

purpose, and when well designed, it can extend learning time. When it is perceived as busy work, when students don't have the skills they need to complete it, or when too much is assigned for the age of the students, home-school relations are damaged. But when homework serves a valuable educational purpose, parents can help ensure that students take pride in their work and that they devote their attention to it, undistracted by television or video games. Furthermore, parents can establish a protected space and time for homework and contribute to the culture in which students accept the need to study for tests; they can even be a resource to their children as they work to master basic information (for example, the multiplication facts or foreign language vocabulary words.)

### **Demonstration**

Teachers can demonstrate their communication with families in many ways, such as by keeping copies of such things as class newsletters, handouts for back-to-school night, or descriptions of a new program. This collection could include guidelines for parents on how to review a child's portfolio or how to encourage responsible completion of homework. In addition, the teacher might maintain a log of phone and personal contacts with families. (See Figure 4.19.)

## **COMPONENT 4D: PARTICIPATING IN A PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY**

### **Rationale and Explanation**

Just as schools are complex social organizations for students, so, too, are they for teachers. One's professional colleagues are a rich resource regarding teaching. In addition, the

challenge of running schools requires the participation of all members of the professional community.

Therefore, whether they like it or not, most teachers' duties extend beyond their classroom doors. Educators, either by contractual agreement or by a sense of professional responsibility, find that their days contain such activities as committee meetings, rehearsals for the school play, assistance with family math night, or participation in a districtwide examination of some important aspect of the educational program. In addition, professional educators know that their instruction is enhanced when they take advantage of the expertise of their colleagues.

Relationships with colleagues are an important element of teachers' participation in a professional community. Teachers enjoy extensive and highly professional relationships with their colleagues, and the tone of the school is one of mutual support and enhancement. Furthermore, when novice teachers join the faculty, more experienced faculty members assume the essential roles of mentor and coach.

Professional educators are generous with their expertise and willingly share materials and insights, particularly with those less experienced than they. They are supportive and do not try to score points in a faculty meeting at the expense of other teachers or attempt to manipulate the outcome of a discussion for their own benefit. The focus of their work is the school's program and the progress of students, and they collaborate with colleagues to that end. For example, they participate in joint planning of thematic units or coordinate the learning experiences for students with special needs.

Above all, participation in a professional community requires active involvement in a culture of inquiry. An enormous professional resource available in every school is the expertise of its

teachers. Therefore, if educators are interested in improving outcomes for students, they must not ignore the expertise within their walls. In addition, to the extent that teaching is a profession, teachers (like other professionals) are obliged to continue their learning for their entire professional lives. As in other fields, the preparation and training of teachers is merely the beginning of professional learning, which can be expected to continue throughout one's career. However, the culture in many schools specifically undermines this expectation. Many schools embody a culture of privacy and autonomy; such a culture makes it virtually impossible for teachers to engage in serious professional discussions with one another.

Professional educators also make many contributions to the life of a school. They assume their share of the duties that help the school function smoothly, whether participating in the PTA, hosting a faculty party, or managing a science fair. These efforts can also include participating in site councils, curriculum committees, and study groups with beginning teachers. Such projects, whether they involve serving on the discipline committee or designing new performance assessments, require a considerable investment of time. In some schools, certain additional roles earn supplementary compensation; in others, it is the faculty's responsibility, working as a team, to divide up the duties. In almost all schools, educators have many opportunities to assume additional responsibilities, thereby enhancing the culture of the entire school.

Schools and districts may undertake major projects that require teacher participation. Professional educators are not content to allow the important decisions to be made by others; they want to help shape, for example, the new reading

curriculum to ensure that it reflects current research as to best practice. Such district involvement, of course, imposes burdens on teachers, particularly if it requires absence from one's own classroom. Preparing materials for a substitute teacher is generally more demanding than teaching the classes oneself, and one can't be sure that the plans will be well executed. Therefore, such participation inevitably involves trade-offs between different aspects of one's professional responsibilities.

In general, full participation in the professional community increases with a teacher's level of experience. Novice teachers are fully occupied preparing for their classes each day and have scant time or energy to spare for larger projects. Even collaborating with their colleagues, which results in significant benefits for their daily work, can require an investment of time that they find difficult to make. Expectations must reflect these realities.

A teacher's ability to be an active member of the professional community is, to some extent, a function of events outside school. Making a contribution to the school or to the district can occur in many different ways. At certain times of one's life, family demands are such that teachers have little spare capacity to devote to school and district affairs. Attending to young children or to a parent with a disability can require enormous amounts of time and commitment. Some teachers let it be known that although they must leave school right at the end of the contract day, they can make their contribution through work they do at home, whether it is finding resources on the Internet for a team-teaching project or establishing the roster for students to volunteer at the soup kitchen.

### Demonstration

Teachers demonstrate their participation in the professional community through their actions. Some teachers maintain a record of their involvement, and the contributions they have made, in the form of a log. (See Figure 4.20.)

## COMPONENT 4E: GROWING AND DEVELOPING PROFESSIONALLY

### Rationale and Explanation

Continuing development is the mark of a true professional; it is an ongoing effort that is never completed. Educators committed to attaining and remaining at the top of their profession invest much energy in staying informed and increasing their skills. They are then in a position to exercise leadership among colleagues.

Content knowledge is one area in which educators can always grow and develop professionally. Superficial content knowledge is insufficient for good teaching; deeper understanding is essential. Elementary teachers who provide instruction in all the disciplines face a challenge in understanding them all well enough to design learning experiences and respond to students' questions. Teachers at the secondary level must be experts in their disciplines so they can enable their students to engage with a subject. All teachers can profit from learning more about the subjects they teach.

Although it is important for teachers to continually deepen their content knowledge, the task is challenging because the subjects themselves keep changing. A characteristic of some

fields, particularly in the sciences and computer technology, has been the rapid expansion of knowledge; many teachers find that the subjects themselves have changed considerably from what they learned in college. Continuing education is essential just to stay abreast of the latest developments.

Ongoing developments in pedagogy also create opportunities for educators to improve their practice. Educational research continually discovers new methods to engage students in learning and to advance their understanding. Furthermore, discoveries in related fields—for example, business management and cultural studies—can suggest promising approaches and applications. Most teachers are able to profit from a focus on the latest work in pedagogical research and its applications to classroom practice. Collaborations with universities can help teachers interpret the latest findings.

Expanding developments in information technology are yet another vehicle for intense professional development. With most schools wired to the Internet and many students having access to computers at home, using electronic tools is no longer a choice for teachers; it is a necessity. And it is a moving target; just when a teacher has become proficient in the use of some software, it is changed or made obsolete by the next generation of applications. To keep up, teachers find they need to keep learning, too.

At the outset of their careers and faced with the daunting work of teaching, beginning teachers are engaged in a steep learning curve, confronting challenges for which no teacher training program can offer adequate preparation. It is small wonder that many beginning teachers give up teaching after only a few years; this situation offers a strong argument for a well-designed mentoring and induction program.

FIGURE 4.19

**DOMAIN 4: PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES****Component 4c: Communicating with Families**

Elements: Information about the instructional program • Information about individual students • Engagement of families in the instructional program

ELEMENT	LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE			
	UNSATISFACTORY	BASIC	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
<b>Information about the instructional program</b>	Teacher provides little or no information about the instructional program to families.	Teacher participates in the school's activities for family communication but offers little additional information.	Teacher provides frequent information to families, as appropriate, about the instructional program.	Teacher provides frequent information to families, as appropriate, about the instructional program. Students participate in preparing materials for their families.
<b>Information about individual students</b>	Teacher provides minimal information to families about individual students, or the communication is inappropriate to the cultures of the families. Teacher does not respond, or responds insensitively, to family concerns about students.	Teacher adheres to the school's required procedures for communicating with families. Responses to family concerns are minimal or may reflect occasional insensitivity to cultural norms.	Teacher communicates with families about students' progress on a regular basis, respecting cultural norms, and is available as needed to respond to family concerns.	Teacher provides information to families frequently on student progress, with students contributing to the design of the system. Response to family concerns is handled with great professional and cultural sensitivity.
<b>Engagement of families in the instructional program</b>	Teacher makes no attempt to engage families in the instructional program, or such efforts are inappropriate.	Teacher makes modest and partially successful attempts to engage families in the instructional program.	Teacher's efforts to engage families in the instructional program are frequent and successful.	Teacher's efforts to engage families in the instructional program are frequent and successful. Students contribute ideas for projects that could be enhanced by family participation.