A Professional Development Plan

for

Newton

By

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Newton is a vibrant town that has quickly evolved over the past 10 years. The town, and the surrounding area, is served by the Newton School District, which is also experiencing a slow metamorphosis. Newton lies on the outskirts of a metropolitan area now, but a decade ago it was a removed community that considered itself mostly rural. The town is still quite proud of its independence, but somewhat nervous with the encroachment of the metropolitan area.

Newton is still a small district compared to its metro neighbors, though it is catching them quickly. The current student population of 8,000 dwarfs its population of 3,000 that it had 10 years prior. The burgeoning population has represented a challenge due to the sheer number of students, but it has also brought challenges nested in its demographics. The district was made up of 95% Caucasian students in the late 1980’s with about 20% of those students being served on the free and reduced lunch program. The number of minority students has risen to 40% with the free and reduced lunch percentage rising to 55%. The population increase was a result of aggressive building of low cost housing and trailer courts, along with other large neighborhoods of mid-priced houses.

Newton’s Superintendent, Dr. Bigman, has worked diligently at keeping pace with the vast changes that have taken place in the community and the district, but has realized that he was loosing the battle. His concern focused most acutely on the need to help his staff adjust to the major changes that have swept through the district while many of them have worked there. Many staff members started with a district of students that look much different from the students that currently make up Newton School District. The stress level of the staff has been evidenced in the rising tension and frustration that he has witnessed and been informed of. His main concern is to help the staff work well with the students to provide an outstanding education.
Dr. Bigman has determined that he should focus on staff development within the district and has hired a consulting firm to come to the district and help him with the process. After extensive evaluation of the district, they reported the following:

- Historically, staff development has been present, but ineffective and unfocused. Staff development money is used every year, but there is no evidence of this staff development by observing the staff.

- Surveys of the staff found the following words used consistently regarding the administrative leadership:
  - Strong
  - Decisive
  - Heavy handed
  - Autocratic

- Staff input on staff development matters is virtually nonexistent.

- Student’s achievement has historically been very strong, but recently has weakened to a point of mediocrity.

- Staff retirements and resignations have steadily increased over the past five years, while the number of students has steadily increased. This has resulted in a drastic change in the demographics of the staff recently, with the median level of experience falling from 15 years in 1990 to 7 years today.

- The general makeup of the district policies (salary schedule, discipline, schedule, fund distribution etc.) is very traditional.
Based on these findings, the firm specified several propositions focused on staff
development designed to return Newton to the level of excellence that it once enjoyed.

Following are the propositions given to Dr. Bigman.

**Proposition #1: Teachers must have a strong knowledge in their subject area,
teaching pedagogy and child development.**

Linda Darling-Hammond makes the observation that: “Raising the graduation
requirement in mathematics, science and foreign language is of little use if there are not enough
teachers prepared to teach these subjects well.” (Darling-Hammond, 1996) The same holds true
for teaching different types of students. High expectations are wonderful, but the knowledge
level in teaching strategies and child development must be high as well for teachers to meet the
high expectations.

The staff at Newton had grown weak in the areas of subject knowledge, teaching
pedagogy and child development for several reasons, including:

- Recent staff development efforts focused on teaching pedagogy, but seemed to be
  a mixture of current hot topics, with no coherent focus.

- No incentive exists for staff to pursue advanced degrees in their subject matter.
  Most advanced degrees are in education, rather than biology, math, foreign
  language, etc.

- The large influx of new staff has resulted in many teachers being assigned to
  teaching duties that they are marginally qualified for. Teachers who have no
  subject qualifications are teaching some classes.

Teachers must be well grounded in the techniques and expertise necessary to help
students succeed. It is vital that the level of expertise be raised through a systematic
implementation of programs designed to enhance the knowledge of teachers in these areas.
Teachers who have a limited knowledge of their subject matter can only teach their subject superficially, with little or no enrichment beyond what the book provides. Teachers who are limited in teaching pedagogy become entrenched in one teaching style, and are frustrated when it will not work for the students they have. Teachers must be well versed in the developmental stages of children so that they can apply the appropriate level of content and teaching strategy for the student’s developmental need.

The following initiatives are recommended (some of the initiatives will be used to meet several propositions):

**Initiative #1: The teacher’s salary schedule should be revised.**

Currently, the teacher’s salary schedule rewards teachers for length of employment and for education. No stipulation is given for the advanced degrees that teachers may apply toward the salary schedule, or for the types of credit hours that can apply. Giving teachers extra compensation for classes is important, but the classes should be limited as follows:

- Individual class credit hours can be used for advancement on the salary schedule only if they apply toward an approved degree or are in the teachers subject area.
- Degrees can be used for advancement on the salary schedule only if they are in the teacher’s current subject area or in a district subject area that is “high need.” Salary schedule advancement will not be granted for administrative degrees, the incentive for obtaining these degrees should be in seeking the advanced pay of the administrative position.

**Initiative #2: Partnerships must be established with the local University**

A partnership with the local university should take two different forms:
University professors could be used to teach advanced level classes at the high school, freeing those teachers up to teach other classes in their subject area. The district could then pay the salary of the professor and also offer the students college credit for taking the class.

Subject area seminars and workshops could be set up for teacher in-service days. The workshops could focus on the latest trends in the subject area as well as vital knowledge that might refresh the repertoire of the teachers.

**Initiative #3: Staff development must reflect district goals**

District and school goals must be established to increase student performance. The goals should serve as a focal point for staff development. Staff knowledge in their subject area, of teaching pedagogy and of students development is not being improved by staff development because there is no direction. Direction and focus are vital for the staff development to be reflected in an improved staff, and ultimately in improved students. More space will be devoted to this initiative later.

**Proposition #2: Staff must be integral in the creating of a successful staff development program.**

Michael Fullan quoted a teacher who was commenting on a principal driven initiative:

We suddenly realized what was wrong. We realized that we did not have ownership anymore…He (the principal) seemed to know everything there was to know about it, so it was necessary to push it onto him. Once we did that, it was doomed to failure. (Fullan, 1997)

Involving teachers in the process is a vital practice if the process of staff development is to be successful. The leadership in Newton understands the importance of developing the staff, and they have devoted a good deal of time and money to this effort. The money and time have
been largely wasted because the initiatives have been disconnected from the teachers. The teachers have felt the initiatives to be dictatorial in nature, coming from an administrator who is out of touch with the daily need of a classroom instructor.

Involving staff in the staff development initiatives does several things, including:

- Includes expert opinion on what professional development needs classroom teachers actually have.
- Gives teachers ownership of the solution, thereby increasing the probability that staff will make a concerted effort for the initiative to succeed. Initiatives given by edict are oftentimes undermined by a staff who feels no connection to the initiative or the leader.
- Involving staff in the process is an important step toward making the school a “Learning Organization”, as Peter Senge has termed. “The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization.”
  (Senge, 1990)

The following initiatives have been recommended:

**Initiative #4: Teams of staff will be created to work with administration in the formation of policy and implementation of initiatives.**

The use of a consulting firm to establish these initiatives flies in the face of this initiative, but the groundwork must start here. From this point forward, teams of staff must be involved in the process to implement initiatives on staff development that they will be involved in. This will provide a higher quality program as a result of involving daily experts in the field. It will also create a program that has a much higher probability of
success because the staff will be more likely to take ownership of the process and the results. Dictatorial programs leave only one person to blame for their failure, the person who initiated them.

**Proposition #3: A strong staff must be hired and retained, with substandard staff improved or removed.**

National estimates say that 30 to 50% of teachers leave the profession within their first three to five years (Ballinger, 2000). Newton is having trouble retaining these new teachers and is also experiencing some veteran teacher flight that is a direst result of teacher frustration over the recent changes in the district. The problem is further exacerbated by the continued increasing need for staff that is a result of the increasing student population. Recent staff hires have had less experience than newly hired staff has had in the past, and this poses a serious problem in the future if these new teachers are not properly acclimated to the intense nature of teaching in a new environment.

The increased turnover rate in the teaching staff has also made the administration reluctant to pursue contract termination with a few teachers that are not performing satisfactorily because they fear that they will not be able to fill the positions. The retention of these poor teachers is slowly becoming a cancer to the organization. Their poor work ethic and negative influence is starting to pull other good teachers down to their level of inadequacy.

The vicious cycle of retaining poor employees is shown in Figure 1. The negative influence of retaining the employees is detrimental in a stable staff, but can be devastating in a staff that has an already increased number of newly hired employees.
The quality of the staff in the school has a direct influence on the quality of the education delivered and thus on the likelihood of student success.

The following initiatives have been recommended:

**Initiative #1: The teacher’s salary schedule should be revised.**

For the salary schedule to attract, retain and improve staff, it must be laden with incentives for those that need to be attracted, retained and improved. The need for incentives for continued education was mentioned above. In addition to those stipulations, the following suggestions are included:

- Pay for beginning teachers should be increased so that the district can actively recruit quality graduates.

- The salary structure should include merit steps that reward excellent teaching and encourage extended learning and involvement in district improvement projects.
➢ The number of years experience allowed for a new teacher to apply toward the salary schedule should be increased. This would allow the district to recruit outstanding veteran teachers that could make a positive impact from their first day.

**Initiative #2: Partnerships must be established with the local University**

University staff could be used to help teachers that have been identified as substandard. They could provide the improvement they need in a non-threatening environment. Teachers that are identified as weak by a principal may become very defensive toward improvement efforts established by the principal, and may be too embarrassed to receive help from colleagues.

The university could also provide workshops for new teachers to help them with common areas of concern during their first year. Helping them deal with the frustrations early could help lead to better retention and higher quality instruction.

**Initiative #5: The teacher evaluation process must be revised.**

The current evaluation process is superficial and adversarial. Administration just goes threw the paperwork hoops, and teachers feel as though they are only looking for them to take one misstep. The process should be a process of development in addition to a possible process of dismissal.

Newton should implement the developmental supervision model. Developmental supervision focuses on matching the supervisory approach with the teacher’s or group’s developmental levels, expertise, and commitment (Glickman, 1998). The model also focuses on building a relationship between the administrator and teacher that fosters growth. This is a vital factor in the supervision process because it helps the administrator guide the weak teachers
toward minimum standards. It also provides the necessary framework to allow the administrator to remove teachers that do not improve to that satisfactory level.

**Initiative #6: Programs must be created to focus on the career stages of teachers.**

Teachers have a definite life cycle, and have different needs at each stage of this cycle. The stages of the Fessler/Christenson model (as given by Dr. Ebmeier in class notes) are as follows (the stages are discussed in detail later in this paper):

- Pre-Service
- Induction
- Competency Building
- Enthusiastic and Growing
- Career Frustration
- Career Stability
- Career Wind Down
- Career Exit

Administrators must be aware of the needs at each stage, and provide support for those individual needs. Administrators should also work to help teachers stay in certain stages, and move smoothly and quickly through others.

For example, a beginning teacher would need programs that help apply the theoretical knowledge they had in their pre-service training. They should also be given support to give them answers to simple questions (like who repairs a pencil sharpener) and assistance with difficult problems (like how to deal with a discipline problem student). Newton should give all new teachers a mentor teacher for the first year to help them with some of the day-to-day problems they face. They should also give ongoing training through a district academy for new teachers.
Proposition #4: Staff development must focus on immediate student needs.

Newton has had consistent staff development over the years. Staff has gathered on the typical two days prior to school starting in the fall and one day after school releases in the spring. They have also interspersed numerous full and half days throughout the year to focus on education topics. Many teachers have been sent to conferences, some even requiring a plane flight and hotel. Newton is committed to staff development, but they are inefficient with the resources and time they spend on staff development. The money and time they devote to staff development is not resulting in improved student and teacher performance, it is merely a facade concealing the absence of direction their staff development program has.

The most unfortunate aspect of Newton’s substandard staff development program is that it is a very common program of staff development. Ann Lieberman summarizes the plight of staff development as this:

Most of the inservice training or staff development that teachers are now exposed to is of a formal nature. Unconnected to classroom life, it is often a mélange of abstract ideas that pays little attention to the ongoing support of continuous learning and changed practices. (Lieberman, 1995)

To improve their staff development, Newton must provide a focused program that has student and teacher needs at the center of the focus. Staff development exercises should be introducing or strengthening initiatives that are proven to be results oriented. These results oriented initiatives must also be initiatives that work well with the needs that the district has. In an interview, Mike Schmoker stated:

I think data should play a crucial role even before staff development begins – by helping to select the best, most results oriented initiatives. Every staff
development proposal should be vetted on the basis of data that indicates that it has led – and will lead – to higher achievement. (Sparks, 2000)

Newton has a very limited budget of time and money to improve their staff. The money and time that they devote to the development of their staff must be utilized very efficiently. This means that staff development must be targeted to meet certain district and school goals. Development initiatives that are not focused on the goals of the district or school must not be funded. Time must also be devoted to actively seek those initiatives that will best meet the needs of the district. The district must also evaluate the initiatives to be sure that they are having the desired results, and they should be discontinued if they are not. Anne Conzemius sums the process up nicely:

Data driven school improvement starts with identifying organizational purpose, vision and values. Educators then align their improvement efforts with standards and measurable, targeted goals. (Conzemius, 2000)

The initiatives will be aimed at meeting two goals:

1. Student needs must be clearly identified.
2. Staff development must be focused on activities that are aimed at helping staff improve identified student deficiencies.

The following initiatives have been recommended:

**Initiative #2: Partnerships must be established with the local University**

The local university can provide expertise to assist with this area in several ways:

- Postgraduate students could be used to study teacher practice in an effort to determine what teaching practices are primarily used. They could also analyze
student performance in an effort to determine the most recent trends in deteriorating student performance.

- University professors could be used to help the district analyze the data collected. The information could be used by teams of staff along with University professors to establish district and school goals.
- University professors could be utilized as a source for introducing recent trends that show promise in helping improve Newton’s students and staff needs.

**Initiative #3: Staff development must reflect district goals**

District goals must be established in order to provide direction for staff development. Staff, administrators and outside consultants (University professors) should collectively create the district and school goals after the district has analyzed student performance and teacher practice in an effort to find deficient areas. Goals must be established that are intensely focused on improving the areas of deficiency.

For instance, reading scores on the state standardized assessment have steadily fallen over the past five years. Teachers have also noted that students seem to struggle with their reading assignments more than they used to. A district goal could be created to improve the reading instruction in grades 1, 2 and 3 in an effort to improve the students reading foundation. Staff development focused on this area, such as training teachers in Reading Recovery, would then be given priority. Staff development in areas such as Cooperative Learning or Multiple Intelligences should then be rejected because they do not meet the district goal for improved reading instruction, even though they are good practices.

**Initiative #7: A comprehensive system of collecting and analyzing data on student achievement and program effectiveness must be established**
The district is already collecting data on student achievement through the state standardized test, but the data is underutilized. The numbers make for good topics of administrative motivational speeches to staff, but little is done beyond that. Teams of staff must be set up to thoroughly analyze the data in an effort to find patterns of underachievement. As noted earlier, the district could use the resource of local graduate students to do the tedious work of analyzing the data for the district. Once the patterns are established, the goals must then be tied to the areas of deficiency.

This number crunching, qualitative analysis need not be the only data collected though. Staff in the school can provide valuable feedback on the attitudes and feelings of the staff and students that may need direct attention. Test score analysis may show that reading scores are down, leading one to think that the reading program may be ineffective. One may also find through staff surveys that the reading program has great potential, but the teachers do not fully understand it, and are therefore implementing it poorly. A strict analysis of the test scores may lead to a goal of establishing a new reading program, but a comprehensive look at the scores and attitudes/feelings of the staff and students shows that the district merely needs more intensive staff development in the current reading program.

The collection of data must also continue after programs have been established and are apparently flourishing. Analysis of the program effectiveness may find programs to be flourishing indeed, or in need of fine-tuning or even in need of replacement. The data collection must not stop with the formation of goals, but must also continue once the goals and programs have been established.

**Proposition #5: Staff development must be intense, pervasive and enduring.**

Administration in Newton has provided definite leadership in the area of professional development, but the leadership has led to activities that are fragmented, temporary and
disconnected. Administrators at Newton, and principals in particular, have fallen into the trap of finding temporal solutions to meet the myriad of emergent problems. Michael Fullen characterizes their common plight:

> Principals, above all, are “victims of the moment.” Because of the immediacy and physical presence of interruptions, principals are constantly dragged into the crises of the moment. These include telephone calls, two students fighting, salespeople, parents waiting to see them, calls from central office to check into something or to come to an urgent meeting, etc. etc. (Fullen, 1997)

The etc. for the Newton administration includes the need to find activities to fill the in-service days. The activities are usually focused on an emergent need and disconnected from all other in-services. The importance of educating staff on the issues at the time is certainly of some importance, but the lack of intensity in the training and the temporal nature of the training make it a nearly complete waste of time. Teachers leave the training session with little applicable information or expertise. Teachers that try to implement the ideas of the session are usually frustrated because of the nuances that inevitably appear which were not covered in the training. The final result is a program that is introduced and then promptly forgotten. The staff quickly returns to the place of need that they occupied just prior to the training taking place.

Teachers in Newton have also become quite frustrated with the “silver bullet” nature of the sessions. Each session has its expert train the staff in the latest fad idea that intends to make schools produce higher achieving students. Teachers in Newton have come to disdain these “silver bullet” types of staff development that are designed and marketed to fix it all with a one day session with teachers (Lewis, 1994). Teachers know that the one day session is a complete waste of time, and their attentiveness and participation during the session evidence this feeling.
To this point, Newton’s professional development has been intense, but it has also been restricted and temporal. The nature of the training must be categorized as intense, pervasive and enduring:

- **Intense**: The training must have a narrow focus, and should include every facet of that focus. For instance, Newton has determined that they have a deficiency in reading. If the district determines that improved reading instruction will be a focus, then training should be focused on every aspect of improving reading instruction. This may include:
  - Training in diagnosis and identification of poor readers.
  - Training in programs aimed at improving deficient reading, such as Reading Recovery.
  - Training in supplemental programs for all teachers to help with reading instruction, such as the Accelerated Reader program.
  - Training in assessing program effectiveness.
  - Training in integrating reading into daily instruction.

- **Pervasive**: The training should be evident in many different forms. Training to improve reading does not effectively happen during a half day in-service. It must also be a part of the evaluation process, curriculum development process and staff induction process. Time must be given for teachers to collaborate regarding effective practices. Master teachers should be given advanced training so they can help others in the building, and so on. The training must take multiple forms in order for it to be truly effective.

- **Enduring**: The training must not be the hot topic de jour. If a topic is important enough to become part of the professional development, then it is important enough to remain a part of it for several years. Administrators often hop from topic to topic trying to train their staff in everything, and effectively training them in nothing. Staff then become frustrated because
they do not see positive results from their efforts. Effective change requires the patient introduction and perfection of programs. A one day in-service may provide a good introduction, but perfection may take years of pervasive and intense in-service activities.

The following initiatives have been recommended:

**Initiative #2: Partnerships must be established with the local University**

The university partnership has been used as an initiative for several proposals to this point. The balance of theory that they bring helps to offset the very practical nature of school personnel that work with students on a daily basis. In relation to this proposition, the theoretical nature of the Universities expertise helps the district staff think in a divergent manner. This divergent thinking is very important if the staff development is to become intense. The district must be able to attack the issue at hand from many different angles, while continuing to use methods that have been proven to be successful.

This partnership must be more than the typical consultant form. University experts brought in for a one day session are quite common, and also quite useless. Consultants that work with a staff on a temporal disconnected problem make no lasting changes. The relationship must be enduring in nature so that the staff can make noticeable changes based on the information given.

**Initiative #3: Staff development must reflect district goals**

District goals restrict professional development in a very healthy manner. Administrators and professional development coordinators are inundated with ideas for great activities. They are given pitches on a myriad of different activities and programs that may or may not have merit. School and district goals provide a filter that administrators can run these programs through.
Programs that do not work to meet a certain goal can be ignored. Programs that do work to meet a certain goal can then be examined further for their likely merits.

The goals help tie all of the professional development together by giving them all a common theme. Staff wide development days can then have some relation to individual staff conferences, staff evaluation emphasis, new teacher induction programs and so forth. The focus makes the entire staff development program more intense.

District and school goals also help the program endure from year to year. The goals should remain in place for multiple years, and should force staff development programs to do the same. Goals should be modified in an effort to make them more applicable from year to year, but their overall emphasis should remain unchanged. The goals should only be completely changed once they have been successfully met, and can only be met once programs have been successfully implemented and established.

**Proposition #6: Staff development must be tailored to fit individual staff needs.**

Proposition #5 focused on the organizational level of staff development. The individual level of staff development could be considered a subset of the organizational level, but the necessity of the individual considerations that must be given to those involved in staff development warrant a separate discussion. To often, staff development is driven by convenience. The convenience may be the day that it is scheduled to happen, or the speaker that is available. The convenience that hampers the growth of the individual most acutely is the convenience of efficiency.

Efficiency in staff development has been a driving force in the kinds of staff development activities that have become so common. Staff are herded into an auditorium to all hear the same speaker give the same speech with the assumption that all in attendance will have
the same receptivity and the same motivation and ability for implementation of the ideas. The method is efficient because the training can take place once. This limits the cost of the trainer, and the cost of devoted time since there are no individual variations to the training. All in charge can then say that they have trained the staff in a particular area. The main problem with this line of thinking is that the practice of mass training is the most inefficient method of training when evaluated from an outcomes perspective.

Training can only be considered effective if it results in changed behavior. Mass trainings are very ineffective. The implementation phase of this type of training is weak, and there is often little support following the training sessions. Teachers leave the training sessions feeling as though the training was intended for others, or that the ideas would not work. They may pay very little attention to the presentation because they have heard it so many times before, or they may be so utterly confused by the new ideas that they dismiss them as impossible. To account for these individual differences, the staff development activities must consider the individual career stage of the staff and their level of expertise in the particular area or development.

Huberman Fessler and Christenson developed a model of the stages of the professional life cycle (as presented by Dr. Ebmeier in class notes). They posit that teachers follow the career stages as given below. They may hover at a particular career stage for a long period of time and may even skip some stages. The important fact is that the individual positions of teachers within these stages must be considered when developing activities for professional development.

Professional Life Cycle of Teachers

- Pre-Service: Teacher training
- Survival and Discovery/Induction: This stage is associated with the beginning of a teacher’s career. They are struggling to survive and question their ability. They
are trying to rectify the apparent gulf that separates the theoretical knowledge they recently received in college with the realities of the classroom.

- **Stabilization/Competency Building**: The teacher is starting to make a lasting commitment. They have rectified the gulf between theory and practice and are starting to gain instructional mastery.

- **Experimentation-Activism/Enthusiastic and Growing**: The teacher starts to venture out beyond their comfort zone. They experiment with different teaching techniques. They begin to exert influence outside of their classroom.

- **Taking Stock (Self-Doubt/Career Frustration)**: The teacher is too committed to the career to leave, but has lost the initial fervor they may have had for the profession. They have become disenchanted with the career.

- **Serenity/Career Stability**: Teaching has become quite mechanical and routine. They have found a comfort zone, often having tried new methods during their experimentation phase and have found what works and what doesn’t. Their energy level is lower and their confidence is higher than in previous stages.

- **Conservatism/Career Wind-Down**: Resistance to change is growing along with nostalgic feelings for the past.

- **Disengagement/Career Exit**: Withdrawal is increasing as the teacher mentally prepares to leave the profession.

A related consideration to the teacher’s career stage is the teacher’s level of expertise in the area of consideration for professional development. The level of expertise may be related directly to the career stage, where teachers in the later stages have more expertise, or the
relationship may be inverted with the new teachers having the most expertise. In either case, the individual level of expertise for every teacher must be considered.

The following initiatives have been recommended:

**Initiative #6: Programs must be created that account for the career stages and expertise of teachers.**

As has been noted earlier, staff development programs must be focused. The formation of the goals that drive this focus can be an activity that purely focuses on the students needs. In keeping with the earlier example, the evaluation of student data may lead to a conclusion that the students are substandard readers. A goal may be created then to improve reading instruction. From this goal, several activities may be determined to best meet these goals. For instance, the district may decide to implement the Reading Recovery program and the Accelerated Reader program. At this point, strong consideration must be given for the career stages of the teachers and for their individual level of expertise in these areas.

The staff should be surveyed to determine their baseline understanding of the initiatives. The leaders of the buildings should also be familiar with the career stages of the teachers. Examples of teacher groups that may be found and probable types of activities are:

- **Experimentation with low level of expertise:** These teachers have a high likelihood of implementing the program but will need extensive training in the actual technique. They don’t need to be convinced of its merits because they are ripe to try it in order to find its merits.

- **Career Frustration with low level of expertise:** They are not likely to dive in and accept a new method of instruction. Time must be taken to reveal the merits of the program and the programs likelihood to make them better teachers.
- Career Stability with high level of expertise: These teachers can be used as peer trainers. They can be the ones to tout the success of the programs to be implemented, and help on a daily basis with the practical implementation phase. They can work on an individual basis with teachers who are struggling with the use of the program.

- Career Wind Down with low expertise: This teacher has no desire to change to implement a new program because they do not see themselves being around long enough to put it into practice. Care should be taken just to maintain this teacher so they do not undermine the initiatives.

Proposition #7: Staff must be given time to collaborate.

The current emphasis on professional development activities in Newton is on formalized activities. The one-day sessions that are arranged by administrators and led by consultants have become the expected norm. The emphasis for professional development must be moved closer to the classroom so that the staff can engage in activities that are more meaningful to them. By increasing the meaning, the professional development activities stand a better chance of resulting in improved student performance.

Currently, the staff in Newton is quite fragmented. Some excellent teaching techniques have been developed by some teachers, and are working well in their classroom, but these are isolated incidents. The teachers that could most use these techniques have no idea of how to use them, or that they even exist. Gathering the staff together for a mass training on the techniques would be inappropriate because of the different needs that all of the teachers have. The single most effective way to disseminate theses techniques in a way that would benefit teachers would be to give expert teachers time to work with teachers who need assistance.
Staff would also benefit by working together on instructional methods on a regular basis. Giving teachers time to collaborate would help them all evaluate what they do and possibly develop different strategies to help them become more effective. In general, teaching is a lonely profession, with teachers rarely working with each other to solve problems. Newton needs to tap into the expertise within their staff and give them time to work with each other.

The following initiatives have been recommended:

**Initiative #8: Alternative schedules must be introduced.**

Alternative scheduling should be designed to remove barriers to teacher collaboration. The collaboration activities that emerge from the alternative schedules can be placed into two different groups:

- First, staff must be given regular time (daily or weekly) to meet with each other.
  - Newton can establish this time by devoting a day every week to collaboration. This can be coupled with their community service emphasis by making one day a week a community service day. Several businesses have volunteered releasing some employees, theses along with numerous community members and senior citizens could make up a base of people to help on these days to provide the time needed to release staff for collaboration. During these community service days, half of the teachers could work with the community volunteers while the other half work collaboratively on staff development. The class sizes can be increased and a teacher can be paired with volunteers to work with the students on their particular project. The following week the staff would rotate allowing all staff to participate in staff development every other week.
The administrators in Newton also need to make common planning periods for teachers a priority in developing the schedule. This may mean that all third grade teachers have a common planning time, or that all science teachers have a common planning time at the high school. The middle school can be set up in teams so that all of the core teachers for a particular group of students can have time to collaborate. By removing the barriers created by the schedule, Newton can reap the benefits available from allowing teachers to exchange ideas.

Secondly, staff must be given large blocks of time to work intensely on needed areas with other staff members.

Newton must establish summer work sessions that are available to all staff. The work sessions could devote extended periods of time to collaboratively working on issues that demand more time than can be devoted during the school year. The teachers would need to be paid during this time, giving them additional motivation to participate in these summer sessions.

**Initiative #9: Expert teacher bank must be established.**

Newton has a storehouse of talented teachers that are doing wonderful things in the classroom, but have no time to share this expertise with any other teachers. Newton must establish a bank of expert teachers in several different areas, both instructional technique and subject knowledge, that can be utilized throughout the school year. Elementary teachers who have a difficult time teaching a science concept would be able to bring in an expert science
teacher. Teachers that would like to use cooperative learning could go observe lessons given to a class by an expert teacher in cooperative learning.

Newton must first identify the expert areas that fit the goals identified for the district. After the areas have been identified, teachers must be either identified as expert teachers in the area or intensively trained in the area. To allow these teachers to give assistance, teachers must be given the freedom to leave their class to meet with or observe these expert teachers. In order for this to work well, funding must be set aside to fund substitute teachers to take classes over to allow for these meetings to take place.

Summary

Newton’s recent changes have become somewhat of an albatross for the district over the past 10 years. The change in students has resulted in a drop in student achievement and a teacher exodus. For Newton to return to the level of excellence that they once enjoyed, they must make fundamental changes within the district to help meet the needs of the students and staff.

The initiatives that have been recommended for the district are all aimed at making targeted improvements that are intended to raise student achievement and staff moral. Taken individually, they would prove ineffective and probably even detrimental. Collectively, they systematically change the basic nature of the staff development model for Newton so that it can better meet the changing needs of the staff and students.

Table 1 summarizes the relationship between the propositions and initiatives. The initiatives are specific programs that must be initiated over the next 1-2 years so that the propositions can be fulfilled. Some of the initiatives must be implemented as soon as possible. Putting staff into teams to help guide the district through the implementation of the initiatives is imperative. Setting goals for the district early will help the district make the correct decisions in the initial stages. Collecting data and basing the goals on that data is important.
Other initiatives may be started a year or two later. It is not vital that the teacher bank is started within the first year, but the idea of a teacher bank should drive some of the decisions made from the outset. Decisions to train certain staff in certain areas should be made with the intention of those teachers eventually becoming part of that teacher bank. The alternative schedule will involve many stakeholders (parents, community, school board, teachers, students, etc.) and will not be practical to start within the first one or two years. The groundwork must be laid early so that the alternative schedules can be put into place eventually though.

Given the strengths of Newton, and the willingness of the administration, it seems obvious that the district has a bright future. Maintaining the focus of staff development will be imperative for the continued improvement of the district. The district must also remember to continually evaluate their present state and compare that with where they have been and where they are going. This roadmap only presents the first steps of the journey. They steps are important and effective if taken together, but they do not represent the steps that may need to be taken in 5 or 10 years. Only through a continual program of collecting and evaluating data followed by revision of goals can the district continue the initial progress.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPOSITIONS / INITIATIVES MATRIX</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salary Schedule Revision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve Teacher Knowledge</td>
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<td>Staff Involvement</td>
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<td>Hire/Retain Strong Staff</td>
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<td>Focus on Student Needs</td>
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<td>Intense/Pervasive/Enduring</td>
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<td>Individualized Staff Development</td>
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<td>Collaboration Time</td>
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References


Sparks, Dennis (2000). Results are the reason. Journal of Staff Development, 21 (1), 51-53.