

Getting Serious about Getting Serious

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For those who believe a school system cannot be better than its teachers and understand that if teachers are expected to thoughtfully build student capacity, the same thought must be given to teacher capacity building, we hope these scenarios will provoke your thinking...

SCENARIO A:	SCENARIO B:
A SYSTEM VERY SERIOUS ABOUT CAPACITY BUILDING	A SYSTEM NOT SERIOUS ABOUT CAPACITY BUILDING
<p>1. HAS A RIGOROUS SYSTEMWIDE SELECTION PROCESS AND CRITERIA FOR SELECTING NEW TEACHERS. SELECTS FOR COLLABORATIVE SKILLS AND COMMITMENT TO ONGOING LEARNING.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes that hiring the right teachers, and principals to support them, is paramount and thus have standards that new teachers and leaders must meet which are never compromised (even in times of shortages) • Understand that the foundation of great teaching is built on a deep caring for the achievement and well being of every student and look for this in every teacher who is hired • In addition to a rigorous systemwide process for selecting new teachers, equal thought is given to the placement of new teachers (and new principals) to do as much as possible to support their success. • In situations where teachers achieve tenure, there is a systemwide standard and process for granting such to new teachers • New and seasoned teachers are valued equally while recognizing that the support they need will often be different and that through mutual respect and support, both will be stronger 	<p>1. DOES NOT HAVE A SYSTEM WITH STANDARDS FOR HIRING NEW TEACHERS AND SIMPLY SELECTS FROM THE APPLICATIONS THEY HAVE ON HAND.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views getting new teachers as a process of filling vacancies as quickly as possible and selection is often left to the varying standards of those who have the open position • Assume that having a credential and some content knowledge is the only qualification necessary to be a good teacher • New teachers are placed in open spots without consideration of whether the assignment is optimal for their success (thus they often end up with the most difficult assignments and schedules) • If tenure decisions come into play, they are left entirely to the discretion of the teacher’s supervisor and there is no systemwide standard against which the decision is made • New teachers and seasoned teachers are left to work things out on their own or it is entirely dependent on the principal to see that all get the support they need to be successful and to work together in a supportive environment
<p>2. SEES TEACHERS AS THE SOLUTION AND SUPPORTS THEM TO DEVELOP INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expects teachers to believe that all students can and want to learn/improve, and thus believes that all teachers can, and want, to learn/improve • For struggling teachers, differentiates support and expects growth • For those very few teachers who choose not to work to improve, there is a plan that offers the opportunity to improve, with clear consequences for failure, and there is always follow through 	<p>2. SEES TEACHERS AS THE PROBLEM AND TRIES TO “FIX” THEM AS INDIVIDUALS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumes a “bell curve” of teacher ability which you just have to live with • Has a “one size fits all” approach to teacher improvement • Ignores and/or accepts poor teaching as long as it does not cross into clearly dismissible offenses

<p>3. UNDERSTANDS THAT GREAT TEACHING IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT AND DEMANDING AND TAKES YEARS TO MASTER THROUGH WORKING COLLABORATIVELY WITH OTHERS.</p>	<p>3. ASSUMES THAT TEACHING IS NOT A HIGHLY SKILLED PROFESSION AND CAN BE FAIRLY QUICKLY “TRAINED” IN INDIVIDUALS.</p>
<p>(leaders are willing/expected to periodically go teach a lesson if they need to be convinced or reminded)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a clear and transparent framework for what great teaching looks like • Sees teacher capacity building (professional development) as “the work” and has a strong “theory of action” that drives this work • Does not stack professional development sessions on top of one another, but lays a foundation and “weaves” each session into those that have come before it • Has a long term, coherent approach to capacity building throughout the system which becomes part of the culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses summative student results as their main measure of good teaching • Sees teacher capacity building as training focused on a series of “problem based” initiatives (and because there are always lots of problems, have lots of initiatives) • Stack one training on top of the next and assume that the teachers will figure out how they connect and build off of one another (if they do)
<p>4. THOUGHTFULLY EXPLORE (WITH PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS) THE REASONS BEHIND LACK OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN TARGETED AREAS BEFORE JUMPING TO SOLUTIONS.</p>	<p>4. SCHEDULE TRAININGS BASED ON THE PROBLEMS YOU PERCEIVE TEACHERS AND THUS STUDENTS, ARE HAVING AND ASSUME THAT MORE TRAINING IN THAT AREA WILL “FIX” THEM.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a professional development session is planned, there is clarity and transparency of exactly what is expected of teachers as a result of the session(s) • They expect to know if the session(s) achieve the intended outcomes by asking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How will we check for understanding and know if expectations are being met? ○ How will we follow up if we do not see what was expected (and if we do)? ○ How do principals fit into the work? ○ How do coaches fit into the work? ○ Assuming that the teachers are doing what was expected from the session(s), what student results do we expect to see improve, and how will we know? ○ Develop a plan with consultant expert to simultaneously build internal expertise to insure sustainability and to reduce their dependency on consultant support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assume that once teachers are “told” how to do something better, they will simply be willing, and able to “go do it” • If they do not achieve the changes they were hoping for, assume that the teachers simply did not do as they were taught, for one reason or another, and repeat with more sessions or move on to something else

<p>5. UNDERSTAND THAT NO MATTER HOW GOOD THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSION(S) ARE, IT TAKES PRACTICE TO IMPROVE SKILLS (GREAT TEACHING TAKES GREAT SKILL) SO UNLESS THE SESSIONS ARE FOLLOWED UP WITH SUPPORT AS THE TEACHERS TRY TO IMPLEMENT WHAT THEY LEARNED, STRONG RESULTS WILL BE UNLIKELY.</p>	<p>5. ASSUME IF THE TRAININGS ARE DONE WELL, THE TEACHERS SHOULD KNOW WHAT TO DO OR IT IS THE PRINCIPALS' JOB TO HELP THEM AND SEE THAT IT GETS DONE.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a well articulated plan for supporting teachers as they practice what they are learning • Support high quality coaching (an expectation of most professionals, so why not for teachers?) • Choose coaches that are both skilled and highly respected by their peers • Are very clear about the coach's role, and expectations for them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Define the role of the coach versus the role of the principal • Invest in building the capacity of coaches (just being a good teacher will not make one a good coach) • Allow and expect teachers to work, learn and practice together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put more money and time in training with little left to support the cost of coaches. • Fail to realize that not practicing what you are trying to learn, or even worse, practicing wrong, is a fatal flaw • Have a few coaches who are expected to be able to anything and everything that is needed • Have poorly trained coaches who are not respected by their peers • Have coaches, but no coaching plan, clear expectations and defined roles
<p>6. DRAW ON BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EXPERTISE TO BUILD CAPACITY.</p>	<p>6. RELY ON THE LATEST AND GREATEST "SAGE ON THE STAGE".</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't overlook the skills of their own teachers when planning professional development sessions. Understand that they come with automatic credibility, and given proper support and the time to prepare for the sessions, do a great job (with the extra benefit of built in sustainability) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Respects teachers for what they know and do and draw and build on their expertise • When using outside expertise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do not use anyone who won't spend time getting a strong understanding of their context and then is willing to "customize" what they do so that it "weaves" into and builds on the work they have already been doing with their teachers. ○ Develop a plan with consultant expert to simultaneously build internal expertise to insure sustainability and to reduce their dependency on consultant support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let outside "experts" and consultants pull out their latest power points, change the name and date, and leave at the end of their contracted commitment with no joint expectations for results or follow-up

<p>7. SUPPORTS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH APPROPRIATE TOOLS AND MATERIALS.</p>	<p>7. EXPECTS TEACHERS TO MAKE DOE WITH THE MATERIALS AND TOOLS THEY ALREADY HAVE, OR TO DEVELOP OR PURCHASE THEIR OWN.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to time to practice with coaching, there is a recognition that aligned materials and tools are necessary to allow teachers the maximum opportunity for success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fail to realize that when something is difficult to do (and changing practice is often difficult) there is a need to make it as easy to accomplish as possible Fail to understand that both tools without training, and training without tools are likely to lead to frustration and failure for many teachers
<p>8. RECOGNIZES THAT BOTH CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND STRONG PEDAGOGY ARE IMPORTANT AND INCLUDE BOTH IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS.</p>	<p>8. NEGLECTS THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG PEDAGOGY AND ASSUME THAT ALL TEACHERS NEED IS TO “KNOW MORE ABOUT MATH OR...”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content knowledge is highly important, however pedagogy crosses all content areas and thus is foundational (just knowing a subject well does not mean you can teach it to others) When making plans for building teacher capacity in a certain area, work with teachers to gain an understanding of the “root cause” of the issue to determine if the challenge is content knowledge, pedagogy or both 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approach every problem as a "content" or "standards" problem (assuming that if teachers just knew the "standards" or had stronger content expertise the problem would be solved) Fail to support the development of and training in sound pedagogical approaches with all teachers
<p>9. BELIEVE THAT TEACHERS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT (AND LARGEST EXPENDITURE IN THE BUDGET) AND THUS TENDING TO THAT INVESTMENT IS ESSENTIAL.</p>	<p>9. TEACHER SUPPORT AND CAPACITY BUILDING IS VIEWED AS IMPORTANT BUT NOT ESSENTIAL.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a dedicated funding stream for capacity building Establish a level of support that is maintained, even in challenging fiscal times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rely on available funds or grant funding to support capacity building efforts Capacity building efforts increase or decrease as a function of available funding
<p>10. CULTIVATES INNOVATION WITH STAFF AND STUDENTS TO STRENGTHEN STUDENT LEARNING AND WELLBEING, AND ACHIEVE EQUITY FOR ALL.</p>	<p>10. STAYS WITH ACADEMIC LEARNING AS TRADITIONALLY TAUGHT.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports teachers in developing pedagogies that involve all students. Helps orient teachers and students to engage in learning related to local and global matters Builds a system and school culture of learning and connectedness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sees academic learning and control as the sole priority Accepts that some students will do well and others won't Treats Socio-Emotional Learning as an add-on program

While the scenarios above are designed to provoke thinking about how to build and sustain strong professional capacity building for teachers, training and coaching alone will not make a great teacher. Suffice it to say that if you expect your teachers to truly care about all of their students, your teachers must feel that you have the same care and concern for them.