

## Encourage comprehensive professional development

Teachers continue to develop their skills and knowledge throughout their entire careers and must complete additional coursework and requirements to maintain their certification/licensure. Individual teachers undertake many professional development courses and activities and also participate in school district sponsored professional development activities. The result is that traditional professional development happens after school, on in-service days or during the summer, which gives educators little opportunity to apply their learning. It also does little to encourage educators to learn from each other's practice and makes it hard for professional development to be a sustained experience when in-service days and after school workshops are short and scattered through the school year. In short, "the kind of high-intensity, job-embedded collaborative learning that is most effective is not a common feature of professional development across most states, districts, and schools in the United States."<sup>1</sup>

### PSEA Recommendations

- PSEA encourages continuing professional development of all educators, including certificated substitutes. Educators must have release time to participate in professional education programs. It must be the responsibility of the school entity and the state to provide for and finance these programs.
- In terms of professional development, building a supportive system means *removing obstacles* to implementing effective professional development (such as costs and schedules). It also means *building supports* for effective professional development. Effective professional development is supported by a strong school vision and related goals, standards for professional development, a process for measuring progress, and an organizational culture that supports learning.

### Meaningful professional development

There is simply no substitute for finding time during the day for educators to collaborate, apply new ideas, and share their learning. Evidence shows that effective professional development needs to be seen as a regular, on-going part of school life and "suggest[s] that the development of opportunities for long-term teacher collaborative interactions is an important and effective professional learning option."<sup>2</sup> Research has found that when teachers can examine specific data

about student achievement and compare these to constructive, detailed and evidence-based information about curriculum and instruction, student achievement can improve. Focused, rich and sustained professional development matters.<sup>3</sup>

Training needs to be accompanied by coaching during the school day, and educators need to have opportunities to share experiences and learn from each other. In order to accomplish this, school leaders must develop systems to allow educators to observe and collaborate, alter scheduling so that key groups of teachers can have shared planning time, provide early-release days so that teachers can work together during afternoons, and use existing meeting time in new ways to foster professional collaboration.

Another way to embed professional development in the work of educators is to provide frequent opportunities to study student work. Studying student work is an important way to share understandings about student learning, discuss instructional ideas to intervene for struggling learners, consider enrichment activities for advanced learners, and discuss real student work in relation to state and local standards. Research has shown that regular study of student work is one of the most effective ways to improve student learning.<sup>4</sup> “Nothing motivates and engages teachers more than examining student work and engaging in conversation with other teachers about how that work was achieved.”<sup>5</sup>

For teachers in particular, professional development needs to deal with deep and useful content knowledge that educators can use in their instruction. There is a strong relationship between teacher content knowledge and effective instruction. “Teachers with a deep, conceptual understanding of their subject ask a greater number of high-level questions, encourage students to apply and transfer knowledge, help students see and understand relationships between and among ideas and concepts, and make other choices in their instruction that engage students and challenge them to learn.”<sup>6</sup>

High-quality professional development is built on collegiality and collaboration among school staff to solve important problems. Efforts to reform professional development often fail because the system is not structured to support the intended reform. For example, educators may try to find time to study and compare student work, but scheduling often makes it hard for staff to meet together during the day. In some countries, teachers have 10 or more hours a week to work together on instructional issues; teachers in the U.S. report having less than an hour a week to examine instructional issues together. Nevertheless, evidence is growing that working collaboratively is important: when educators work collectively, they are more likely to believe that what they do has a positive effect on students. This belief changes behavior in important ways and improves student achievement.<sup>7</sup> Because of the link between collegiality and student achievement, successful professional development helps educators think about their practice in

the context of a professional community. It also gives educators opportunities to use their collective expertise and support to make decisions about instruction.<sup>8</sup>

Educators also may want to examine student assessment data together to consider appropriate curriculum changes, but there is no coordinated local assessment system to provide the kinds of data they would need to make judgments about the curriculum. Fundamentally, professional development does not exist in a vacuum; schedules, curriculum, student and teacher evaluations, school mission, goals, and expectations must all be aligned with professional development in a coordinated system.

Michael Fullan explained the importance of the whole system by pointing out that the infrastructure of reform—that is, the layer above whatever layer is being targeted for reform—often conflicts with the intended change or is too weak to support it.<sup>9</sup> When schools and districts give attention to a reform without also paying attention to the surrounding infrastructure to support the reform, the reform is likely to fail.

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<sup>1</sup> Darling-Hammond, Linda, et al. (2009). "Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad," The School Redesign Network at Stanford University and NSDC.

<sup>2</sup> Thibodeau, Gail M., (2008). "A Content Literacy Collaborative Study Group: High School Teachers Take Charge of Their Professional Learning," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, v52 n1 p54-64.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Wenglinski, H. (2002). "How schools matter: The link between teacher classroom practices and student academic performance," *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 10(12). Available online:

<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n12>; Wenglinski, H. (2000). "How teaching matters: Bringing the classroom back into discussions of teacher quality," Milken Family Foundation and Educational Testing Service; Killion, J. (2002). "What works in the high school: Results-based staff development," National Staff Development Council; Killion, J. (2002).

<sup>4</sup> Darling-Hammond, Linda, et al. (2009). "Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad," The School Redesign Network at Stanford University and NSDC.

<sup>5</sup> Cross, C. (2001). "Assessment, TIMSS-R, and the Challenge to Change," *Basic Education*, 45(5)1-4.

<sup>6</sup> Rigden, D. (2000). "Implications of Standards for Teacher Preparation," *Basic Education*, 45(3), 1-6.

<sup>7</sup> Goddard, R., W. Hoy, & A.W. Hoy. (2000). "Collective Teacher Efficacy: Its Meaning, Measure, and Impact on Student Achievement," *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(2), 479-507; Lee, V., J. Smith, & R. Croninger. (1995). "Another Look at High School Restructuring," *Issues in Restructuring Schools*. Issue 9, Fall.

<sup>8</sup> National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement (NRCELA). (2002). "Effective Professional Development Begins in the Classroom," *English Update*, 1-3.

<sup>9</sup> Fullan, M. (2001). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Teachers College Press.