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TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION

Brian Kesel



**The Power of Localized Professional Learning:
How State and Local Organizations Enhance
Educator Efficacy and Knowledge**



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The Power of Localized Professional Learning: How State and Local Organizations Enhance Educator Efficacy and Knowledge



Brian Kesel, Executive Director, New York State ASCD

As the Executive Director of [New York State ASCD \(NYSASCD\)](#), I've had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the transformative impact of professional learning on educators across New York State. In a profession as demanding and dynamic as ours, ongoing professional development is not just beneficial—it's essential. Yet, in my experience, the most effective support often comes from those who understand the unique challenges and opportunities within our local contexts. This is why state and local professional learning organizations, like NYSASCD and New York State Teacher Centers, are uniquely positioned to provide the kind of targeted, relevant support that truly advances teacher efficacy and knowledge.

While national organizations offer valuable resources and a broad perspective, they sometimes lack the nuanced understanding needed to address the specific needs of educators in our state. Our work at NYSASCD, alongside our partners at NYS Teacher Centers, is rooted in the belief that the most impactful professional learning is that which is tailored to the realities of our classrooms, communities, and schools. By focusing on localized support, we can more efficiently and effectively empower educators to navigate the complexities of teaching and learning in New York State.

The Importance of Localized Professional Learning Organizations

In my role, I've seen the critical difference that localized professional learning can make. National organizations provide a wealth of resources and broad-based frameworks, but state and local organizations like NYSASCD bring something invaluable to the table: a deep understanding of our unique educational landscape. We know our educators, our students, and the specific challenges they face, allowing us to offer professional development that is not only relevant but immediately applicable.

State and local professional learning organizations operate within a network that includes school districts, higher education institutions, and other regional stakeholders. This close proximity to the educational landscape enables us to align professional development efforts with state standards, district goals, and the diverse needs of educators. This alignment ensures that professional learning leads to more meaningful and sustainable changes in instructional practice.

NYSASCD: A Commitment to Contextualized Leadership and Innovation

At NYSASCD, we are deeply committed to supporting New York educators through high-quality, contextually relevant professional development, advocacy, and resources. As an affiliate of the international ASCD since 1947, we benefited from a wealth of national and global insights. However, as ASCD has begun dismantling its 80-year old affiliate program, NYSASCD endures. We remain firmly focused on the specific needs of New York State educators.



Our mission at NYSASCD is to inspire and support educators in meeting the needs of all students. We offer a range of programs and services, including conferences, workshops, publications, and online resources, all designed with the unique challenges of New York State educators in mind. These offerings are tailored to address pressing issues such as state-specific curriculum standards, regional equity concerns, and localized technology integration.

By grounding our work in the realities of New York State's educational landscape, educators receive support that is directly applicable to their classrooms, making it easier to implement new strategies and improve student outcomes.



The Role of NYS Teacher Centers in Localized Professional Learning

The **NYS Teacher Centers** are another cornerstone of professional development in our state. Established by the New York State Legislature in 1984, these centers were created to offer professional development that responds directly to the needs of local educators. With over 125 Teacher Centers statewide, each one serves its community by addressing specific regional challenges and opportunities.

Teacher Centers offer a variety of professional development opportunities, including workshops, seminars, coaching, and collaborative learning experiences. These programs are often developed in direct response to the needs of educators in the area, ensuring that professional learning is both relevant and impactful. The focus is on job-embedded learning that teachers can immediately apply in their classrooms, leading to more efficient and effective improvements in instructional practice.

One of the key strengths of NYS Teacher Centers is their emphasis on teacher-led professional development. Educators are directly involved in the design and delivery of learning experiences. This localized, teacher-driven approach fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among educators, further enhancing the effectiveness of professional development.

The Advantages of State and Local Partnerships

Our collaboration with NYS Teacher Centers and other state and local professional learning organizations demonstrates the power of partnerships. By working together, we leverage our collective expertise and deep understanding of regional needs to provide educators with professional development that is more efficient and effective than what national organizations can offer.

One primary advantage of these partnerships is the ability to design and deliver professional learning opportunities that are tailored to the specific needs of educators within the state. NYSASCD and NYS Teacher Centers regularly collaborate to offer joint workshops and webinars that bring together educators from across the state to share best practices and learn from one another. These events provide a platform for educators to engage in meaningful dialogue, explore new ideas, and build professional networks, all within a context that is directly relevant to their work.

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In addition to joint events, NYSASCD and NYS Teacher Centers collaborate on the development of resources and publications that support educators in their professional growth. These resources, such as a poverty toolkit and the incorporation of civic engagement and discourse into NYS classrooms, are designed to address state-specific challenges and opportunities, making them more practical and immediately applicable than those provided by national organizations.

Another important aspect of our partnership is advocacy. In parallel with NYS Teacher Centers, we work to advocate for policies and practices that support effective professional development at the state and local levels. By focusing our advocacy efforts on the specific needs of New York State educators, we can influence state and local education policy in ways that national organizations may not be able to.

Impact on Teacher Efficacy and Knowledge

The localized support provided by state and local professional learning organizations like NYSASCD and NYS Teacher Centers has a profound impact on teacher efficacy and knowledge. By offering professional development that is directly relevant to the challenges educators face in their specific contexts, we help teachers develop the skills and confidence they need to be effective in the classroom.

Research consistently shows that professional development is most effective when it is relevant to teachers' everyday experiences and directly connected to their instructional practice. The localized approach taken by NYSASCD and NYS Teacher Centers leads to more efficient and effective improvements in teaching practice, ultimately benefiting students.

One of the key benefits of localized professional development is its ability to be responsive to emerging trends and challenges within the state. Because state and local organizations are closely connected to the field, they can quickly identify new issues and design professional learning experiences that address these challenges. This responsiveness ensures that educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate the complexities of teaching in the 21st century.



In addition to enhancing teacher efficacy, the localized approach of NYSASCD and NYS Teacher Centers also contributes to the development of teacher leadership. By involving educators in the design and delivery of professional development, these organizations help teachers build their leadership capacity. This, in turn, has a ripple effect on the broader education community, as teacher leaders take on new roles and responsibilities that further strengthen the profession.



Case Studies of Localized Success

Allow me to share some examples of how these localized efforts have made a tangible difference in our state:

Case Study 1: New Teacher Onboarding with PLC Associates

NYSASCD is partnering with PLC Associates to develop a [comprehensive onboarding program](#) for new teachers. Understanding the unique challenges faced by new educators, especially in the first few years of teaching, this program focused on building a strong foundation through mentorship and the creation of educator networks.

Through this partnership, new teachers receive targeted support in key areas such as classroom management, working with diverse populations, and student engagement. The program also fosters collaboration among new educators, allowing them to share experiences and strategies in a supportive environment. As a result, participating teachers increase confidence and competence in their instructional practices, leading to improved student outcomes in their classrooms.

Case Study 2: The Science of Reading with The Reading League

Recognizing the importance of literacy in student success, NYSASCD is collaborating with [The Reading League](#) to deliver professional development focused on the science of reading. As the [New York State Education Department](#) has begun an emphasis on the science of reading, this initiative is designed to equip educators with evidence-based strategies for teaching and assessing reading, grounded in the latest research on how students learn to read.

The webinars and ongoing support allow educators to deepen their understanding of effective reading instruction and apply these strategies in their classrooms. Educators who participate in this professional development gain insight on the anchors to ground decision making when implementing the science of reading including assessing and implementing effective interventions based on data, and the structures and attitudes necessary to make their systems shift to research-based reading instruction.

Case Study 3: Managing Conflict with Jen Schwanke

In response to the growing need for conflict resolution skills in schools, NYSASCD is partnering with education leader [Jen Schwanke](#) to offer a series of [workshops on managing conflict](#). This professional development was tailored to the specific challenges faced by educators in New York State, addressing issues such as student behavior, parent-teacher relationships, and colleague collaboration.

The workshops provide educators with practical tools and strategies for navigating conflicts effectively, reducing stress, and fostering a more positive school environment. Participants will develop the skills to manage difficult situations more confidently and constructively, leading to better outcomes for both students and staff.

Case Study 4: Integrating Civic Engagement and Discourse in the Classroom with Angela Di Michele Lalor

In an era where civic understanding and engagement are more critical than ever, we partnered with [Angela Di Michele Lalor](#) to integrate [civic engagement and discourse into classroom teaching](#). The goal of this initiative was to help educators foster a classroom environment where students can discuss and debate complex social issues in a respectful and informed manner.

Through a series of workshops, educators were equipped with strategies to promote critical thinking, respectful dialogue, and active participation in civic life. These skills are essential for preparing students (as well as educators) to be thoughtful, engaged citizens in a democratic society.

Conclusion

As Executive Director of NYSASCD, I am proud of the work we do in partnership with NYS Teacher Centers and other local organizations. Together, we provide professional learning that is not only relevant and responsive but also deeply connected to the needs of our educators. We understand that the most effective professional development is that which speaks directly to the challenges and opportunities of our classrooms, and it's this understanding that drives our work every day.

As the educational landscape continues to evolve, the importance of state and local professional learning organizations will only grow. By continuing to collaborate and innovate, we can ensure that our educators are well-prepared to meet the challenges of teaching in the 21st century and to provide their students with the best possible education.

For more information about workshops and webinars, as well as becoming a member of the organization, visit [New York State ASCD](#).



Brian Kesel serves as the NYSASCD Executive Director. He has been on the Board of Directors since the 2010s. He served as physics teacher, department chair, assistant principal and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction for the West Genesee Central School District for 32 years, retiring in 2023.  

