Research Brief

Professional Development

Question: What are the components of a successful professional development program?

Summary of Findings: According to the literature, the purpose of professional development is to improve student learning. It was noted that there appeared to be a direct correlation between the depth of the teacher's content knowledge, methodologies, student-teacher relationships, and reflection, that when applied to an improvement in practices, positively affected student learning. An example was given of the Saturn Automobile Company, where 5% of the yearly work time was allotted to employees for professional growth. "…If it takes 92 hours a year per employee to make a better automobile, it will take that and more to make better schools. And if we're not willing to commit ourselves to that kind of effort, we are not going to get what we want" (Finding time for professional development, p. 2). It was noted that the common perspective of community members and parents appeared to be that educators were only working when they were with students, with little acknowledgment that in order to provide a high quality program, teachers must spend quality time developing their knowledge, designing appropriate curriculum, and assessing student work. There was ample research that found that the traditional "one size fits all, top down" model of providing training for staff after school, on Saturdays, and in the summer has not appeared to greatly improve student learning, yet often continues to be implemented because of organizational and financial constraints. The literature strongly supported the system that is utilized in Asia and Europe where professional development is part of the teacher's day. It was recommended that a strong staff development program have a balance of meeting together as a staff for district and school needs and building in time in the teachers' day so that they may work collegially with peers, contact others through emails and electronic bulletin boards and participate in video conferencing.

Major Findings and Conclusions:
The teacher as learner:
1. To be respected as an intelligent, thoughtful, and life-long learner.
2. To study individually, reflect, and then do.
3. To collaborate regularly with other teachers, especially in their specific content area(s).
4. To share what they observe and experience.
5. To respond to constructive feedback then apply it to their settings.
6. To relate the information to the real world of their classrooms.
7. To observe other teachers, both at their own site as well as at other sites.

Professional Development Components:
It was strongly stated in the literature that there are specific components that should be in place when developing a meaningful program.

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1. The beliefs about the school and district should be identified.
2. A specific and realistic plan to implement the vision should be developed based on data analysis, identification of matches and gaps of the current program, and should be student centered for equitable outcomes.
3. When the innovation(s) have been identified through consensus by the staff, determine what support will be needed in order to fill in the targeted gap(s) and provide that support.
4. The supports that need to be in place to continue strengthening the matches should be ascertained and implemented.
5. The plan of action should support teachers through implementation, maintenance, and evaluation.
6. Collective autonomy should be accepted so that formal and informal leaders are acknowledged. Teachers should have opportunities to become leaders.
7. The plan should be seen as a whole, not as disconnected parts that are changing every year.
8. The plan should align with the goals of state mandates, standards, the district as a whole, and the school.
9. The concerns and needs of the staff have been taken into account.
10. Partnerships with other schools, institutions of higher education, and businesses should be developed and implemented.
11. The plan should allow for teachers to work regularly with others in their content field.
12. A recommendation was proposed that 10% of the budget that is not part of salary or benefits, should be set aside for professional development.
13. Teacher study groups should be established, especially in the same content areas.
14. Teams of teachers should be sent to workshops and classes.
15. Local and online resources should be established and supported.
16. Information from professional sources should be disseminated and shared.
17. The parents should be kept informed about the program and its purposes.

Online Resources:

- Does Professional Development Change Teaching Practice? Results from a three- year study.
  This is the complete research report on what effects professional development programs have had on changing pedagogies. The study indicates that the network and study group models are more effective than the traditional models.
  Access this under "Sources."
  http://www.edweek.org/context/topics/issuespage.cfm?id=16

- Finding Time for Professional Development
  This article provides an overview of past professional development practices and suggests alternative ways to view this program. Examples of a few exemplary programs and their approaches are cited.
  http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/profdevl/pd300.htm

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- Professional Development
  An overview of research on the characteristics of effective professional
  development programs was provided.
  http://www.edweek.org/context/topics/issuespage.cfm?id=16

- Professional Development for Teachers
  This article provides general information on components of effective staff development programs that
  are supported by research.
  http://www.nmsa.org/

- Teacher Learning That Supports Student Learning
  An overview of what teachers need to know about how they learn and what they need know about their
  own learning and how it relates to professional development is provided. Examples from teacher
  preparation programs along with schools using newer models are briefly described.
  http://www.ascd.org/ed_topics/el199802_darlinghammond.html

- Terms of Engagement-Rethinking Teachers Independent Learning Traits
  This article reviews the idea of new learning organizations for teachers and provides issues for
  consideration when designing a professional development program.
  http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/profdevl/pd400.htm

- ` The Mission & Principles of Staff Development
  A brief overview of the purpose of professional development and a list of guiding principles for its
  successful implementation are provided.
  http://www.ed.gov/G2K/bridge.html

Book:
Zmuda, A., Kuklis, R., & Kline, E. (2004). *Transforming Schools*. Alexandria, VA:Association of
  Supervision and Curriculum.
  A comprehensive book outlining the components of an effective staff development program. It contains
  examples of teacher responses and an analysis of how to meet their needs.

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                                                              http://www.principalspartnership.com/