



*Remarks by NSDC Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh at the  
release of Professional Learning and the Learning Profession,  
Feb. 4, 2009*

Good morning. I am Stephanie Hirsh, executive director of the National Staff Development Council. First I must say, if this was a staff development session this room set up would never work.

Thank you for joining us today. We are honored by the turnout to discuss one of the most critical – and often overlooked -- factors we can address to ensure students in America meet and exceed high standards at all levels. Improving professional learning is crucial to achieving this goal.

The nation's students deserve to experience effective teaching every day. But ensuring this happens isn't just about getting rid of poor teachers or recruiting better teachers. We must do more with the talent we have – the more than 3 million teachers and school leaders who could be called on to transform student learning and school success if they had the know-how, the leadership, the structures, the support, and the time to do so.

None of us are satisfied when two students in adjacent classrooms have dramatically different learning experiences. Or when all the students in one school continue to do poorly and all the students at a school down the block in the same neighborhood celebrate academic success.

Ensuring that best practice is everyday practice in schools requires opportunities for teachers to learn from each other, collaborate, view each other's practice, and share what works from classroom to classroom and from school to school. This can only happen when every educator can engage in quality professional learning every day. When this is realized, research shows, teachers and students have more success.

The challenge before us is to make these opportunities regularly available on the job, everyday, as most professions do. This is a purpose worth pursuing and worth measuring.

To transform the current state of professional development in this country, we took a lesson from Robert Fritz, the author of *The Path of Least Resistance*, who wrote: “identify a morally compelling purpose and then conduct a ruthless assessment of reality that reveals the gap between the current state and the desired state. And then go to work closing that gap.”

This report is part one of our ruthless assessment of reality. It is designed to remind each of us of the important and necessary contribution professional development must play if this nation is to achieve its goals for teacher and student performance.

This report gives us a starting place for conversations about what we as a nation can and must do with our investment in teacher learning. We believe that this investment must

make a difference for all teachers, not just some, and all students, not just the fortunate few.

It is the first step of a larger effort to rate and track state progress in strengthening professional learning and to study effective policies that support it.

I am incredibly grateful to all of you present today. Your presence demonstrates to me your understanding of the important contribution professional development must make in helping American regain its promise of educational excellence for all.

There are a few individuals with us today that I would like to acknowledge for their support and leadership in this effort.

**Charles Mason**, NSDC's president and a former state superintendent of the year, represents a supportive of board of trustees who willingly made the initial investment in this study.

When it was challenging to find investors in this work they took a play from President Obama's autobiography: "**If we aren't willing to pay a price for our values, then we should ask ourselves whether we truly believe in them at all.**" And they authorized expenditures for the study from the NSDC "rainy" day fund.

**Joellen Killion**, NSDC deputy executive director, contributed her enormous talents as a facilitator, writer, negotiator, researcher, and staff developer extraordinaire to spearhead this effort.

**Linda Darling-Hammond**, in addition to all her other important responsibilities, is a member of NSDC's national advisory panel. I am grateful that during what was intended to be a casual dinner just over 18 months ago she agreed this study needed to be done and took the lead in the effort.

**Shep Ranbom** and the great team at Communication Works who kept encouraging us and ensuring us that this story needed to be told and mentored us throughout this journey.

And finally to **Rick Love, at The MetLife Foundation, Fred Brown and Jessica Schwartz at The Wallace Foundation, and Vicki Phillips, Sandra Licon, and Lynn Olson from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**, whose funding ensured we could continue the research and tell the rest of the story.

Through the past 30 years there have been many studies that have drawn the attention of our nation's leaders and doers. Some have helped rate the performance of states in everything from student achievement and teacher quality to higher education.

We are hopeful that this report, *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession*, and the reports that follow it will draw similar attention, inspire coordinated action, and allow us to fulfill our moral responsibility of ensuring great teaching for every student every day.

Now allow me to identify today's speakers and tell you a little bit about the format. We will have several people speak and take questions from the audience at the end. With us today are:

--**U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**, will speak first and will have to leave early;

--**Linda Darling-Hammond**, the leader of the team at the School Redesign Network at Stanford University and her colleague **Nikole Richardson**, who conducted the study will present the findings;

**Gene Wilhoit**, executive director, Council of Chief State School Officers, who will react to the report's findings from the state perspective; and

**Michael Garet**, managing research scientist; and **Kwang Suk Yoon**, senior research scientist, American Institutes of Research, who will talk about what we know from research and what we still need to know.

And now it is my pleasure to turn the microphone over to Secretary Duncan, a leader who I know understands the importance of investing in teachers so that students learn.

We are honored by your presence and very hopeful for your leadership.