As instructional facilitator and assistant principal, I worked with my principal to develop a vision of sustained, ongoing professional development. We had to change from a "spray-and-pray" model -- spray it out there and pray the teachers go back in the classroom and implement it -- to professional development on campus involving everyone in our school. Now, we purposefully plan and execute professional development. We have eliminated faculty meetings. If we meet, we meet for a learning purpose.

We have a school leadership team that includes representatives from each grade level, the special education department, and the special areas, as well as the assistant principal, and principal. The team meets six times throughout the year, beginning with a leadership planning meeting in the summer. We look at performance expectations using state standards, federal Adequate Yearly Progress goals, and at our trends across the school to decide which areas to focus on. From there, we select professional development needs that align with our school improvement goals. We also get teacher input through a survey as an additional data point.

We have shifted our professional development to work more with one another. We have book studies based around student needs and teacher interests. I facilitate study groups in which we analyze the data and research instructional strategies. I work with teachers to develop their abilities to lead these groups. We hire substitutes to allow us to do peer observations, co-teach, or observe model lessons, and then we have dialogue about what we observe and have consultants or coaches work with us to follow up. The district also offers daylong or half-day sessions that grade-level teams use in their studies.

We periodically evaluate ourselves as a form of reflection, either individually or as a learning team. These are not performance evaluations. We use Innovation Configuration maps for teachers to decide at what level they are performing and to set goals for themselves.

We have a schoolwide focus. Everyone in the school, from paraprofessionals to office secretary to principal, takes part in professional learning around the topic. We also involve parents.

For example, we discovered students were struggling with figurative language and not understanding metaphors, similes, and idioms. Parents use idioms a lot in everyday language. So teachers would point out whenever a child used an idiom; we asked parents to explain the meaning of the idioms they used; and even the bus driver had students on the bus sharing idioms with him to see whether he knew what they meant. Sometimes it's not all looking at data, but having everybody aware of the strategies that are in place.

Our teachers are really teaching as one unit, teaching our children what they need to know according to the standards and the learning goals we have.

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