Developing a Culture of Learning

In years past, developing a culture of continuous learning applied to students, faculty, and administrators. In today’s era of scrutiny from a variety of stakeholders, continuous learning must apply to a broader range of people, including support staff, parents, legislators, and members of the business community.

As a young administrator, I did not encourage staff to share their learning with a variety of colleagues. Often the information remained within the “safe zone” of teacher teams or was not shared at all. After years of experience, however, the imperative to provide professional development opportunities for faculty and support staff and for them to share what was covered became apparent. Faculty and support staff need opportunities to learn about a range of topics, including strategies that address the various learning styles of students, community issues that may impact student learning, analysis of student data, and how to improve student achievement to reach the goals of No Child Left Behind.

At our school, we identified interested faculty and support staff who wanted professional development and who were willing to share their new learning with others. As people began to share, we saw increased involvement among other staff who then participated in professional development. Teachers were encouraged to share learning strategies, data, and student achievement with parents. Parents began to understand the complexities of teaching and learning. Parents who showed interest and leadership were asked to become more involved in the PTA and other committees, increasing the circle of learning and parent involvement.

Having been trained as a mentor in NAESP’s PALS program, I encouraged my protégé to think about the circle of learners. How could she increase the circle of learning to maximize student achievement and improve the climate, involving additional parents and continuing staff learning? I asked her to consider the following:

■ What issues are relevant to student learning that staff need to be aware of in order to improve student achievement?
■ What funding is needed to support professional development in the areas identified? And how will funding be obtained?
■ How can the school involve parents in professional development activities at the school?

—Joyce E. Dunn