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Introduction

The past several years have helped us see more clearly than ever before that staff development, school reform, and the improvement of schools are complicated and challenging undertakings. As discussed in the Preface, change, even positively perceived change, is difficult to bring about in long-standing, well-established organizations. Our schools are clearly among such organizations, and their cultures, the ones that have given us so much success and stability in the past, are deeply ensconced and rigid. Like all other such organizations, they are not naturally open or amenable to major change. Can we bring about meaningful reform and major change in our schools? The answer is “absolutely yes,” and many such changes will be essential in the future! To do so, however, will require approaches and processes that are different from most of those attempted during the past decade. We must not only decide what change or reform is required but also put in place a significant transition process to help us negotiate the societal, organizational, cultural, and people barriers in and affecting the schools.

Major change in our schools, as is true in other types of organizations, requires active and effective sponsorship—support, encouragement, pressure, and accountability—from the leadership (e.g., boards, superintendents, and principals). With strong sponsorship at each level in the school, teachers and other school personnel feel a greater sense of empowerment and are more comfortable with change and more willing to seriously attempt new major projects and processes.

If genuine reform is to come from within our schools, then teachers and school personnel must be importantly and intimately involved. In particular, teachers must be perceived, treated, and held accountable as educational professionals. To treat them as such requires that teachers enjoy the latitude to invent local solutions and to discover and develop practices that embody central values and principles rather than to implement, adopt, or demonstrate practices thought to be universally effective (Little, 1993).

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THE WHOLE-FACULTY STUDY GROUP SYSTEM

One of the most exciting new approaches to staff development, school improvement and reform, enhancement of student learning, and change in education is Murphy's Whole-Faculty Study Groups (WFSGs).

The Whole-Faculty Study Group system is a job-embedded, self-directed, student-driven approach to professional development. It is a professional development system designed to build communities of learners in which professionals continuously strive to increase student learning. This is accomplished by practitioners (a) deepening their own knowledge and understanding of what is taught, (b) reflecting on their practices, (c) sharpening their skills, and (d) taking joint responsibility for the students they teach.

"Whole-Faculty" means that every faculty member at the school is a member of a study group focusing on data-based student instructional needs. In such a context, a study group is a small number of individuals, three to five, joining together to increase their capacities to enable students to reach higher levels of performance. The collective synergy of all the study groups advances the whole school.

The essence of the WFSG system resides in the following four grounding or fundamental questions.

- What do students need for teachers to do so that teachers will have a deeper understanding of what they teach?
- What do students need for teachers to do so that teachers will be more skillful in how they teach?
- What do students need for teachers to do so that teachers will challenge students to learn difficult and fundamental concepts?
- What do students need for teachers to do so that teachers will give students skills to be deep thinkers and problem solvers?

The WFSG system has all the teachers on a faculty actively involved in study groups addressing student needs. WFSGs are student based! Consequently, the essential or overarching question that guides the WFSG system is as follows.

What are our students learning and achieving as a result of what we are learning and doing in our study group?

A properly implemented model encompasses the change characteristics discussed previously as well as several others, including collaboration and synergy; comentoring; individual, team, and organizational resilience; elements of learning organizations; and culture modification.

WFSGs allow teachers the freedom and flexibility to explicate, invent, and evaluate practices that have the potential to meet the needs of their students and the community their schools serve. As teachers work together in study groups, they alter their practices to provide new and innovative opportunities for their students to learn in challenging and productive new ways.

Effective WFSGs are a complex mixture of many activities occurring simultaneously. This model is a holistic, practical process for facilitating major schoolwide change and for enhancing learning outcomes in the schools. In particular, Murphy's WFSGs include the following:

- Giving teachers in schools a structure for collaboration and school improvement
- Supporting each other and, together, planning, learning, testing ideas, and sharing and reflecting on classroom practice
- Grappling with broad principles of teaching, learning, and practice
- Engaging in the pursuit of genuine questions, problems, and curiosities in ways that alter perspectives, policies, and practices
- Constructing subject matter knowledge versus merely consuming it
- Immersing in sustained work with ideas, materials, and colleagues
- Experiencing the frustrations of dealing with “what is” while envisioning “what could be”
- Functioning not only as consumers of research but also as critics and producers of research
- Contributing to knowledge and practice
- Struggling with the fundamental questions of what teachers and students must learn and know

WFSG: WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW IT BEGAN

In December 1986, Carlene Murphy, Joseph Murphy, Bruce Joyce, and Beverly Showers had their first conversation about how to increase student achievement through staff development in the Richmond County School District in Augusta, Georgia. Carlene Murphy was director of staff development in the public school district, which comprised 60 schools, and Joseph Murphy was dean of the School of Education at Augusta State University. Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, authors of a then newly published book titled *Increasing Student Achievement Through Staff Development*, were and still are nationally and internationally known scholars in the fields of staff development and models of teaching. This conversation led to a 3-year working relationship and an intense focus on (a) the culture of the school and the process of innovation, (b) ways teachers learn new teaching strategies, and (c) ways teachers transfer new skills into the classroom.

One of the first decisions the foursome made was that their work would involve whole schools. This meant that the staff development program would be offered only to whole faculties, and every teacher in such a school would participate in all

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phases of the program. The program was voluntary for a school, but if at least 80% of the teachers voted to support the program, all teachers would be expected to participate. This decision, whole-faculty participation, later became the central feature of what is today called the WFSG approach.

During the next 5 years, after discussions among the superintendent, principals, and faculties, 12 schools chose to become a part of the whole-school improvement program. The content of the improvement program was several models of teaching (Joyce & Weil, 2003) or approaches to teaching designed to bring about particular kinds of learning and help students become more effective learners. The models selected also helped students acquire information, ideas, skills, ways of thinking, and means of expressing themselves.

The whole-school improvement, called the Models of Teaching (MOT) program, put emphasis on content and on what teachers would be learning to do.

The skill development phase of Richmond County's program was two-pronged. One prong had teachers attending training sessions to learn the theory that supported the selected models while providing them with many opportunities for demonstrations and practice strategies with other teachers in a risk-free environment. The other prong involved using the models of teaching focused on redesigning the workplace, including having all the teachers on a faculty in small groups focusing on the implementation of the teaching strategies in their classrooms. Without the work that occurred in the small groups, the level of use of the models of teaching would not have had such a profound impact, and cultural norms would not have shifted from teacher isolation to teacher collaboration. Murphy discovered that in doing the work, one cannot separate the content (MOT) from the process (study groups). If the program had not had powerful content, it would not have mattered what processes were used.

It took a powerful process, however, to push high levels of application of the models of teaching to result in significant student learning. This very important understanding is the foundation of Chapters 6 through 8.

From 1987 to 1993, seven articles were published in professional journals and chapters in two books were written about the work in Richmond County. These publications are listed in the references and recommended reading list.

GOING NATIONAL WITH WFSGs

In January 1993, Murphy retired from the Richmond County Public Schools and began working with schools at the national level. She designed a process through which each school would identify its own required staff development content. The procedure required the faculty, in conjunction with the administration, to identify the priority academic needs of its students and specify the content that would enable teachers to address identified student needs.

In terms of support and resources, Murphy recognized that most districts had valuable resources and support personnel who had expertise in different academic areas, such as reading, mathematics, and science. University personnel, textbook representatives, and private consultants also could provide services and resources to schools in curriculum content and in effective teaching practices.

After working with schools for several years and trying various procedures for identifying the student's study groups and how study groups could be organized,

Murphy designed the decision-making cycle (DMC) described in Chapter 7. From these varied practical experiences over several years (e.g., responding to different school contexts), the procedural guidelines given in Chapter 6 evolved from Murphy's work.

In 1994, Murphy called the work she was doing "whole-faculty study groups." This title emerged as a result of the types of requests she was receiving. When school and district leaders began contacting Murphy about working with their school or district using study groups, she would ask, "A whole faculty?" Most often, the answer was "No. Any teacher who wants to be in a study group." Murphy's response was "My work is with whole schools, not setting up independent, stand-alone study groups." Over time, Murphy found it necessary to call her work whole-faculty study groups to distinguish it from other types of collegial arrangements. The first time this term appeared in a publication was in the article, "Whole-Faculty Study Groups: Doing the Seemingly Undoable," in the *Journal of Staff Development* (Murphy, 1995).

The WFSG approach has evolved dramatically since it began in 1986. Nonetheless, the heart of the WFSG process rests with Joyce and Showers from the early days in the schools in Augusta.

ATLAS COMMUNITIES

In 1997, Murphy became associated with ATLAS Communities, one of the national comprehensive school reform designs. Starting with Murphy's involvement, the WFSG system became the centerpiece of professional development in all ATLAS Communities' schools. ATLAS had previously strongly encouraged schools to organize faculty into study groups; WFSG became the standard for ATLAS schools, however. The Murphy-ATLAS relationship greatly increased the number of schools implementing WFSGs and expanded its knowledge base. Through spring 2004, 135 schools had chosen ATLAS Communities as their change model knowing that one nonnegotiable aspect of ATLAS is that all faculty would be members of study groups.

As indicated previously, ATLAS Communities is a comprehensive design. The ATLAS design or framework includes four key elements. The goal is to fully integrate the four elements during a 3-year period. The elements are

- Teaching, learning, and assessment: The central academic purpose of ATLAS is to help students understand important ideas and concepts and to challenge students to apply their knowledge in new situations.
- Professional development: ATLAS asserts that professional development is the cornerstone of the change effort and WFSGs are the cornerstone of professional development.
- Family and community: In ATLAS Communities, schools, families, and the communities have reciprocal relationships in which families and communities contribute to the school and the school values their voices.
- Management and decision making: Management structures are in place and involve all stakeholders.

When we refer to ATLAS Communities, readers should keep in mind that the reference is to more than schools implementing WFSGs; ATLAS is an integrated

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approach to the change process. For more information about ATLAS, see www.atlascommunities.org. There is no measure to accurately determine the impact ATLAS Communities has had on the ongoing development and evolution of the WFSG system. The ATLAS-Murphy partnership greatly increased the number of schools, the demographics of the schools, and the scope of geographic locations of schools to implement WFSGs. From 1997 to 2002, Murphy exclusively worked with ATLAS, with the exception of the Louisiana Department of Education and Springfield, Missouri, public schools.

LOUISIANA'S STATEWIDE LEARNING-INTENSIVE NETWORKING COMMUNITIES FOR SUCCESS PROCESS

In 2000, Murphy began working with the Louisiana Department of Education in relation to its Learning-Intensive Networking Communities for Success (LINCS), a statewide English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies initiative. LINCS is a multidimensional professional development partnership in association with the Louisiana Department of Education, the Louisiana Systemic Initiatives Program, and the Southern Regional Education Board. The purpose of the LINCS process is to establish professional learning communities in which classroom teachers build content knowledge and strengthen the ability to design and implement standards-based, content-rich, technology-enhanced lessons into their daily instruction to improve student achievement. This program requires a 5-year commitment from a school and integrally involves the WFSG process.

Continuous communication between Murphy and the LINCS staff has contributed to the history and the effectiveness of the WFSG process. In Chapter 11, data from the LINCS schools are discussed.

SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A partnership was forged in 2001 between Murphy and the Springfield public schools (SPSs). After attending a national institute on WFSGs, Director of Staff Development Anita Kissinger presented the WFSG system to her supervisors and colleagues. As a result, six district instructional specialists have been trained in WFSGs and have conducted orientations and trainings for SPS faculties. As of September 2003, 55 of the 61 SPSs were using WFSGs as the vehicle for implementing school improvement plans. The Springfield schools continue to add to the data on the effects of WFSGs.

In Chapter 11, more information is given about specific results. It should be noted that the good results from the WFSG process have been obtained in conjunction with other critical variables for creating this positive change, including the hard work of district and school administrators, the time allocated to WFSG meetings, and the substantive content that teachers do in their study group meetings.

AUTHORS' COLLABORATION

In spring 1997, Dale W. Lick contacted Murphy after reading about her work. Lick was intrigued with the idea that all faculty at a school were members of teams or

small groups focusing on the goal of the organization—student achievement. Lick commented that the model was as close to a synergistic organizational development model as anything he had seen in public schools. The two decided that Murphy's public school experience and Lick's organizational and change experience from his more than 25 years of administrative work should be integrated. Lick would integrate his theoretical and practical knowledge of organizations and change and his experience in working with teams into Murphy's work. Two major results of the Murphy and Lick collaboration were the two books, *Whole-Faculty Study Groups: A Powerful Way to Change Schools and Enhance Learning* (1998) and *Whole-Faculty Study Groups: Creating Student-Based Professional Development* (2001).

THE WFSG NATIONAL CENTER

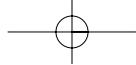
The WFSG National Center is in Augusta, Georgia. The vision of the center is to be "the exemplary learning organization that provides systemic support for creating collaborative cultures ensuring student success." Its mission is to "ensure student achievement through the authentic application of the WFSG system in schools worldwide." The Web site, www.MurphysWFSG.org, gives contact, schedule, and other information about the center. The center sponsors the National WFSG Conference in February each year, including general and concurrent sessions presented by individuals and teams concerning WFSGs in schools. In conjunction with the conference, preconference workshops (institutes) are offered on skill building: the Level I institute for representatives from schools who are planning or just beginning WFSGs, the Level II institute for representatives from schools who are interested in maintenance and continuation strategies for WFSGs, and the Looking at Student Work (LASW) institute. Each summer, the center also sponsors Level I, Level II, and LASW institutes in June and July. In addition, the center offers a range of services directly to state and regional agencies and districts and schools.

THE VIDEO JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

The Video Journal of Education has produced a program titled "Whole-Faculty Study Groups: Collaboration Targeting Student Learning," which is presented by Carlene Murphy. The first video, "A Catalyst for Change," discusses the context that supports WFSG and the 15 process guidelines. The second video, "A Structure for Collaboration," discusses the DMC and the four guiding principles. Both tapes include interviews with teachers and principals and study groups' meeting and classroom work. (For additional information, see www.TeachStream.com.)

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY

People often say to Murphy, "WFSG is such a good idea. How did you come up with it?" In her mind in response, she reflects on her and Lick's two previous WFSG books and their development and the numerous presentations that she, Lick, and others have made throughout the country on WFSGs and how important it is for others to understand that a major part of the success of the WFSG system is the years of work with it by real people, in real schools, in many very different places, and in all kinds



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of circumstances. The history of the WFSG system illustrates an evolutionary, purposeful work by many dedicated professional educators over more than 20 years. From this history, our readers and implementers should take comfort in knowing that (a) the WFSG system is a valuable part of the work today leading to the advancement of our schools and enhanced student learning, and (b) this WFSG book is the result of a long and fruitful period of progressive and accountable development.

