



Hancock Central School District educators took part in a three-day conference on professional development in February at the Phoenix Convention Center in Arizona. From left to right are Middle School Social Studies teacher Kelly DaBrescia, Middle School/High School Spanish teacher Danielle Gross, K-12 Art teacher Samantha Spalholz, Kindergarten teacher Melissa Karcher, and K-12 Principal Lori Asquith.

Staff development means higher learning

It's all about the kids.

That's why the Hancock Central School District's Lori Asquith, Kelly DaBrescia, Danielle Gross, Melissa Karcher and Samantha Spalholz spent three days together in Phoenix, Arizona, earlier this year. Their road trip revolved around The Summit on Professional Learning Communities at Work, a professional-development conference for K-12 educators inspired by the late Dr. Richard DuFour.

"Student learning means whatever it takes," said Asquith, whose first academic year as Hancock's K-12 Principal included the February conference at the Phoenix Convention Center. "We want everybody to get that universal message. The common vision is it's about our students, not us."

Dr. DuFour served public-school communities as a teacher, principal and superintendent en route to becoming an authority on the Professional Learning Communities at Work process, which he detailed in his 1998 best-selling book *Professional Learning Communities at Work, Learning by Doing, and In Praise of American Educators*.

Educators following the PLC model work together to continuously develop their professional skills, leading to improved student learning by default. In short, the idea is that student achievement is directly linked to the qualifications, experience and proficiency of their educators.

"We want to keep practicing the right things to keep a positive approach to learning," said Gross, who teaches Spanish to middle and high school students at Hancock. "It boils down to keeping the community knowledgeable. The devil is in the details."

DuFour's book spawned Professional Learning Communities at Work Institute conferences, which are offered across the country throughout the year by Solution Tree, a leading K-12 education company. The comprehensive professional-development conferences also give educators the opportunity to customize their learning to suit the needs of their respective districts.

"These professional-development seminars show us what works best for students and teachers," Hancock kindergarten teacher Karcher said as colleagues DaBrescia (Middle School Social Studies) and Spalholz (K-12 Art) nodded in agreement. "Collaboration among teachers is one of the greatest assets we have and provides more opportunities to practice what we teach."

Staff Development - Professional Learning Communities

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Sources

ALLTHINGSPLC website (<http://www.allthingsplc.info>)

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development website (<http://www.ascd.org>)

Solution Tree website (www.solutiontree.com)