

Improving Teacher Satisfaction with Professional Development

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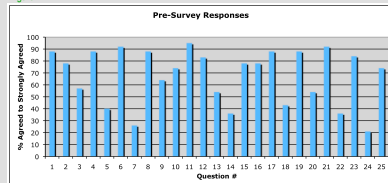
Introduction

Depending on whom you ask in education, 'professional development' can either be an exciting part of a fundamental commitment to ongoing learning, or it can be a burden to professionals who find it irrelevant and/or boring. The *National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development* (2001) defines staff (professional) development as "the means by which educators acquire or enhance the knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and beliefs necessary to create high levels of learning for all students" (NSDC p. 2). If student outcomes are the ultimate goal, why should we pay attention to teacher satisfaction with professional development? As we strive to maximize the use of our resources to impact student learning, professional development must adapt and achieve a reputation for high quality and satisfaction among all educators. If it does not, we run the risk of our community perceiving our schools as poor managers of the precious resources of time, money and professional expertise. In addition, without satisfying professional development for educators we will surely continue down the well-worn path of dissatisfaction and burnout that causes an estimated 50 percent of all new teachers to leave the profession within five years (Surpuria & Jordan, 1997).

Determining Needs and Priorities

Our middle school has a Professional Development Team (PDT) which consists of teachers and administrators that meets to plan for staff professional development. A Likert Scale survey was administered to measure levels of staff satisfaction with a variety of elements of professional development. Generally the staff expressed high levels of satisfaction (74% to 95% agreed or strongly agreed) with statements about feeling that their ideas are valued, knowing what is expected of them from their leaders, feeling supported by administration, and feeling recognized for their professional development work. Satisfaction was lower (54% to 64% agreed or strongly agreed) with questions that dealt with having sufficient time and resources to complete tasks and to collaborate with colleagues. The most obvious trend, however, was that for nearly every question where monthly all-staff meetings were compared to grade level meetings, the satisfaction was from 31% to 62% higher for the grade level meetings, and was quite low for all-staff meetings, ranging from only 21% to 57% of staff expressing satisfaction. This trend can clearly be seen in Figure 1, question numbers 3, 5, 7, 14, 18, 20, 22 and 24.

Figure 1



Goal:

With the all-staff meetings clearly being the area where teachers expressed the lowest levels of satisfaction, the PDT sought options to improve this area of professional development.

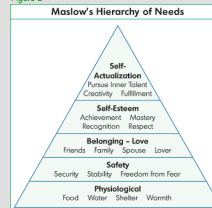
Factors Influencing Teacher Satisfaction

In order to gain insight into the survey responses that indicated lower levels of satisfaction, interviews were conducted with each grade-level team. Three trends clearly emerged through the interview process. First, the staff was dissatisfied with the technology training taking place at all-staff meetings. Reasons included a perceived **irrelevance of the chosen topics** to their teaching, **disorganized presentation**, and **lack of time to practice** skills. Second, staff **wanted to be asked** about what they'd like to see happen during professional development time. There was a feeling that our staff possessed a great deal of expertise and **we have much we can learn from each other**, if given the chance to choose what we'd like to focus on. However, several staff members expressed that they did not want to be asked their opinion if they wouldn't see their input translated into action. Third, staff felt the **size of the all-staff group was not as effective for training as smaller groups** such as grade level or content-area teams. Factors that contributed to this feeling were that group agreements had not been established and that the meetings themselves were not being taken seriously by several staff members, either through lack of attendance or participation.

Theory and Practice

Developed in the 1940's-50's, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory "remains valid today for understanding human motivation, management training, and personal development" (Chapman, 1995-2008, ¶ 1). The 5-level hierarchy (see Figure 2) progresses from biological and physiological needs toward the final step of self-actualization. Essential to this theory is that we must "satisfy each need in turn, starting with the first. Only when the lower order needs of physical and emotional well-being are satisfied are we concerned with the higher order needs of influence and personal development" (Chapman, 1995-2008, ¶ 5). Keeping this in mind, one can see that there are multiple factors and steps involved in creating professional development that is both professionally meaningful as well as personally satisfying. Ma & MacMillan (2001) suggest that factors affecting teachers' job satisfaction can be divided into three areas: (a) teachers' feelings of competence, (b) administrative control, and (c) organizational culture. Professional development plays a role in all three of these areas, and therefore can either positively or negatively influence a teacher's overall job satisfaction. As shown in Table 1, there is a correlation between these areas and Maslow's hierarchy. Each of these areas should be considered when developing a plan that hopes to improve teacher satisfaction with professional development.

Figure 2



Area affecting satisfaction	Maslow's level of need
Administrative control	2 - Safety needs: protection, security, order, law, limits, stability, etc.
Organizational culture	3 - Belongingness and love needs: family, affection, relationships, work group, etc.
Teachers' feelings of competence	4 - Esteem needs: Achievement, status, responsibility, reputation

Options for Improvement of All-Staff Professional Development

Option/Description	Pros	Cons
1. Survey staff for ideas and have them vote on the topics they most want to have at monthly all-staff meetings. Administrators choose staff members to lead trainings or bring in a trainer or presenter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicits ideas from staff Could involve staff members as trainers Choices should reflect staff desires All staff members receive the same training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff ideas may not align w/admin goals Staff may not be effective presenters Topics chosen may not be relevant to all Outside presenters may be costly Size of group remains large
2. Restructure the format/focus of all-staff meetings to be led by administrators, with topics chosen by the PDT.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PDT and admin could choose topics related to school-wide goals Involves admin as instructional leaders All staff members receive the same training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admin may not be effective presenters Teachers may resent lack of choice Size of group remains large
3. Eliminate professional development from monthly all-staff meeting; Meet as an entire staff only for birthdays, announcements, etc. (Combine with option four or five)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce size of group, increase accountability Maintain culture of school-wide celebration Provide more choice/relevance of training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff will not all receive same training Admin will not have as much control over PD, and will be spread out more
4. Restructure the format for professional development to take place entirely within grade-level teams, with topics to be decided by each team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teams choose topics to meet their needs More time for collaboration at grade levels Increases role of teachers as experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indiv. may not have same goals/needs Teams may lack cooperation, leadership, or expertise
5. Restructure the format for professional development into multi-week sessions, with multiple topics to choose from, resulting in small work groups (one per trimester).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-week format increases transfer Allows staff members to be instructors Teachers can choose their instructor/topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrows focus for year to three topics Instructors not compensated for planning

Addressing the Goal/Timeline

The main reasons teachers gave for dissatisfaction can be correlated to Maslow's hierarchy and the three areas affecting teachers' job satisfaction (described by Ma & MacMillan) as follows:

- Level 2 - Safety needs:** protection, security, order, law, limits, stability, etc. (**Administrative control**)
- Irrelevant topics
 - Disorganized presentation
 - Group agreements not established
 - Lack of time to accomplish tasks

- Level 3 - Belongingness and love needs:** family, affection, relationships, work group, etc. (**Organizational culture**)
- Lack cohesiveness in large group

- Level 4 - Esteem needs:** Achievement, status, responsibility, reputation (**Teachers' feelings of competence**)
- Not being asked to share expertise
 - Not being given responsibility to choose their own needs

When considering which action to take that would address these multiple elements, a combination of the options outlined above seems most likely to bring about the desired changes in teacher satisfaction. Our school will combine option 3 and 5, using the following timeline:

- Spring 2009:
- Pilot multi-week PD format (technology theme)
 - Use feedback form to plan for implementation

- June 2009:
- Survey staff for ideas about relevant topics
 - PDT combines/groups topics into related themes
 - All-staff votes for top three choices for PD for 09/10 year

- August 2009:
- Administration reviews new format for PD with all staff
 - PDT shares training options w/staff for first trimester and teachers select first trimester focus

Sept-Nov 2009:

- Begin implementation of monthly 'meet & greet' + weekly PD
- Use feedback forms to evaluate continued effectiveness of structure, make modifications for second trimester as needed

Second and Third Trimester:

- Continue new structure, including utilizing teacher feedback to make improvements throughout the year

Impacts/Expected Outcomes

Budget: Budgetary impacts are minimal; there are no 'new' expenses. Rather, PD funds can be assigned to directly reflect the needs determined by smaller teams

Schedule: This plan allows more time in the PD schedule for team meetings by reducing all-staff time. There is no need for further scheduling changes since the Wed. structure remains intact.

Staffing: There will be no change in staffing. However, some staff members may become more deeply involved in PD by choosing to instruct (individually or in teams) peers. The PDT will continue to serve as liaisons between teachers and administrators. Administrators may find the need to change the way in which they oversee smaller group

Expected Outcome: We would expect after implementing this plan that teacher satisfaction with the all-staff professional development activities would show significant improvement.

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