



The Front Page



The e-publication of New Jersey ASCD

Part Three in a Series ~ ~

May 2016

Issue 11

Continuing the Conversation: A Continuum to Support Effective Teaching in New Jersey

Guest authors:

Claudine Keenan, Ed.D., Dean, School of Education, Stockton University
Christopher J. Campisano, Ed.D., Director, Program in Teacher Preparation, Princeton University

“Today, what is desperately needed is a systems approach to educator quality. Tinkering around the edges or addressing one aspect of the continuum will not improve student learning. Simply preparing excellent beginner educators alone without a system in place to sustain and strengthen professional practice over time is foolish.”

-Sharon Feiman-Nemser, author, From Preparation to Practice: Designing a Continuum to Strengthen and Sustain Teaching

As we face the increasingly complex social and professional problems of the future of education, we cannot expect tomorrow’s solutions to come from the past. Historically, several distinct groups have each operated in their own professional areas of specialization: although connected by a common goal, those who prepare teachers, those who recruit and retain teachers, those who implement policies that impact teachers, those who represent and professionally develop teachers, those whose children depend on teachers, and those who become teachers operate independently and often in the dark regarding our core mission. In an age of rising standards, greater accountability, and diminishing resources, the distinctions between each group run the high-stakes risk of standing as barriers to improvement, rather than bastions of quality.

With that sentiment in mind, the members of six major professional associations have come together over the course of the past several years to form the Garden State Alliance for Strengthening Education. The GSASE convenes members of the New Jersey - Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the Education Association, the Field Directors Forum, the Parent-Teacher Association, and the Principals and Supervisors Association for a series of conversations aimed at designing a continuum from preparation to leadership, for today and tomorrow.

The first phase of this unprecedented work culminated in a detailed, research-infused and practitioner-grounded report with concrete recommendations, some of which have direct policy implications, some of which require more of the scarce resources for which we are generally competing, and all of which are intended to strengthen the continuum by replacing competitive approaches with collaborative action. We presented the report to the policymakers at the New Jersey Department of Education in September of 2014, and were optimistic that we had begun to set an agenda for partnership that would extend for decades to come. In this issue, we are proud to share those recommendations here, noting that we have already begun to make progress towards implementing several of them. We recognize that the road ahead is long, but we believe the journey is well worth making, especially because we are making it together. Many of the GSASE members continue this work on the Connected Action Road Map. The full report from the Garden State Alliance is available: http://njacte.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/GSASE_Report_on_Teacher_Continuum.pdf





Recommendations for Strengthening Professional Learning

The following recommendations are designed to enhance the support and impact of professional development on the continuum of teaching and learning:

- A.** Assure ongoing growth of teachers through research-based approaches to professional learning during the workday, particularly those supporting collaborative learning and planning, so that teachers can systematically benefit from synergy of the experience and practice of other teachers.
- B.** Develop regulations that encourage formation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and require school districts to schedule time within the school day/week for PLCs and other research-based approaches to professional learning focused on improving teaching and learning.
- C.** Ensure that PLC discussions and other research-based professional learning experiences are used to inform practice.
- D.** Develop a non-remedial, robust, and integrated system of evaluation and professional development that stresses continuous reflection by teachers as a non-evaluative tool, encourages innovation, considers both experience in the assignment and in teaching, and supports collaboration in improving teaching and learning.
- E.** Identify model confidential peer support programs for teachers – both those who are struggling and those who voluntarily seek help with challenges.
- F.** Restore district and school educator-based professional development committees to increase participation in professional development planning, with the majority of seats on each committee held by teaching staff members chosen in elections run by the majority representative.
- G.** Engage the professional development committees, in concert with school leaders and the majority representative staff association(s), in studying, developing, and recommending creative scheduling and other ways to create collaborative time for all teaching staff within the contractual school day while still providing students with required instruction. These panels could address time for professional learning across the continuum – including interactions among college faculty, novice teachers, and experienced P-12 teachers; teacher-to-teacher support and growth experiences; PLC and team experiences; and opportunities for teacher leader learning and interactions.
- H.** Engage non-traditional professional development approaches to strengthen instruction across grades/disciplines and to address the needs of other teaching staff members.
- I.** Support development of teacher leaders to act as instructional coaches and mentors in confidential, non-evaluative ways.
- J.** Create a state teacher professional development advisory panel to assure teacher input on state professional development policy, with P-12 teaching staff members making up the majority of panel members. Teacher members would be selected from nominees offered by the largest state education association representing teachers, except that one seat would be filled by a nominee from the minority teachers' union.
- K.** Ensure that the state aid formula for New Jersey public schools is fully funded, thereby providing the supports required for teaching and learning, including collaborative professional development and other collaboration required across the continuum.