
Providing Professional Development

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

Teachers often acknowledge that the professional development they receive is of limited usefulness to their daily work and to their professional growth. Districts must work to create systems of professional development that genuinely advance the effectiveness of their staff for the benefit of both staff and students. According to the National Staff Development Council's *Standards for Staff Development* (2001), professional development should be standards based, results driven, and job embedded (e.g., formal or informal professional development conducted during the school day as educators engage in their daily work activities). Professional development programs should extend beyond traditional workshops to include activities such as peer observation, mentoring, the creation of teacher portfolios, action research projects, whole-faculty or team/department study groups, curriculum planning and development, literature circles, critical friends groups, data analysis activities, school improvement planning, the shared analysis of student work, lesson study, or teacher self-assessment and goal-setting activities. Professional development activities should be collaborative but also differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers (Chambers, Lam, & Mahitivanichcha, 2008).

District professional development systems and requirements should be aligned with staff evaluation systems. They should be guided by formative teacher evaluation data as well as formative and summative student assessment data to create individualized professional development that will address a teacher's specific challenge areas. Professional development also should be linked to opportunities for career advancement, and provide opportunities for teachers to be involved in its selection and delivery. Finally, professional development should be aligned with school and district vision, mission, and improvement goals (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Districts should consider high quality professional development in the following areas:

- **Developing a deeper understanding of the community served by a school.** Because at-risk schools and districts often struggle with teacher retention and student achievement, targeted professional development should be provided for teachers in these schools that is focused on understanding the community culture and the specific special needs of students. This professional development might include training in communication and linguistic differences, strategies for overcoming language barriers for English language learners, dealing with gangs (in certain communities), engaging parents, and equipping teachers with a better understanding of and comfort with the home backgrounds of their students.
- **Developing subject-specific pedagogical knowledge.** Professional development should be provided in content areas where children often under-perform and where teacher shortages sometimes result in under-qualified instructors being hired. Mathematics, science, and foreign language instruction often benefit the most from such targeted professional development.
- **Developing leadership capabilities.** Ongoing opportunities for school leaders to engage in professional development should be provided by the district. As is the case for teacher learning, professional development for school leaders should be ongoing, job-embedded, and differentiated to meet the needs of individual principals and other school leaders (Goldring, Camburn, Huff, & Sebastian, 2007; Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006). This approach may involve coaching, mentoring, reflection, and self-assessment. Through professional development, school leaders are often better equipped to promote collaboration among principals, teachers, and other school and district personnel and to create opportunities for staff to share in leadership responsibilities and develop and demonstrate leadership potential (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Salazar, 2007).

Finally, the effectiveness of professional development activities for all staff should be monitored. Data on the extent to which professional development changes instructional practice should be collected and used to make future decisions about the professional development offered. Making this determination involves first clarifying the desired outcomes of professional development and then assessing whether these have been achieved (Borko, 2004).

Action Principles

For District

1. Ensure that professional development activities are based on student data and other teacher evaluation information.
2. Ensure that professional development programs are based on strategies supported by rigorous research.
3. Align professional development requirements with state and district standards, assessments, and goals.
4. Provide all staff high quality, ongoing, job-embedded, and differentiated professional development.
5. Provide staff ample time for formal, structured collaboration and reflection.
6. Incorporate principles of adult learning into professional development activities.
7. Structure professional development that facilitates active learning and provides sustained implementation support.
8. Establish a system for evaluating the quality of specific professional development providers and work only with those providers considered of high quality.
9. Set goals for professional development success and monitor the outcomes of professional development investments.

For School

1. Create a professional learning community that fosters a school culture of continuous learning.
2. Promote a culture in which professional collaboration is valued and emphasized.
3. Ensure that school leaders act as instructional leaders, providing regular, detailed feedback to teachers to help them continually grow and improve their professional practice.

References and Resources

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