

# Creating a Sense of Awe

Professional growth and development can change a teacher's outlook and the impact they have on students

**SESSION** *Personalizing Your Professional Development* | **Presenters** Fall Creek School District: Joe Sanfelippo, superintendent; Sun Prairie Area School District: Brad Saron, superintendent

**W**hat makes people want to get out of their comfort zone and learn? How do you drive meaningful professional growth for you and your staff?

Joe Sanfelippo, superintendent of the Fall Creek School District, said that in his district, professional development begins with a call to adventure. He asks his teachers to develop a personal learning goal that they are interested in and that gets them outside of their comfort zone.

"When you take the opportunity to get out and try something different, that's when the real learning and adventure takes place," Sanfelippo said.

All too often professional development means sitting in a room and listening to someone talk. This model can be uninspiring and not engaging. Sanfelippo bases his professional development model on Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey*. In this model, the individual begins the journey with a "call to adventure" or the development of a goal. The beginning of the journey emphasizes the importance of a mentor or helper. The peak of the journey is the revelation and then transformation when one begins to see something in a different light.

"You are where you started, but your world is completely different now," Sanfelippo said. "You might still be in your second-grade classroom,

but it looks completely different because of the journey you took."

In Fall Creek, professional development days are devoted to exploring and working on these personal goals. Sanfelippo keeps a document with each of his staff member's goals and recognizes when a staff member reaches their goal.

"Acknowledgement is key," Sanfelippo said. "If we are asking our staff to do something out of their comfort zone, we need to acknowledge them. This helps build momentum for them and other staff."

Brad Saron, superintendent for the Sun Prairie Area School District, noted that in recent years there has been a flurry of education initiatives such as the Common Core State Standards and Smarter Balanced testing being thrown at school leaders.

"We haven't been able to contemplate, 'How do I develop? How do I grow?'" Saron said.

Another term being thrown around a lot in education is accountability. Saron said accountability comes down to understanding your impact on students.

"The way that people grow is when they understand their impact," Saron said.

Social media tools such as Twitter, Voxer and Flipboard can help professional development by sharing and



developing ideas, getting inspiration and guidance. But Saron said the tools are ultimately about building relationships.

"It's not especially about Twitter, it's about connection," Saron said.

Saron also recommended that when first using these social media tools, it's important for staff to listen to the dialogue first.

"The first step is to listen and engage, it's not to go out and broadcast and influence others," Saron said.

Sanfelippo said one simple professional development initiative that has helped his district immensely is the notion of three — What are three things that you can do through the course of the day that make you feel good as a professional?

"We ask our teachers, 'What is your three?'" Sanfelippo said.

The notion of three and personal learning goals are just a couple of the professional development tools that can inspire staff to get out of their comfort zone and make a greater impact on their students.

"We can create a sense of awe," Sanfelippo said. "We can create an environment where our teachers want to learn and grow." ■