

## Professional Development

Professional development activities in the public schools of the Township of Union are designed to assure full staff participation through the designation of three (3) five-hour days of training. At each district-wide activity, the Local Professional Development Committee (LPDC) requests staff feedback and recommendations for the improvement of future activities through the recommendation form on the district portal. During 2007-2008, the district focused all activities on specific goals and objectives set at the school site level. The district objective of creating professional learning communities at each individual campus was successful, as each school now has its own professional development committee in place. All of the teachers register themselves for professional development sessions through our online learning portal. This portal was very well received by the staff, as reflected by staff comments on the session evaluations. The topics for all sessions at the schools were intended to respond to district needs as identified in the staff needs assessment, district goals, school-level corrective action plans, and New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJ CCCS). Emphasis was focused on instructional strategies that would result in enhanced student learning and achievement.

During 2007-2008, the district continued its comprehensive program of after-school elective professional development activities. We more than doubled the amount of courses offered from the prior year. Topics for these sessions were selected from among those noted in the approved district professional development plan and various needs assessment instruments. Whenever possible, the district tried to utilize the professional expertise of in-house staff. Of particular note were the many sessions related to the integration of technology in the classroom. All activities were scheduled with the topics adjusted in response to emerging needs. Continuing the success of June 2007's Content Reading Summer Seminar, two (2) simultaneous sessions were scheduled in June 2008. One was about understanding dyslexia and the other about using databases. Each summer session took place over a four-day period. 52 teachers participated in our successful summer seminars. Over 700 members of the district staff participated in thirty-one after school courses ranging from cardio-pulmonary resuscitation training to differentiated instructional methodology to cultural competence.

In accordance with the district professional development plan, other professional development activities focused on building-level goals and objectives. This will remain the primary focus of all of the district-wide staff development days in 2008-2009. In selecting activities and presenters, the intention is to present teachers with opportunities for collaboration and collective action in the pursuit of improved classroom practice.

The district utilizes a number of diverse methods to fully assess its professional development needs. In the past, surveys, test data analysis, program needs assessments, and school needs assessments have been used to determine these needs. For 2008-2009, these methods will be utilized once again, including the analysis of student test data from the spring 2008 statewide assessments. By disaggregating the data, we can better formulate and/or sponsor professional development which will assist any schools/students in need. Subsequent to all district sponsored professional development activities, members of the staff are asked for input on future professional development programs. The Local Professional Development Council, made up of the chairs of the schools' in-house professional development committee is a valuable contributor to this process. Any comments/ideas received are reviewed by the building principals and reported to the district administration and the LPDC, which continually works to implement these suggestions, seeking recommendations for PD activities in light of state and federal mandates concerning standards and assessment.

In an effort to achieve its target goals to meet the requirements of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, (the "No Child Left Behind" law), the district has established school-level goals. The activities conducted to formulate these goals constitute a significant effort to address identified needs directly related to student achievement and the CCCS. Each building conducted its own needs assessment and analyzed available district and state test data to delineate these school goals. The LPDC analyzed each building objective to determine the appropriate professional development activity to facilitate its achievement.

The ESEA/NCLB legislation also requires that the district focus attention on "teaching methods that are proven to work." Monies were dedicated in the FY 2007 NCLB Consolidated Application to the following areas of need: Science and Mathematics at the middle and high school levels, with an emphasis on special education teachers in content areas. The district targeted FY 2007 Title IIA professional development funds to the aforementioned groups. The goal was to expand content area expertise, while simultaneously increasing the abilities of teachers in the areas of differentiated instruction and multiple measures/assessments.

In response to the identification of these topics by the LPDC, the district focuses its professional development program on these issues: Classroom Management/Discipline, Technology, Differentiated Instruction, Crisis Management, Bullying, Addressing the Needs of a Diverse Community/ Multicultural Experiences, Motivating Reluctant Learners, Core Curriculum Content Standards, Achievement of Adequate Yearly Progress Goals (NCLB), Open-ended Questions/Rubric Scoring, Inclusion/Mainstreaming Learning Styles/Strategies, Conflict Resolution/Character Education, Reading Difficulties, Educational Leadership Development/Facilitator Training, Reading/Writing Strategies for Content Areas and Educational Issues and Law. Many of these topics are recurring and continue to be a priority among the teaching staff.

Time commitments are reflected in the inclusion of three professional development days in the school calendar and up to two professional days per staff member to attend conferences/ workshops outside the district as stipulated in the collective bargaining agreement. Also, the district has included salaries for four elementary reading coaches and a staff development coordinator in the budget. The role of the coaches is to provide ongoing reading assistance to K-5 staff/students throughout the school year. The role of the coordinator is to monitor, plan, implement, and assess professional development activities in the district in consultation with the LPDC. The coordinator also serves as the secretary to the LPDC.

The district's Mentor and Induction Plan was revised during the 2007-2008 school year and was also approved by the county board in July 2008. In May 2008, a three-day Mentor Training Institute was conducted to train prospective new teacher mentors.

For 2008-2009, additional training to all assigned mentors was held on September 8, 2008 .On August 27, 2008, provisional teachers participated in orientation activities and classroom management training that was also delineated in the district Mentor Plan. Both mentors and novice teacher partners were encouraged to conduct weekly meetings to provoke discussion about effective classroom teaching practices.

Mentors and provisional partners will again be expected to complete at least three (3) classroom visitations, keep monthly logs of the issues discussed in their regular meetings, and attend a series of meetings/training sessions that will be held approximately every six weeks through June.