



Employment Issues

Professional Development

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General Information

In 2001, the Iowa General Assembly passed legislation that identifies professional development as a key component of school reform in Iowa. The Student Achievement and Teacher Quality Program is sharply focused on increasing student achievement through acknowledging and supporting the improvement and acquisition of the knowledge and skills of teachers through professional development. The major elements of the legislation are:

1. Mentoring and induction programs that provide support for beginning teachers;
2. Professional development designed to directly support best teaching practice;
3. Career paths with compensation levels that strengthen Iowa's ability to recruit and retain teachers;
4. Eight Iowa Teaching Standards and supporting criteria which shape the

- implementation of each aspect of the Teacher Quality Program; and
5. Team-based variable pay program that provides additional compensation when student performance improves.

In order for professional development to raise achievement, the focus must be on building teachers' instructional repertoires, content knowledge and/or other classroom-related knowledge and skills. The Iowa Department of Education (DE) proposes that 80 percent of professional development should be squarely focused on raising student achievement. That allows time (20 percent) for requirements like "Bloodborne Pathogens" and "Chemical Right to Know" and also for organizing the building and district behavioral expectations, learning to use new technology and other issues.

Recent state and federal legislation acknowledges the significance of well-trained teachers and paraprofessionals in raising achievement. Iowa's Teacher Quality legislation provides for several levels of teachers: beginning, career and advanced. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) defines the necessity for "highly qualified" teachers and paraprofessionals. Schools working to improve student achievement include all the educators in the professional development and create learning communities where everyone learns together, no matter what position they hold or what career level they have attained. Certainly there are teachers with targeted needs that must have additional and focused development, but schools that expect to raise achievement through staff development include everyone in the school –

principals, teachers, central office personnel and paraprofessionals in the ongoing learning.

The DE has invested significant resources in a model of professional development that, if well implemented, will yield student achievement gains.

The Iowa Professional Development Model can be accessed at

www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/tqt/tc/doc/ipdm02.pdf_

Purpose

The purpose of professional development is to provide a structured, supportive, and collaborative environment to promote professional growth that will further the district's comprehensive school improvement plan (CSIP) goals in order to increase student achievement. NCLB defines professional development as activities that:

1. Improve and increase teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach, and enable teachers to become highly qualified
2. Are an integral part of broad schoolwide and districtwide educational improvement plans
3. Are high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher's performance in the classroom; and are not one-day or short-term workshops or conferences, and
4. Advance teacher understanding of effective instructional strategies that are based on scientifically based research; and
5. Strategize for improving student academic achievement or substantially increasing the knowledge and teaching skills of teachers (No Child Left Behind Act, Title IX, Sec. 9101 [34]).

District Career Development Plans

The Iowa Teacher Quality Program requires each district to submit a district career development plan as part of the CSIP. While it is the district plan that is submitted via the CSIP process, schools within the district may need to implement appropriate content and strategies for their

particular buildings to meet the district's goals for student achievement. Schools are not required to submit school improvement plans, but district plans are encouraged to include variations in staff development that will be used by individual attendance sites within their Local Education Agency (LEA).

During the 2003-04 school year, districts continued the district career development planning process by designing building-level professional development and individual teacher career development plans (building-level plans and individual teacher plans do not need to be submitted to the DE). Districts will analyze their current practices, determining appropriate district resources and supports for assisting building level staff in selecting appropriate building level strategies for improving student learning. LEAs will be required to submit district career development plans with their CSIP for 2004. By September of 2004, the teacher evaluation model and professional development plans must be fully implemented in each local district and school. The district career development plan must describe how the district will provide all teachers access to career development and program offering.

Individual Teacher Career Development Plans

The Teacher Quality legislation provides that an individual teacher career development plan will be developed, in cooperation with the teacher's supervisor, for each career teacher in the district. The individual plan must be based on the Iowa Teaching Standards appropriate to the student achievement goals of the district and the teacher's needs.

Ideally, the goals for individual teacher career development plans and the district career development plan will be very closely aligned. The individual teacher career development plan for the career teacher may be congruent with the district career development plan, and the process described in the Iowa Model for Professional Development may be used simultaneously to implement both. Thus, a fourth grade teacher whose school is engaging in the study and implementation of a new math curriculum would likely have an individual plan to study and learn the new math curriculum. Should he/she be

identified during the evaluation process as needing additional skills in classroom management, however, that teacher's individual teacher career development plan would include staff development to address this specific need in addition to the learning of the new math curriculum. The individual teacher career development plans of the faculty members of this building would look very similar because of the collaborative work being undertaken to study the same instructional content.

Iowa Professional Development Standards

The following Professional Development Standards established in the Teacher Quality Program are to be followed by the approved provider(s) and the local district. Professional development must:

1. Align with the Iowa Teaching Standards;
2. Focus on research-based instructional strategies aligned with the school district's student achievement needs and the long-range and annual improvement goals established by the district;
3. Deliver professional development that is targeted at instructional improvement and designed with the following components:
 - a. student achievement data and analysis
 - b. theory
 - c. classroom demonstration and practice
 - d. observation and reflection
 - e. teacher collaboration
 - f. integration of instructional technology, if applicable;
4. Include an evaluation component that documents the improvement in instructional practice and the effect on student learning; and
5. Support the career development needs of individual teachers.

High Expectations for All Students

NCLB requires that states have challenging academic standards; test students annually in grades 3-8 and once in high school; and other regulations designed with the goal of increasing student achievement so that all students reach proficient levels by the 2013-2014 school year.

Central in this call for school improvement is the belief, supported by research, that almost all students can learn at very high levels and that most student failure is preventable.

This is a big shift from past societal expectations, influenced largely by the belief that schools could do little to overcome the challenges some students brought with them into the classroom in the form of poverty or an unsupportive home environment. But a growing number of school districts across the country are proving that it is possible to produce dramatically higher levels of learning, while showing virtually no differences between the achievement of the poorest and most affluent students in the district. Across entire school districts, students in every subgroup are achieving at or above state or district standards in reading and math. A core reason for their success is that teachers are being provided the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills they need to teach, so all students learn well.

Teaching Matters

These higher expectations for students raise the bar in what we've expected from educators. We can no longer assume that teaching is an innate gift or that education majors learn all they need in college. To teach well, teachers must understand:

1. The material they are teaching
2. How to present critical ideas in powerful ways
3. How to organize a useful learning process
4. How to adapt instruction to the learning needs of their students.

A growing body of evidence indicates that teacher effectiveness is not fixed, and that when teachers of all experience levels learn powerful skills and methods to use with students in the classroom, student achievement increases.

Professional Development that Improves Student Learning

Studies show that high quality, research-based professional development is essential for improving teaching in ways that will impact all students' learning. But that staff development looks dramatically different than that used in the past.

Over the years, staff development has been used to cover everything from workshops to help teachers understand their legal duty to report suspected child abuse to night or summer courses teachers take to earn credit toward an advanced degree or certification. But these one-shot sessions and unconnected studies do little to produce better results for students across entire school districts.

New kinds of professional development are taking hold, and research is documenting their success in improving student learning. Generally, these programs are:

Grounded in student need in an academic content area. Much of traditional professional development has been generic, focusing on topics such as learning styles, brain research or classroom management. These approaches have their uses, but recent research indicates that professional development aimed at improving student achievement is most effective when grounded in an academic content area, such as reading, math or science.

Districts use assessment data to identify specific learning needs of students and set goals to improve the results around those needs. This locally determined improvement goal, based on data about student learning needs, determines the focus of professional development activities. The entire staff engages in an initiative to improve instruction around that area of need, usually by studying and receiving training in a specific teaching strategy or model.

Research-based to ensure that the training provided lives up to the promise of improved teaching and higher student achievement. The most effective efforts focus on teaching strategies backed by research that shows those strategies are effective in producing higher student achievement. Teachers and administrators carefully study the research that supports claims made by advocates of a particular approach to instructional improvement and choose the approaches most likely to improve achievement with their students.

Collaborative and ongoing requiring an ongoing study of teaching and learning throughout the school year, not just one-shot

sessions or separate, unconnected projects or classes. Educators meet as whole faculties and in smaller teams. These teams are sometimes called learning communities, communities of practice, study teams or peer coaching teams. The small teams meet on a regular basis, preferably several times a week, for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, studying student data, and problem solving. Their goal is to improve their daily work to advance the achievement of students around the district goals for student learning. Time within the regular school day is a key resource for this team problem-solving and learning.

Embedded in the system; not an add-on, occasional event that teachers must juggle with their other duties and obligations. There must be a comprehensive structure, embedded in the everyday life of school, that ensures that teachers can acquire the skill and knowledge they need, practice what they learn and then reflect on the results. This structure includes time and expert resources for formal training sessions, materials necessary to implement the new learning, and time for collaboration during the school day to practice the new learning, plan lessons together, etc.

Connected: Effective professional development is closely linked to the broader context of school improvement. The professional development program doesn't stand alone. School leaders must ensure that professional development is aligned with other foundations of school improvement, such as school improvement goals, student standards, curricular frameworks and assessments

Consistent and sustained leadership at all levels of the system. Everyone who affects student learning is involved. Teacher leaders and principals form a leadership team to plan and implement professional development activities in a building. Principals learn the new teaching skills along with the teachers. As one principal said, "How can I be an instructional leader in our building when I don't have the very skills I am evaluating in the teachers?" Vocal and visible commitment from district administrators is needed to support improvement of instruction district-wide. The superintendent and other district leaders

can set and hold to the agenda for the initiative and provide focus on fundamental issues of instruction. In the past, teachers have often been left to discover or invent good practices without such guidance. The school board ensures that the “ends” of the effort stay focused on improving student learning, provides the necessary resources and time, and holds the system accountable for getting better.

Built on effective training processes. To learn new behavior and effectively apply it in the classroom, teachers must:

1. Receive formal training from an expert in the strategy or model being learned—someone for whom this teaching strategy is second nature. This expert must be very clear about the specific moves involved in the strategy or model, not someone who has just read about it or been to one workshop. This usually means technical assistance will be needed from an expert outside the building or district.
2. Understand the theory and principles behind the new skills and strategies.
3. Observe an expert teacher in action, modeling the new skill. This can occur live or through videotape.
4. Practice the new behavior in a safe context, such as a classroom or in front of a coaching partner.
5. Try out the behavior with peer coaching and support in the classroom.

The results of professional development are monitored by changes in teacher knowledge and skills and improvements in student learning. The guiding questions are: Are teachers effectively implementing their new skills and knowledge in the classroom? Are students learning more as a result?

The School Board’s Role

Establishing this new model of professional development in a school district is challenging work. It pushes administrators to lead in new ways and to learn to support new, district-wide professional development efforts. Teachers are being asked to change habits and traditions in how they’ve approached their learning. Parents must come to understand how this time affects their child, and sometimes the schedule of the school

day. School boards have an important role to play in supporting this change:

1. Send a clear message that the priority for your district’s professional development effort is to improve student learning.
2. Ensure that the professional development program is integrally linked to the broader context of school improvement in your district.
3. Allocate time for all members of the school staff to meet weekly for sustained, in-depth, collective study of teaching and learning. The built-in weekly time (preferably two hours or more) can be used for the collective study of student learning, training and for peer coaching teams to meet.
4. Ensure that instructional initiatives are selected and implemented because of their potential and documented success for increasing student performance.
5. Guarantee the structures exist to support and sustain effective implementation of the program. These structures include time for training and collaboration, resources for an expert trainer, instructional materials and adequate assessment.
6. Help parents and the community understand that altering student schedules so that teachers have time for training and planning improves the quality of instruction for all students.
7. Evaluate the effectiveness of professional development efforts by changes in student learning.
8. Advocate with state and federal legislators for adequate funding and supports for quality professional development.

Endnotes

- Helping Your Community Understand Professional Development. IASB.
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