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Advocacy is central to the work of the College Board. We promote programs, policies and practices that increase college access and success for all students. In a world of growing complexity and competing demands, we advocate to ensure that education comes first.

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# NSDC POLICY POINTS

INFORMATION FOR POLICY MAKERS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT IMPROVES STUDENT RESULTS

## Transforming schools: Practices that work

In the executive summary of *How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top* (McKinsey & Company, 2007), Sir Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed write: "Changing what happens in the hearts and minds of children — the main charge of any school system — is no simple task. That some do so successfully while others do not is indisputable. So why is it that some school systems consistently perform better and improve faster than others?" To find the answer, they examined the practices used to improve student performance in 25 of the world's school systems, including 10 of the top performers. "The experiences of these top school systems suggest that three things matter most: 1) Getting the right people to become teachers; 2) Developing them into effective instructors; and 3) Ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child."

**NSDC'S PURPOSE:**  
Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.

NSDC spoke with Sir Michael Barber for the

### ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Winter 2009 issue of the quarterly magazine *JSD*. As a partner at McKinsey & Company, Barber leads its global education practice. He works on major challenges of performance, organization, and reform in government and public services, especially education, in the U.S., U.K., and other countries. Barber worked for British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the implementation of his priority programs, including education.

**In your work preparing the McKinsey report, *How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top*, you found that several policies and approaches delivered superior results for students. Can you describe those?**

**Barber:** There were basically four key messages from looking at the best systems in the world. Although these systems were on three different continents — in Canada, in Finland, in

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### ABOUT NSDC POLICY POINTS

NSDC is a nonprofit membership association representing more than 12,000 educators committed to effective professional development for every educator every day. NSDC recognizes the singular purpose of effective professional learning as ensuring great teaching for every student so that all students achieve at high levels. NSDC believes that one way nations ensure high-quality teaching every day for every student is by creating policies that support school systems in delivering on this promise.

Look to this newsletter to stay informed about the most powerful forms of professional development for educators and the role government has in supporting this key strategy for reaching all students. Each issue will examine a specific aspect of professional development and its relevance to policy making. This issue establishes the importance of professional development for our nation and illuminates what we can learn from high-performing school systems in the U.S. and other countries.



**NSDC Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh**



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## ABOUT NSDC

With more than 12,000 members, NSDC is the only education association working solely to increase student achievement through more effective professional development.

NSDC views high-quality professional development as essential to creating schools in which all students and staff members are learners who continually improve their performance.

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# Transforming schools: Practices that work

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Singapore and in other parts of Asia — all culturally extremely varied, they had three or four things consistently in common.

One is that they recruit really good people into teaching. They could recruit people with good qualifications — that is, good academic degrees — but also with the personal qualifications to be a good teacher, things like their generosity, their liking of children, their ability to be an inspirer of young people. These successful systems screen for the human qualities and for the academic qualifications, and then they train them really well at the beginning.

Secondly, when those teachers get into the profession and become teachers, the system focuses on them learning continuously. There's an ethic of continuous improvement in the profession within these countries and within the successful schools. You see a lot of embedded professional development with mentoring and coaching for support. You see joint planning of lessons and looking at the data, with teachers teaching them separately, reviewing the student work, and then teaching the lesson again. There's very much a focus on improving pedagogy built into the routines of the teachers. When you see systems in the U.S. improving significantly, professional development close to the classrooms is very central to that improvement.

The third thing is that the systems expect that every child will succeed. When a child falls behind, people in these systems don't say, "Oh, that child's not clever enough or comes from a poor background." They say, "What's the barrier to that child keeping up with everybody else, and

what do we need to do about it?"

**Describe the professional learning you see in successful systems. How can schools foster that type of learning for teachers?**

**Barber:** There seem to be some very clear lessons. What don't really work are off-site programs of an academic nature, or even

nonacademic and not related to the job. I'm not saying those programs are bad. If a teacher wants to do an M.A. in educational sociology, that's a great thing to do. What I'm saying is that won't change practice or effect results in a school in a significant way. If you want to drive up the performance of a school or school system, that's not where you should put your dollars as a government.

Second, there are some very good, well-designed, top-down implemented professional learning programs that have changed the results of systems. You can do whole-system reform and staff development in that

top-down way. The problem with that is it's not sustainable in the long run. That will drive up the performance of the system in a short period of time — two, three, or four years — but it doesn't become embedded, the work doesn't become owned by the teachers themselves.

Where you really want to get to is beyond that, where professional learning is absolutely embedded in the practice of the school. There's time in the school day, there's time in the school year. There are teams of teachers working together, planning lessons, reviewing student work, comparing student work from different classes, and trying to understand why certain pedagogies

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## PRACTICES THAT IMPROVE SCHOOLS

- Recruit and effectively train the right people to be teachers.
- Support ongoing teacher learning.
- Expect every child to succeed.
- Embed professional development in the daily work of the school.
- Support teams of teachers in meaningful collaboration.
- Build strong leaders for strong professional learning cultures.



To read the entire interview with Sir Michael Barber, see [www.nsd.org/news/policypoints/](http://www.nsd.org/news/policypoints/). This interview is part of the Winter 2009 issue of *JSD* on what works in professional development.

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seem to work more effectively than others. There are people in the school who are acknowledged experts — the coaches, we call them — or the expert teachers in our primary strategy. This is the kind of person who is demonstrably effective, who will coach teachers, who will model lessons in their own classrooms. It's that culture of professional learning, really focused on "how do I get the next child up to the standard?"

What you really want to achieve is to get that culture of professional learning in every school. That brings about consistent, continuous improvement. You see it in the best schools in the U.S and U.K. , but you don't see it consistently across the U.S. and the U.K.

**What can help to change a school's culture? Obviously it's not enough for teachers to want this or for principals to demand it.**

**Barber:** Getting the professional development you want for school leaders becomes absolutely fundamental. They are the people who will set the culture, create the timetable, and create expectations for teachers. If the school leader creates a culture in which teachers are expected to look at data and worry about each student who falls behind, expected to watch each other teach, expected to work with mentors and coaches in the system, it will happen.

Our challenge is to get that to happen across all schools in a country. In the U.S., you've often got huge bureaucratic barriers to that. The barriers could be the competence of district leaders, or the degree to which districts have their own staff development or curriculum people of variable quality who soak up resources that could otherwise be spent on what I've just been describing.

Secondly, in the U.S. there are funding barriers, bureaucratic barriers, and in some schools, skill barriers. There's not sufficient focus in U.S. systems on developing school leaders and giving them the responsibility to set the staff culture I've described. It's quite a big challenge to do that. Some school districts manage to do that because they get the right leadership and set the right tone, and they make it all sing everywhere. You see individual school districts go a long way doing that. The problem is it takes only for a superintendent to move somewhere else, and the district sinks back. Embedding that culture in the schools and the professional ethic as well as in the working practices really makes it work.

## REFERENCE

**McKinsey & Company (2007).** *How the world's best-performing systems come out on top*. London: Author. Available online at <http://snipurl.com/9j80o>. ■

## resources / elements of effective professional development

### NSDC's Standards for Staff Development

Developed in collaboration with leading educational organizations and practitioners and informed by research, NSDC's standards establish what is necessary to ensure that professional development impacts student achievement.

**See NSDC's standards online:**  
[www.nsd.org/standards/](http://www.nsd.org/standards/)

### Definition of professional development

NSDC has proposed a revised definition of professional development for use in the reauthorized version of NCLB. This definition reflects the latest research on effective professional development.

**Read the definition online:**  
[www.nsd.org/standfor/definition.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standfor/definition.cfm)

## ABOUT THE COLLEGE BOARD

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity.

Founded in 1900, the association is composed of more than 5,400 schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations.

Each year, the College Board serves 7 million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,500 colleges.

Among its best-known programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, and the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®).

The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities, and concerns.

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# When adults learn, students achieve

*Benwood schools' state reading scores jump 53% in program's first year*

To see a U.S. system that is using professional learning as a lever to boost student achievement, examine the Benwood Initiative in Chattanooga, Tenn. (Hamilton County Schools). Widely touted for its success in raising student achievement over the course of just a few years, several media outlets at first focused attention on the reconstitution of schools and later the financial incentives some teachers received for improved performance. The success the district experienced, however, is due in large part to the initiative's unrelenting emphasis on improving teacher effectiveness through high-quality professional development and leadership practices.

With several Hamilton County schools at the bottom of a 1999 state-wide ranking, the district was motivated to make drastic transformations. The Benwood Foundation, a local initiative, agreed to contribute significant resources to fund a partnership between the schools and the Public Education Foundation, with the stipulation that the schools raise the scores of 3rd graders on state reading tests. Eight of the lowest-performing elementary schools in the district thus became the Benwood schools.

The leadership in the district realized that ensuring an effective teaching staff was critical to turning around student achievement. As the improvement efforts began, schools were experiencing poor teaching as well as teacher turnover and retention problems. The superintendent made the controversial move to reconstitute the entire staffs of

**To learn more about the Benwood Initiative, visit the following resources:**

- **Public Education Foundation web site**  
[www.pefchattanooga.org](http://www.pefchattanooga.org)
- **"The Benwood Plan: A Lesson in Comprehensive Teacher Reform,"** by Elena Silva, *Education Sector Reports*, April 2008  
[www.educationsector.org/usr\\_doc/TheBenwoodPlan.pdf](http://www.educationsector.org/usr_doc/TheBenwoodPlan.pdf)
- **"It's Being Done: The Benwood Initiative. Chattanooga, Tennessee,"** The Achievement Alliance  
<http://snipurl.com/91pen>



the Benwood schools at the end of the 2001-02 school year, requiring all faculty to reapply for their jobs. He believed this would allow the district to move ineffective teachers out of Benwood schools, though for all the publicity this move generated, more than 90% of the teachers were rehired to their previous assignments. So what then contributed to the 53% gain in the state reading scores at the end of the first year and 80% by 2007? In addition, all schools showed gains in most subjects, with five schools receiving A's on the state's assessment in reading, math, science, and social studies.

The key to the schools' improvement was widespread, intentional professional development, teacher support, and focused leadership. Specific professional support that the Benwood schools used to improve teacher capacity include:

- **Regular opportunities for collaboration:** Schools reorganized their schedules to give teachers

time to meet in grade-level teams while students are in specials such as art and music. The teams focus on instruction, often with the support of a lead teacher or principal.

- **Coaches and consulting teachers:** Teachers and administrators received one-on-one support in instructional practices and curriculum development, with opportunities for observing model lessons and co-teaching.
- **Frequent data analysis:** Tennessee's "value-added" data shows educators where students begin each year along with their progress plotted against their expected growth. This information allows teachers and administrators to pinpoint effective teachers. Principals encourage other teachers to observe those who are effective in specific areas; when all teachers struggle with a particular topic, principals arrange for targeted professional development. ■