYP if all the subgroups meet Florida's annual measurable goal in reading and mathematics and attain at least 95% participation on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) or an alternate assessment. The FCAT measures the students' achievement in comparison to the benchmarks in the Florida Sunshine State Standards (SSS). The scores range from

Level 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Students must receive a 2 in order to pass. Proficiency is a score of Level 3, and advanced includes Levels 4 and 5 (Florida Department of Education, 2005). NCLB holds teachers and schools responsible for the proficiency of all students.

Teacher Performance Through Professional Development and Classroom Support

Teacher performance can be influenced by many factors, with professional development (PD) at the forefront. Typical workshop format is not enough; follow-up must be evident. Joyce and Showers (2002) compare the percentage of teachers' attainment of skills in four areas: 1) theory presented (15%), 2) modeling (18%), 3) practice and low-risk feedback (80%), and 4) coaching and study teams (90%). In-class support in the form of coaching, practice, and feedback, provides teachers with a support model, whereby teachers have someone to lean on and from whom to learn, taking the workshop format of PD into a new dimension of teacher-skill attainment. Increasing teacher performance (with the goal of increasing student achievement) is possible through PD, which must consist of teacher support.

Joyce and Showers (2002), found that coached teachers: 1) implemented new strategies more frequently and developed greater skill than "uncoached" teachers; 2) used their newly learned strategies more appropriately than "uncoached" teachers; 3) demonstrated greater long-term retention of knowledge about and skill of strategies; 4) were more likely to explain new models of teaching to students; and 5) understood the purposes of the new strategies.

Fogarty & Pete (2007) describe "rich, robust, and rigorous models of professional learning" (p. 41) as having seven critical qualities in which training is: 1) sustained; 2) job embedded; 3) collegial; 4) interactive; 5) integrated; 6) results oriented; and 6) practical or hands on. The objective of collegial interaction in learning communities is that

follow-up, assessment, and adjustment of instruction result in internal expertise that is then shared by a group of teachers, which Schmoker (2006) describes as imperative to effective professional development. Teacher support, which includes collegial interactions, is an effective strategy for increasing teacher performance.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that shaped this inquiry includes AYP and student achievement, as well as teacher performance through professional development and in-class support (including coaching and modeling). According to Killion (2007) school-based coaching provides 1) an increase in student achievement and 2) a culture of professional collaboration that increases teachers' sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, and teaching performance. These two concepts shaped the school-based support implemented by the central office special education staff to a large urban school district and two target schools in hopes of improving student achievement to improve the schools' AYP.

Method

Participants

A group of 140 out of 195 urban elementary schools in a large diverse school district were identified as needing assistance based on not meeting AYP in the 2003-2004 school year. Data from the 140 schools were analyzed, focusing on the subgroup of students with disabilities. Findings generated a group of schools, which were identified as needing intensive support, and included a focus directed at the special education classrooms. Central office personnel were deployed to the school sites with the goal of providing instructional classroom support to the special education teachers. This article will focus on the overall progress of these schools over a two-year period and the support specifically provided to two urban schools from the 140

schools. In the two case schools, six special education teachers were the focus of on-site support. The subgroup of students with disabilities were targeted in an effort to assist the school in meeting the criteria of AYP. See Table 1 for school demographics of each target school compared with overall means of the larger group of non-AYP elementary schools.

TABLE 1 *School Demographics*

	Means	SD	Target A	Target B
	140 sample			
Ethnicity				
B%	38	35	13	41
W%	8	11	1	3
H%	53	33	86	55
CSS hours	16	32	37	44
LEP %	23	14	47	25
FRL%	79	21	98	92
SE%	17	8	15	15
MI%	29	9	37	37
MS%	48	10	28	40
ATT%	96	.8	95	94
SUS #	39	51	37	23
CS#	26	3	23	25

Key: b= Black, w= White, h=Hispanic, CSS= curriculum support specialists, LEP= limited English proficiency, FRL= free/reduced lunch, SE= special education (not gifted), MI= mobility index, MS= percent of teachers with a Master's degree or higher, ATD= attendance, SUS= suspensions, CS= average class size

Data Collection Procedures

One of the authors, a special education central office administrator at the time, deployed staff to schools that met criteria of needing support. Criteria were based on a variety of data, including, but not limited to: AYP, school

performance on state-wide assessments, mobility, levels of student achievement, and special education population. The deployed staff consisted of teachers-on-special-assignment, referred to as Curriculum Support Specialists (CSS). Each of the CSS was assigned a group of schools to which on-site support in the form of coaching and on-site professional development was provided. The two case studies provide a sample of on-site support and professional development.

CSS were scheduled once a week to engage in dialogue and reflection in collaboration with each other, as well as regular conversations and debriefings with the central office administrator. These opportunities are crucial to the success of the support (Pitton, 2000) and it provided built-in time to share and evaluate, as well as map out action plans for the future. Documentation was essential. Coaching logs were completed by the CSS were maintained from each classroom visitation, which included the follow-up necessary for focusing the central office to enhance the continued growth of the special education teachers. In addition, documentation also included sign-in sheets and actual presentation materials that were maintained for the on-site professional development, both providing a clear picture of learning opportunities being offered through on-site support and targeted professional development, based on the needs of the school. The central office administrator maintained staff work logs, and the CSS created pictorial graphs of documented support.

Both School A and B were provided in-class support in a variety of ways, based on the needs of each school; however, there were similar threads of needs in both schools. Three teachers were targeted at each school for intensive classroom supports.

Inclusion. Both schools were provided assistance with the implementation of increasing the number of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The CSS helped the two schools obtain grant funding to support inclusive classrooms, as well as assisted in the development of an

inclusion action plan to be submitted to the central office. The central office staff arranged for the observation of effective co-teaching models at neighboring schools with similar demographics. During the support phase, inclusion rates indicated an increase in students with disabilities spending 80% or more of their day with non-disabled peers: School A increased their inclusion rate from 27.88% in June 2005 to 44.89% in June 2006. School B's inclusion rate in June 2005 was 17.28%, increasing to 24.65% in June 2006.

Professional Development. Based on a needs assessment, teachers from both schools were also provided professional opportunities via intensive, small-group PD sessions such as: effective reading practices; FCAT Reading, analysis of benchmarks, FCAT strategies and accommodations permissible on the FCAT. Following PD, school-site follow-up was conducted to assist in the implementation of knowledge gained for transfer to the classroom setting.

In-Class Support. A large portion of PD at both schools consisted of providing coaching and modeling through in-class support, which included planning for effective lessons, coaching and co-teaching during the lessons, as well as debriefing opportunities at the end of the lesson through the modeling of effective reading and teaching strategies. Based upon logs maintained by the central office staff, additional coaching and modeling was provided to teachers as needed. For example, School A needed more specific modeling of lessons in guided reading and whole group instruction utilizing grade level texts, while School B required modeling effective multi-age and multi-grade lessons. Additionally, accommodation kits were provided to the six target classes. Math materials and classroom libraries were also provided to both schools, as well as on-site PD of how to effectively use them. PD was provided to help each school be compliant with IEP, documentation, and assessment requirements.

Data Sources

Data sources include a needs assessment survey given to the teachers at non-AYP schools, materials and logs from PD, follow-up surveys with teachers who received support, logs of classroom observations and interviews of target teachers, as well as an in-depth analysis of demographic and achievement data of all 140 non-AYP schools.

Data Analysis

A combination of quantitative data analysis and qualitative methodology were utilized. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) described this type of mixed methodology as a sequential QUAN-QUAL design (quantitative data analysis followed by qualitative data collection and analysis). In addition to collecting school-wide data on each of the 140 schools, the two target schools were studied in depth through the use of a constant comparative process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), where data collected from the teachers through surveys, interviews, and observations were continuously analyzed using a recursive process. The process of constant comparison of data led to the gradual emergence of tentative hypotheses that explained the data. The researchers attempted to show connections between survey responses, interview responses, and classroom actions. Interview protocols were open-ended to capture both expected and unexpected perspectives and information.

Descriptive information about the survey responses (means and standard deviations) of total scores of each of the teachers was calculated. Means and frequencies were run on FCAT achievement data, AYP data, school gains, and school grades.

Results

Adequate Yearly Progress

Table 2 below shows school AYP percentages at the start of CCS interventions (2004) and the year after the interventions (2006) for the 140 schools and the target schools. Improvements in AYP were evident across the

board. Table 2 also shows school grades across the three years and whether or not the school "made gains." The percentage of schools scoring "C" or higher consistently increased over time and the two target schools each increased their letter grade (and made gains) in year three.

TABLE 2 *School Progress*

School Years	% AYP	School Grade (%)					Make Gains?	
		A	B	C	D	F	YES	NO
140 school average								
03-04	88	41	15	23	12	2	0	100
04-05		50	13	19	11	1	80	19
05-06	93	48	21	21	4	0	56	36
School A								
03-04	80			X				X
04-05				X				X
05-06	97		X				X	
School B								
03-04	77				X			X
04-05					X			X
05-06	82		X				X	

Student Achievement

Tables 3 and 4 show the percent of students scoring at levels 1-5 on the reading and math sections of the FCAT. Progress was evident in most grades and levels as indicated by a decrease in level 1s and increases in levels 2 and above meeting criteria. The grade that showed the least amount of progress across the board was grade 4. Both target schools made improvements and improved at greater strides than the larger sample averages.

Two Case Schools

Original needs assessments indicated that professional development and instructional support were needed in literacy. These included implementing the newly-adopted

TABLE 3 *Reading Achievement Data*

Grade	Year	140 sample			School A			School B		
		3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5
	Level 1									
	04	34	21	37	46	41	62	50	33	37
	05	28	21	24	36	40	34	50	33	23
	06	21	24	22	26	38	34	19	36	34
	Level 2									
	04	14	18	19	19	19	21	15	28	29
	05	15	16	20	19	19	20	9	12	17
	06	12	18	19	15	15	27	14	26	16
	Level 3									
	04	30	37	27	28	31	16	21	33	24
	05	33	41	34	29	32	33	24	33	46
	06	38	34	34	38	31	30	32	25	31
	Level 4									
	04	19	21	14	6	8	1	13	8	7
	05	21	24	19	13	8	11	15	16	14
	06	26	20	20	20	16	7	33	9	16
	Level 5									
	04	4	4	3	1	1	0	1	0	2
	05	4	5	4	3	0	1	1	7	0
	06	3	4	4	2	0	2	1	4	3

core reading program, teaching effectively in multi-age, multi-level reading classes, and small-group interventions o instruction, as well as, the use of appropriate accommodations and differentiated instruction for students with disabilities. CSS logs from classroom observations and interviews indicated the need to provide a connection between the instructional aspects of learning and

compliance, as well as the appropriate implementation of grade-level texts (School A) and the need to provide support for instruction in an effective classroom environment (School B). Ongoing logs revealed the target teachers effectively implementing their newly trained skills. Following the school based coaching, two-thirds of the focus

TABLE 4 *Math Achievement Scores*

Grade	Year	140 sample			School A			School B		
		3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5
	Level 1									
	04	28	20	31	25	25	44	44	25	43
	05	21	20	20	25	20	30	38	33	23
	06	17	19	23	17	19	27	17	37	38
	Level 2									
	04	21	24	30	18	33	35	24	31	24
	05	20	24	29	13	30	35	27	24	31
	06	18	22	30	18	18	38	15	28	28
	Level 3									
	04	31	36	21	41	32	17	25	36	26
	05	33	37	26	36	41	23	24	29	23
	06	34	35	25	23	43	24	39	20	21
	Level 4									
	04	16	16	16	15	9	4	6	8	7
	05	19	16	21	18	7	10	8	12	23
	06	24	19	18	33	15	11	24	13	10
	Level 5									
	04	4	4	5	1	0	0	1	0	0
	05	7	4	4	9	1	1	2	2	0
	06	7	6	4	9	5	1	4	2	3

teachers responded to a follow-up survey. Table 5 below indicates the high level of teacher satisfaction with the professional development and improved self-confidence in teaching.

The following excerpts from the teachers capture the professional growth of teachers through this study.

School A

Best Practices was the most helpful professional development I have taken. It provided me with many teaching ideas and strategies to better serve my special education students.

TABLE 5 *Professional Development Survey*

Question	Mean	SD
I feel that the professional development I have attended prepared me to teach my students.	5.25	.96
I am able to provide appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of all of my students.	5.50	.58
I feel confident in my ability to teach the students that I currently have in my class.	6.00	0.0
I feel more confident and prepared after engaging in professional development both workshops and on-site.	5.50	.58
I feel that the on-site support I received from District SPED Curriculum Support Specialist (CSS) made a difference in my teaching.	5.75	.50

Note: 6 =Strongly Agree; 5=Moderately Agree; 4=Agree more than Disagree; 3=Disagree more than Agree; 2=Moderately Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree

One of the District Special Education staff members modeled how to write expository and narrative writing essays. It was very helpful for the FCAT Writing Test.

They [supported] me when I was about to leave the teaching career.

School B

> *I truly feel that all the training put together has had an effect on me growing as a professional. Each has contributed to me growing in a different aspect of my job…teaching exceptional education is a multi-tasking, multi-faceted profession.*
>
> *The most beneficial support I have received is the on-site support provided by [central office staff]. Although from the district, she remained grounded in the realities of the classroom and made suggestions that really made a difference. She has been unsurpassed, and her presence is missed.*

Discussion

Although the 140 schools made progress over the three years, the least progress was evident in grade 4. A possible explanation for this is the eventual promotion of third graders who were not proficient by the third year of the study. Additionally, most gains were evident in the third year, particularly in target schools. This was the first time that the FCAT was given following a year of support. This might explain why target schools' gains and grades did not improve dramatically until year three. Target schools showed improvements at greater rates than the overall sample. This was not surprising since the two schools received consistent professional development and in-class support.

According to Fogarty & Pete (2007) on-site professional development "is designed to be more responsive to school-wide goals…" (p. 38). This type of support was evidenced by the collaboration between teachers, administrators, and CSS, while focusing each school's goals and needs. As indicated in previous research, (Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Toll, 2005) when colleagues relied on each other, rapport was established, and trust and respect were maintained, something effective happened: collegiality bonded the group

of learners, thus providing emotional support for change as well as the expertise needed for continued development of appropriate skills. The goal of this professional culture of collaboration became internal at the two case study schools, resulting in internal expertise that was shared by a group of teachers, which Schmoker (2006) describes to be imperative to effective professional development.

The critical qualities of professional development were found to be integrated in the support provided to the two case studies (Fogarty & Pete, 2007). Support and professional development 1) were sustained throughout the school year; 2) job embedded at the school-site; 3) collegial in sustaining the sense of mutually respectful community of learners; 4) interactive in the actual classrooms; 5) integrated through a variety of learning opportunities; 6) results-oriented by utilizing the data collected at the school; and 7) encompassed a hands-on focus that connected the real-world of the classroom with learning outcomes agreed upon by the teachers, school-site administrators, CSS, and central office administrators. These attributes are critical to the change process, and follow the concept that teachers must use it, not just know about it (Fogarty & Pete, 2007).

The coaching concepts identified by Joyce and Showers (2002) were apparent in individual teachers from the case study schools. The special education teachers were willing to take a risk and try new strategies based on their trusted comfort-level with the CSS team, dialoguing and reflecting upon instructional practices, thus exploring the phenomenon of the pedagogy of recognition (Van Manen, n.d.). In addition, ongoing relationships with the school principals enhanced the model, expanding into respectful professional collaboration, which in turn illustrates what Killion (2007) describes as a mutual respect leading to significant impact of coaches working with teams of teachers that produces more substantial results, reiterating what Knight (2007) describes as building a relationship before doing anything else.

An example of this type of relationship between the central office staff and the school site was evident in the principal of School A who was nominated Administrator of the Year for the local chapter of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) by his staff and selected as the district winner by the CEC selection committee. The mutual respect of that principal and his school staff, was evident when seventy-two school-site staff members joined the central office staff, attending the awards reception on his behalf.

Implications and Conclusions

One of the key factors of on-site support is meeting the needs of the teachers and students of that particular setting, thus leading to "sustained implementation of new teaching practices in schools" (Knight, 2007, p. 26). This on-site support provided to the two target schools focused on meeting the individual needs of the special education teachers, which in turn trickled down to the students, as evidenced by an increase in teacher efficacy and self-worth, as well as student achievement. This high level of satisfaction may lead to increased teacher retention, an ongoing problem in urban schools.

Providing on-site support and professional development is a model that requires further research and review, particularly in urban districts. It is a model that follows what we know about effective professional development and engages the learner in all the "right stuff" to assist in the core focus of increasing student achievement. Results were evident in special education classrooms and further extension to general education classrooms would be appropriate.

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