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Supt. Dockins



Superintendent's Message Professional Obligation

Superintendent Mark Dockins

If we consider ourselves professional, then we have a professional obligation to a focus on continuous improvement in our field. In any profession, continuous improvement drives that industry. The medical profession, for instance, must constantly improve procedures and treatments in order to reduce health issues in our world. The business profession is constantly monitoring its product and improving upon the product, delivery, consumer satisfaction, etc. in order to stay in business. When professionals become complacent and/or content with the level of achievement, they soon find themselves left in the dust at the end of the day. The key to continuous improvement in any profession is the ability to monitor progress. We have to be able to immediately monitor whether what we are doing is actually improving our product. As professionals we must be researchers and learners ourselves. We must analyze our own profession and understand the learning process better than anyone else. We must endeavor to continuously improve our product.

Our professional product is student learning. Those of us in the education profession understand that student learning is a highly complicated and complex process. It is not as simple as just sitting in a class and absorbing information from a fountain head of knowledge. Many people outside

the profession do not understand the difference between lecturing and **ensured** learning—hence the ignorant statement: “Those that can’t—teach”. If teaching were as simple as standing in front of a class and telling students to remember important things, then the nation would have 100% graduation rate and everyone would be a teacher.

The act of **ensuring** that a student learns to read is amazingly complex. It requires

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repetition, application of new skills, engaged listening, the ability to understand engagement, modeling, scaffolding from old to new skills, more repetition, independent practice, progress monitoring, assessment, a thorough understanding of the curriculum, the ability to intervene with a new way of instruction for remediation, more progress monitoring and the ability to make personal connections to every individual student. Learning to read is truly more complicated than rocket science.

We are creating systematic monitoring processes and a system of interventions for those who have interference in their learning. Only when monitoring and intervening systems are implemented, is it possible that we can ensure that every student learns at a high level. At any step in the

process of acquiring the skills of reading, if something is missing and not corrected, a child may not be able to achieve in their reading at a normal level. If a child is missing the skill of reading, everything else in their educational endeavors will be at risk. There is never a simple step by step process for a teacher to follow to ensure a child will learn. Learning is vicarious; however, that does not mean that there shouldn't be a clear system of multiple level interventions that can be immediately implemented when a problem is detected to ensure a student does not get left behind.

Implementing that systematic approach to student learning is the key to our successful delivery of the end product. Learning is a complex process that can be broken down into individual skills. It's not simple by any means, but it is understandable. To be an educational professional, we must approach student learning with the attitude that we must continually assess our product and find ways of making it better. Otherwise we are merely punching in the time-clock of an assembly-line job teaching only the students who come prepared, without any learning deficits, and who have supportive parents. Society expects more from the education profession than the assembly-line approach. Society expects us to be experts on how children learn and continuously improve the education profession.

Educators Must Accept the Challenge to Be Professional

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) model for educators has become increasingly popular in the American education system. Developed and championed by the staff of Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois and its former principal and superintendent Dr. Richard DuFour, the model emphasizes focusing on the areas of learning more than teaching, working collaboratively, and holding educators accountable for results (DuFour, 2004). Who could argue with such noble principles?

In order to become part of a Professional Learning Community, educators first must commit to its most fundamental premise: to be a *professional*. What is a professional? A *professional is someone with expertise in a specialized field. It is an individual who not only has pursued advanced knowledge to enter the field but who expects to remain current in their evolving knowledge base* (DuFour and Eaker, 1998).

This definition is divided into two parts. The first part of the definition implies credentialing, which is required by Michigan law. This includes such avenues as completing an approved course of study at a college or university, serving an apprenticeship, and passing some form of professional examination. This process allows a person to *enter* the field. For more information, visit www.michigan.gov/opps.

The second part of the definition identifies the key concept of *growth*. As professionals, educators are expected to stay current in the constantly evolving knowledge-base within education. It is each educator's

responsibility to stay connected with research that stimulates thought and provides findings that enhance educational practice.

Educators have the awesome responsibility of shaping the minds of society's most vulnerable members—its children. In order to effectively shape those minds to become capable, contributing citizens, each educator must be armed with in-depth understanding of his or her learners, the subject matter being taught, educational policies, and the communities that are served.

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Here are a few simple steps educators can use to increase their professional learning:

1. Join a professional organization for educators (preferably within the subject area taught).
2. Read one article per week from an educational journal that relates to either the learners or the subject being taught (sharing articles with colleagues offers the additional benefit of encouraging impromptu conversations).
3. Subscribe to an educational periodical to stay abreast of the latest developments in the field.
4. Buy a book from the education section of a bookstore, or borrow one from the library. Read from the book for 15-30 minutes each night. Repeat this process

monthly.

These steps do not require a huge time commitment. They simply require a commitment to be the very best. In a climate that demands more of students, more is demanded of the educators who teach them. When teachers embrace professionalism and keep up with advances in their field, they naturally become invigorated and productive. Embracing professional duties not only promises that students will learn more, it makes the teaching profession more rewarding as well.

Anthony Muhammad is a researcher and educational consultant. He is a former teacher and award-winning principal at Southfield High School. He currently is president of New Frontier 21 Consulting, an organization dedicated to the transformation of schools in underprivileged communities in North America located at www.newfrontier21.com. For more information, contact: Anthony Muhammad, amuhammad@newfrontier21.com.

References

- DuFour, R. (2004). What is a professional learning community? *Educational Leadership*, pg. 71-75.
- DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998). Professional learning communities at work. National Educational Service.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Fingerprinting for Educator Licensing—Lee Gagon, HR

Thanks for noting that the Board of Education has approved changes to policy 005.1200 *Standards of Conduct and Due Process* and policy 005.2100 *Drug Free Workplace*, to prohibit smoking in all school district buildings and on the property on which those facilities are located. Please refer to those policies, located online at www.uitah.net, *Personnel Policies*, for more detailed information.

All Level 2 or 3 licensed educators whose professional license expires in 2010 will

need to complete a fingerprint background check as part of the relicensure process. Please complete the fingerprint background check process as soon as possible, in order to avoid any potential backlog of the Bureau of Criminal Investigations (BCI) system in the winter or spring of 2010.

Visit www.utah.gov/teachers, provide the information requested, pay the \$69 online fee, and print out the form to bring to the district office to complete fingerprinting. Beginning January 4, 2010, you can go

to www.utah.gov/teachers to complete the relicensure process. Please contact Lee Gagon at lee.gagon@uintah.net, if you have questions.

License Renewal:
Simply go to www.schools.utah.gov,
Educator Quality and Licensing,
License Renewal to access the
Background Check link.