

## DEAR COLLEAGUES:



As superintendents, you already know that your leadership is critical in building structures for effective professional development systems and

processes that optimize existing resources (people, money, and time). Success requires passionate superintendents presenting positive, forward-looking visions that include high levels of achievement for all students. Superintendents must possess the skills and acumen to build coalitions with teachers, principals, school boards, parents, and students to adequately staff, fund, and implement reforms with fidelity.

The current moment in education (ESEA reauthorization looming, Common Core Standards and more) presents a unique opportunity for districts to reassess, redesign, and drastically alter the teacher professional development system. You hold the key levers to advance system-level reforms and, as such, you are in the best position to affect change.

Professional development is critical to achieving positive academic outcomes in the classroom.

AASA supports superintendents to ensure that the professional development systems created are sustainable, teacher-supported and teacher-led. This publication focuses on redesigning teacher professional development using innovative professional development (iPD) principles to increase the ranks of engaging and effective teachers, which will positively affect retention, graduation and academic success, and that will assist in reaching your district's goals.

Enjoy it and let me know what you think.

**Daniel Domenech**

*Executive Director*



# Superintendent Leadership for iPD Assessment and Redesign



**AASA partnered with three urban/large county districts on a professional development redesign process** to evaluate, assess, and make plans for improvement. These three districts—Fulton County Schools (GA), Miami-Dade County Public Schools (FL) and Syracuse City School District (NY)—made great progress individually and collectively. All three districts are led by innovative superintendents who have embraced and continue to institute bold reforms to improve outcomes for students.

Superintendent Robert Avossa, then of Fulton County Schools, Superintendent Alberto Carvalho of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and Superintendent Sharon Contreras of Syracuse City School District have partnered with AASA on high-impact initiatives to improve outcomes for students and have shown the capacity for successful change management, vision, and communication. Combined, these urban/large county districts serve nearly 470,000 children and employ more than 30,000 teachers (FTE). This publication highlights the work of these three superintendents and provides clear recommendations for redesigning teacher professional development systems.

## Readiness Assessment

The **Readiness Assessment Tool** was developed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and is available for free, online at [www.pdredesign.org](http://www.pdredesign.org). It is best used at the beginning of a Professional Development (PD) redesign process or as a checkpoint to get agreement on the current state of the PD system's functionality and efficacy in the district.

The Readiness Assessment Tool is designed to help districts engage in a candid, cross-functional discussion about Professional Development using a common language anchored to key program elements. The assessment tool allows district leaders to gain a high-level understanding of the organization's current strengths and weaknesses and overall readiness, aid in the PD strategy design, and support the associated whole system change.

This online assessment consists of 30 questions across eight categories that comprise the "enabling conditions" and "building blocks" theorized to be necessary for PD Redesign. They are:

- ▶ **Teacher Engagement**
- ▶ **PD Process**
- ▶ **Leadership Capacity**
- ▶ **Resource Optimization**
- ▶ **Delivery Infrastructure**
- ▶ **Supportive Policies**
- ▶ **Data Infrastructure**
- ▶ **High Quality Content and Tools**

Four levels are described for each of the 30 questions, with participants rating the district's capacity as either nonexistent, initial, defined and managed, or optimizing.

Each team member independently reviews and answers each of the 30 questions based on his or her experience and understanding within the district. A summary report is created to highlight key strengths and gaps. All participants meet to discuss their perspectives. Following the discussion, members of the core PD team determine how to incorporate the learnings into actionable next steps and prioritize areas of focus.

## Fulton County Schools, Georgia

- ▶ 95,000 students
- ▶ 67% children of color, 50% FRL
- ▶ 6,200 FTE teachers

### Innovative Professional Development Team

**Lydia Conway**, *Executive Director, Professional Learning*, (team lead)

**Tracy Altherr**, *Teacher*

**Lisa Steele**, *Coordinator, Professional Learning*

**Ronnie Wade**, *Chief of Human Resources*

### Fulton County Schools Redesign Plan

Fulton County Schools' PD Redesign plan centers on their platform of "PD for All" which encompasses Professional Development for all 10,500 staff members in the district including teachers, paraprofessionals, bookkeeping staff, transportation staff and all others. Fulton County's PD Redesign plan centers on three strategies. One expands the district's continued focus on school-based, job-embedded professional learning. Three schools (elementary, middle and high) will be coached and guided through a process for delivery, collaboration, application, evaluation, and best practice for professional learning in their buildings. A second strategy includes increasing the development of teacher-led, high-quality PD content. Exemplary educators will be interviewed and vetted, and those given stipends will create coursework for identified PD needs and pathways. Lastly, the district's focus on blended learning strategies will enhance the video conferencing capacity of its online PD system where teachers will upload video content about instructional strategies that add rigor to the classroom.

INTERVIEW WITH:

## Superintendent Robert Avossa

FORMER SUPERINTENDENT OF FULTON COUNTY SCHOOLS

### What does a good Professional Development system look like?

We don't want teachers to feel like PD is something we do to them. It needs to be something that teachers own and something that they feel like they contribute to, not only for their own development, but also for the development of other teachers in the school district and within their own school. We wanted to start first by allowing them to understand what it was that we expect of great teachers, and then try to help them drive and make those decisions on their own.

### What did your district learn from the Readiness Assessment?

It was very validating. We had several dozen staff involved in the assessment, and they cited that the data that we have available in the school system is good, that the technology tools that we have are good, but that teachers felt like there wasn't a broad enough menu of options for them. Teachers also felt that too much of PD was dictated professional learning opportunities that they were required to take. PD was being seen as more of a compliance piece than for growth and development. In some ways, it validated what we thought; but the good thing is that now

the district has the data and the information to help make those decisions and to make the case to the Board of Education and to the community on why we need to continue to invest in teachers' development. It's one of the most important things we do.

### What advice would you give other district leaders about investing in Innovative Teacher PD systems?

The most important part of our job is who we hire. So, you hire teachers, principals, bus drivers. And it doesn't stop there; because once you've hired a person, now you've got to start thinking about that individual as an asset, and you have to continue to invest in that asset in order for it to give you better and better returns.

A teacher doesn't just stop learning and growing once he or she finishes college. We've got to continue to invest. We think about it as a continuum. And what I would challenge other superintendents to do is to make a case for why they should be investing in their people. And the best case, really, is about student achievement; if you want your scores to go up, you want higher graduation rates, you want dropout rates to go down, then you need to invest in your people.



Professional Development is for everyone...we are giving people a career path...whether they are a teacher, bus driver, teacher assistant, paraprofessional...we want to be able to help them grow. That's really the part that's energized me the most about it.



# Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Florida

- ▶ 350,000 students
- ▶ 91% children of color, 74% FRL
- ▶ 22,450 teachers

## Innovative Professional Development Team

**Anna Rodriguez**, *Director, Office of PD (team lead)*

**Patricia Fernandez**, *Director, Performance Evaluation*

**David Moore**, *Assistant Superintendent  
Office of Academics & Transformation*

**Sergio Nieves**, *Curriculum Support Specialist, Office of PD*

**Wandarece Ruan**, *Director, Teacher Growth*



## Miami-Dade County Public Schools Redesign Plan

M-DCPS is supporting Professional Learning Support Teams' (PLSTs) at each school site. The PLSTs are made up of the principal, an assistant principal, a professional learning specialist and two teachers who provide training in the effective use of collaboration time for professional learning. The PLST serves as a catalyst for school improvement, by working with the school leadership team to develop meaningful professional learning opportunities that are relevant and timely. M-DCPS is working to ensure that professional learning services are targeted to address individual school and educator needs. Members of the PLST will participate in enhanced training on the standards of professional learning, implementation and monitoring of school-based professional learning models, and the new districtwide professional development management system. M-DCPS made a policy change and coupled the schools' required School Improvement and Professional Development plans to show the important linkage between PD and school turnaround.



INTERVIEW WITH:

## Superintendent Alberto Carvalho

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### Why does Miami-Dade invest in Professional Development?

Like many other school districts, we experience a number of challenges like shrinking budgets, a fragile economy, recruiting and retaining skilled instructional staff and the demands for greater financial and academic accountability. These are the stark realities that school districts and the nation's education leaders face as they seek innovative ways to lift student achievement. High-quality professional development systems are critical to achieving the student academic outcomes we strive for. PD is also fundamental to the district's school improvement plan that each school is responsible for implementing.

### What has assessing the current Professional Development system pointed your strategy toward?

We are seeking to enhance district initiatives that undertake a more organic approach to the design and delivery of PD. We are evaluating the effectiveness and efficacy of PD learning experiences on teacher practice and student achievement. One of many PD initiatives that we have successfully implemented in every school in M-DCPS is professional learning support teams. Support teams have proved to be the foundation by which we assess school and teacher needs and evaluate the effectiveness of learning experiences on teacher practice and student achievement.

### What advice would you give district leaders on creating the necessary conditions for effective and sustainable change within their Professional Development programs?

If school leaders are to successfully create effective and lasting change in our PD programs, we have to: focus on student learning driven by specific performance data, create opportunities for teachers to improve instructional practice through self-reflection and collegial feedback, encourage reflective dialogue that enhances instructional practice, and empower our schools to engage in continuous improvement processes that identify professional development needs.



In Miami-Dade, we believe that principals are the primary instructional leaders and best at identifying Professional Development needs at their schools. We are working hard to build instructional leadership capacity and empower principals to individualize and maximize Professional Development at their schools.

For more on AASA's Superintendent Leadership for iPD Assessment and Redesign including Courageous Leadership Conversation videos with Superintendents Avossa, Carvalho, and Contreras, visit: [www.aasa.org/ipd.aspx](http://www.aasa.org/ipd.aspx)

# Syracuse City School District, New York

- ▶ 23,000 students
- ▶ 72% children of color, 78% FRL
- ▶ 1,620 FTE teachers

## Innovative Professional Development Team

**Paula Shannon**, *Chief Academic Officer* (team lead)

**Nathan Franz**, *Executive Director, Office of Teaching and Learning*

**Sharon Pernisi**, *Mathematics Teacher*

**Margaret Wilson**, *Director of Professional Development*

**Rhonda Zajac**, *Supervisor of English Language Arts*

## Syracuse City School District Redesign Plan

The main innovation in SCSD centers on the piloting of a digital platform whereby teachers who participate and excel in Professional Development offerings will earn digital 'badges' of recognition for their skill acquisition. Building on the gamification, interaction, and social media landscape, this platform harnesses the power of recognizing and rewarding participation. SCSD seeks to build targeted, virtual, and self-driven opportunities for Professional Development. The district is also working to add high-quality online offerings that encourage teachers to collaborate and contribute to professional learning to the traditional summer summits and principal institutes throughout the district.



INTERVIEW WITH:

## **Superintendent Sharon Contreras** SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

### **Why is it important to invest in Professional Development?**

In the Syracuse City School District, we face several challenges, and I suspect that many districts are facing these challenges. The first one is maintaining coherence and focus. In the midst of so many demands and mandates being thrown at us, it is easy to be thrown off-task, to lose focus; but we work hard to try to maintain that coherence and focus. We are also dealing in an antiquated system with limited funds, so we're working hard to make sure that as we make a shift from a traditional Professional Development system to a more blended model that has a greater chance of being successful for teachers and students, that we're able to sustain it.

### **What was the Readiness Assessment process like for your district?**

It was a great process, and I am grateful that we completed the Readiness Assessment. We brought together the Superintendent's Teacher Advisory Council, which is made up of approximately 120 classroom teachers, representing every school and program in the district. We also have what are called C3 committees, which are made up of content teachers who provided input. That was another 100 teachers. So, that's more than 10 percent of our teacher population. We also asked the unions to participate: the principal unions, our vice principals, and the Syracuse Teachers Association. And because we brought everyone together, when we analyzed the data, we were able to quickly come to agreement about where we should focus our redesign plans.

### **What were some of the challenges identified in the assessment?**

I think the greatest challenge is that Professional Development does not currently meet the needs of the individual. So, teachers are deeply concerned that a veteran teacher might be in the room with a first-year teacher, who's not only struggling with the Common Core, but also just struggling with, "How do I fill out my grade book?" Teachers want a professional development system that is aligned to the evaluation system, so that they can look at their evaluation framework and say, "This is what I have to work on." Then, the district will have the opportunity and responsibility to offer professional development and professional learning that meets those needs.



I've been in education for more than 20 years, which is long enough to know that most initiatives fail because we don't fully include all of the stakeholders. This process forces us to think about the students, the teachers, the building and central-office leaders...And it's exciting work to bring people together to help us design our professional development system.

# Step-by-Step Guide: How to Redesign Your District's Professional Development System



**The best redesign processes are inclusive, informed, and collaborative and they leverage the district's existing strengths, strategic plan and ongoing improvement practices.**

## 1. Form a Core Team

**Team** Before the redesign process can begin, a core group that will shepherd, catalyze, and implement the redesign plan must be formed. Selecting three to five individuals who will take ownership and responsibility throughout the redesign process is essential to a productive process and favorable outcome.

## 2. Conduct an Assessment With a Strategic Group of Stakeholders

To carry out an assessment, the core team members should participate in and recruit approximately 20 key stakeholders representing a variety of personnel, departments, and perspectives to reflect on and give honest feedback on the current state of PD in their district. The key to a successful assessment process is to find the proper cross-section of PD players to give feedback on what's working and

what's not and promote candid, cross-functional discussions about the current state of PD in the district.

## 3. Share the Results Broadly

The results should be shared with those who had participated in the assessment, along with additional relevant players in the district's change management structure such as union leadership, board members, and other cabinet officials. This provides an opportunity to share findings, discuss the implications, and assist in the beginning phases of planning to improve PD. Sharing the strengths and weaknesses identified by the readiness assessment with other leadership staff encourages transparency and accountability and generates discussion among the group around the tangible steps needed to improve PD in the district. This step also offers models for other teams to redesign or improve processes in their division.

**4. Utilize Assessment Results and Feedback to Develop an Action Plan and Prepare for Implementation** Create an action plan that articulates next

steps in the PD redesign process. Core teams use key findings to make data-informed decisions and develop a plan that includes discrete strategies to implement in the district. It is important that the action plan identifies Phase One implementation priorities—the first wave of program, policy, and practice changes that will be enacted as a result of this process. Redesigning the systems, structures, content and delivery of professional development at the district-level is a multi-year process. The action plan should include short-term and long-term strategies for innovation and redesign that set achievable goals year-by-year.

**5. Begin Districtwide Implementation** Executing a PD redesign plan requires changes in policy and practice. It is also important to promote the new professional development plan to teachers, staff, and administrators, and continue to use the continuous improvement process steps above to ensure course corrections and enhancements.



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