

SPENDING MONEY WISELY

GETTING THE MOST FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGETS



IMPROVING THE COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Reducing Expenses while Increasing Impact

Opportunity Brief • Getting Started • Lessons from the Field

by Nathan Levenson, Karla Baehr, James C. Smith, Claire Sullivan



DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®

www.dmccouncil.org

OPPORTUNITY BRIEF

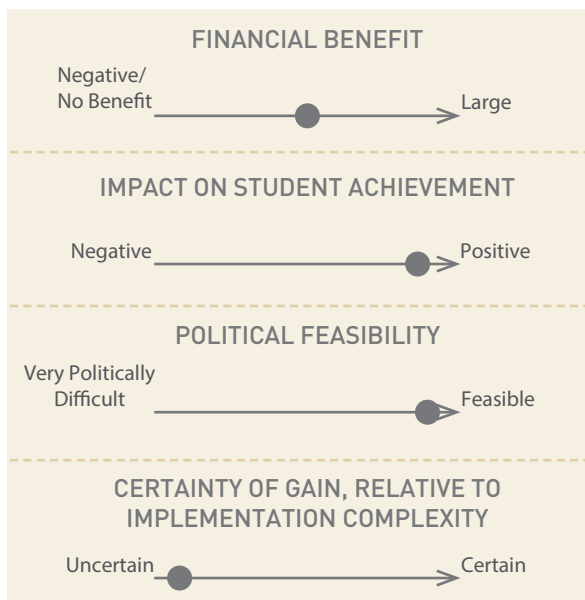
IMPROVING THE COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Reducing Expenses while Increasing Impact



DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®

Research confirms what many students, families, and school leaders have long believed: teachers are the most important school-based factor in raising student achievement. Spending money wisely to improve teacher effectiveness is therefore a high-leverage opportunity for improving student outcomes. Since most districts already spend a great amount on this effort, there is an opportunity to shift significant resources, rather than look for new funds. Political pushback is limited: external stakeholders are not typically impacted, and few internal staff are negatively affected. The real challenge is the implementation risk; providing effective professional development that actually raises student achievement is difficult to achieve.

No other school-based factors can come close to having as significant an impact as an effective teacher. Based on one study, even a ten-student reduction in class size produces smaller benefits than one standard deviation improvement in teaching quality.¹



An effective teacher can mitigate non-school factors such as family characteristics and income, which influence achievement. A student fortunate to be assigned to an effective teacher can make up to a full year’s more growth than a student assigned to an ineffective teacher. Being assigned consecutively year after year to several effective teachers can close achievement gaps. Improving teaching quality is one of the biggest levers for improving student outcomes.

Recognizing the potential impact, districts have invested significantly in professional development (PD) for their teachers. School districts often spend \$8,000-\$12,000 per teacher per year on professional development.² A recent study of two urban districts by Education Resource

Strategies found that spending reached as high as \$18,000 per teacher.³ For a typical school district of 50,000 students, a conservative estimate for professional development is \$25 – \$40 million per year, with over \$3.5 million per year spent on contracted professional development services alone.

While the importance of professional development is well understood, the total cost of PD is often not well understood; many districts are quite surprised to discover how high the total costs are, as the costs are often much larger than they appear in the budget. In a study of a sample of large, urban districts, one district’s actual PD costs were 20 times the budget item amount.⁴ Professional development spending is often buried across multiple department budgets and funding sources. Spending frequently falls under the purview of many departments such as curriculum and instruction, technology, Title I, and special education, among others. The staff overseeing this spending is usually not officially charged with managing “professional development.” The aforementioned report found that in the four districts studied, each had more than ten departments managing professional development spending. As a result, professional development spending is often fragmented and uncoordinated, making it difficult to accurately aggregate.

Another reason some districts do not realize how much they are spending on professional development is that many of the costs are not labeled as professional development. For example, many districts believe that since teachers must pay tuition out-of-pocket for graduate courses, the courses are “free” to the district. However, the “lanes” in most collective bargaining agreements pay teachers extra for completing these courses. This cost is rarely considered professional development, and yet these pay increases can total close to \$9 million annually for a typical school district of 50,000 students.⁵

More disconcerting than not knowing the full cost of a district’s professional development efforts is not knowing whether these efforts are effective. PD is a significant expense, but few districts have comprehensive systems to measure its effectiveness. Of more than 1,300 studies that do address the effects of teacher professional development on student achievement, only nine meet What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards.

Research is clear that substantial and sustained professional development – 50 hours on a single topic – is needed to change teacher behavior and correlate to student achievement gains.⁶ However, it is rare that professional development is substantial, focused on the content being taught, and sustained. Often, limited professional development time is used to address multiple topics and content areas over the course of the school year. A recent Education Resource Strategies study of three urban school systems with robust programs reported that they all spent more than half of their PD time on non-content specific topics.⁷ Most professional development is delivered in the

form of short conferences and workshops that do not provide the time on topic that research shows is needed to improve student outcomes. Given this, it is no surprise that most teachers report that the professional development they receive does not effectively inform their practice. One survey showed that 41% of teachers reported that content-related training they had received was unhelpful and over 50% reported that training in other areas was unhelpful.⁸

Given the importance and expense of professional development, there is an opportunity in many districts to both more effectively manage the cost of PD, and increase its effectiveness.

What Gets Measured Gets Managed

As the management adage goes, “what gets measured gets managed.” Simply knowing the full cost drives action. When district leaders realize how much they are actually spending, they are often surprised and highly motivated to make better use of scarce resources. Additionally, a full understanding of the scope of the programs offered can help better examine effectiveness and increase the ability to manage cost-effectiveness.

So, how do you assess the full real cost of PD? To fully assess the total costs, consider the following:

1 - Teacher time

Up to 55% of total professional development spending is allocated to freeing up teacher time,⁹ which represents up to \$20 million for a school district of 50,000 students.

- Salaries to support teacher participation in PD
Non-teaching days in the teacher contract, often intended to be used for professional development. A study of five urban districts found that the number of full professional development days ranged from 5 to 11.¹⁰ For a typical district of 50,000 students, this item alone could amount to approximately \$5 million - \$15 million.
- Teacher stipends for PD
Districts and schools pay teachers to stay after school to collaborate with their colleagues, such as for team planning or professional learning community (PLC) meetings.
- Expenditures for substitute teachers to cover classes during PD
Some districts increase the cost of each hour of professional development by paying for a substitute teacher in addition to the portion of the teacher’s salary.
- Salaries and benefits for school-based PD
Some staff is paid on a part-time or full-time basis to take on coaching, teacher-leadership roles, or other PD related tasks.

2 - External PD fees

Externally contracted services are the second largest cost-driver of professional development.

- Tuition for teachers who enroll in college and university courses
- Fees and expenses for external consultants and workshops
- Transportation, meals, and lodging for out-of-district PD

3 - Pay increases tied to PD

While seldom labeled as a PD expense, districts encourage and reward teachers for taking graduate courses, presumably based on the assumption that this will increase teacher effectiveness.

- Salary increases tied to graduate degrees and courses
Although graduate degrees have been shown to be ineffective in raising student achievement, many districts still invest heavily in this form of professional development, most often through increased compensation tied to graduate degrees and courses.

4 - Other PD costs include:

- Principal and assistant principal time devoted to educator evaluations
- Salaries and benefits for coaches, master teachers, department heads and other roles that help teachers become better
- Salaries and benefits for central office PD staff
- Salaries and benefits for central office staff that devote a portion of their time to supporting PD
- Expenditures for supplies and equipment used for PD activities
- Expenditures for district facilities and other facilities used primarily for PD

Once districts know the full costs and scope of their PD, they can take steps to make their programs more cost-effective and effective in raising student achievement.

Measuring effectiveness

Managing the cost-effectiveness of professional development requires knowing both the cost and the effectiveness of each effort. A full accounting of costs is not an easy task, but assessing effectiveness can be even more challenging. When measuring the effectiveness of professional development, districts should ask the following questions:

1. Is teacher behavior changing?
2. Is student learning improving as a result of professional development?

Is Teacher Behavior Changing?

This first measure is valuable as an easy-to-monitor leading indicator. Before professional development can impact student achievement, it must first change teacher practice. If teacher actions do not change, then PD has no chance of impacting students.

Pre- and post-observations of teacher practice can be very illuminating. For example, suppose a district is preparing to roll out professional development on the topic of asking probing questions. Principals, coaches, and other observers could visit a sample of classrooms and collect data on the number and type of probing questions asked; the assessment should be based on a rubric aligned to the goals of the professional development program to be administered. This creates a baseline for teachers' use of probing questions. After the professional development has begun, the observers should return to those same classrooms and use the same rubric to measure progress against the baseline. Ideally, these classroom visits should be done on a regular basis and integrated into the school's regular walk-through schedule.

Similar to observations, pre- and post-surveys offer districts an opportunity to establish a baseline and measure progress. They also offer teachers the opportunity to provide feedback, a step that could increase buy-in. The caution is that teachers may overstate any change in behavior, but feedback that says, "I have not changed my practice much" should ring an alarm bell.

Neither classroom observation nor survey data can show whether a professional development offering is effective, but they can show whether it is ineffective. In the case of professional development, it is easier to measure failure. This can be helpful information given that national research has indicated many current efforts are ineffective and costly.

These assessment strategies can provide feedback within weeks or months. Once the district realizes that a certain professional development program is not producing changes in teacher behavior, the particular program can be discontinued or modified quickly.

Is Student-Learning Improving?

The ultimate measure of the effectiveness of most PD is its impact on student learning. The measures of student outcomes should be aligned to the specific goals of the professional development. For example, if the goal is to impact student understanding of a particular concept in math, the districts should measure student growth in that particular skill.

End-of-year state assessments provide the easiest and crudest measure of student outcomes, and if specific questions can be linked to the focus areas of the PD, end-of-year assessments can be helpful data. Common formative assessments and/or pre- and post-tests may be even better measures. A short quiz can be administered at the start of the professional

development and then again at the end to measure growth on particular skills.

The most precise way to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development is to provide it only to some teachers, thus creating a control group. By piloting professional development efforts in some classrooms or schools, districts can compare the growth of students whose teachers received the professional development to the growth of students whose teachers did not. If effective, the program can then be launched in more classrooms and schools, and can be continually refined and measured for effectiveness.

Many might object to offering professional development to only some teachers as “unfair.” However, perhaps it is more unfair to not know if professional development is actually helping. Is it fair to teachers, principals, taxpayers, and most importantly, to students to spend so much on a critically important effort without knowing if it helps, should be continued, or needs to be changed?

Recommendations for Managing PD More Strategically

Based on a review of existing literature as well as feedback from district leaders, some promising PD strategies have been identified as being cost-effective. As districts seek to build more cost-effective programs, the following four recommendations are good places to start:

1 Don't pay for time that can be had for free

A full cost analysis of a district's professional development efforts is likely to show that paying for extra teacher time is the biggest cost component. Principals, central office leaders, and teachers themselves have asked for more PD as the demands placed on them have increased. The Common Core State Standards, data-driven instruction, anti-bullying efforts, and many more topics seem to overwhelm the PD schedule. In response to having too much to cover in too little time, districts have opted to pay extra for teacher time to accomplish all of this. This takes many forms: non-teaching days; before- and after-school meetings such as faculty meetings, team, or professional learning community (PLC) time; or stipends for selected staff to work after school or over the summer to develop curriculum or analyze data.

Paying for this extra time is often expensive and ineffective. Some districts have found ways through expert scheduling to create extensive PD time during the regular school day, without reducing teachers' time with students.

Non-teaching days in the teacher contract are initially intended for professional development and often come in exchange for larger-than-typical pay increases – districts buy this extra time. Unfortunately, these days often end up being used for other things. If these days are scheduled at the

beginning or end of the school year, the days can end up being used to set up classrooms or grade final exams. Even time scheduled during the regular school year sometimes ends up being used for individual planning or prep, not professional development, especially for teachers who are not teaching core subjects.

Even when these days are used for PD, their timing limits the potential impact. Because the PD happens when students are not present, content is less likely to inform actual classroom practices. PD during the summer or the start or end of the school year does not allow ideas to be reinforced throughout the school year with follow-up activities.

When the cost of these extra days is calculated, district leaders are often surprised by the magnitude of the expense, especially when alternative uses for the funds are considered. Since these days are just “part of the contract” and not line-itemed, they are often considered as free, when, in fact, six extra days for a typical urban district of 50,000 students amounts to \$11,000,000 a year! This sum of money would pay for nearly 150 instructional coaches, approximately one per every 13 core teachers. Retrieving non-teaching days is not simple, especially when it requires collective bargaining. That said, strategies that “trade” them in for use as teaching days or in place of salary adjustments hold promise.

Districts also pay for teacher-time outside of the regular school day in the form of stipends for after-school or before-school PD. Through expert scheduling, some districts have created time for these activities during the school day, thus eliminating the need to pay extra for it.

A scheduling expert can almost always find time within the regular school day for teacher collaboration. For example, in a

Recommendations for Managing PD More Strategically

Don't pay for time that can be had for free

Free up funds to invest in coaching

Target professional development strategically

Consider the evaluation system as professional development

district that wanted to introduce common planning time for teachers at four middle schools, principals said, “We want and need common planning time, but there just isn’t any wiggle room in the schedule.” After a month of trying, they approached the superintendent with two choices: look for funds to pay for after-school time or live without.

Unwilling to give up, a scheduling expert offered to review all four schools’ schedules and staffing data. After many hours of work, he was able to add 45 minutes of common planning time each day by department, an individual planning period, plus regular grade-level team meetings. This was all done without adding any staff, shortening classes, or lengthening the day. In addition, the common planning time was scheduled back-to-back with lunch and the personal prep period. All of this was scheduled at the same time across all four schools, which gave teachers the option to spend two hours collaborating with colleagues at other schools.

Dramatically improved schedules may seem impossible in many districts. Most people assigned to create schedules find it very difficult. At many schools, either the principal or an assistant principal is tasked with building the schedule, and they were generally not hired for their scheduling abilities.

Some districts have searched for this expertise internally by asking one talented principal to schedule many schools, or paying a stipend to a teacher with a knack for it. Other districts hire an outside scheduling expert, which is a small investment to free up much teacher time and reduce professional development costs.

One such expert, Marilyn Crawford, affirms, “Common planning time should never be after school. There is always time during the regular school day for teachers to work together without the need for reducing individual planning time or core instruction for students.” In some cases, she has scheduled a full day of teacher collaboration per week for core subjects without adding staff or using substitute teachers. Another expert with over 40 years of experience, Elliot Merenbloom, reports, “I can usually build in one period of teacher collaboration per day in school schedules.”

Embedded time for collaboration during the school day is not only more cost-effective, but potentially more effective overall. Rooting it in the school day sends a powerful signal to teachers that time for collaboration is an essential part of their jobs. Additionally, districts can often actually provide more time when scheduled during the school day than they can pay for when added-on.

2 Free up funds to invest in coaching

Instructional coaching is a promising strategy for professional development that has become increasingly popular in the past decade. Its popularity has grown partly in response to the weaknesses of traditional professional development in the form of workshops, lectures, and courses. McKinsey & Company has identified coaching as one of the highest potential professional development practices when implemented well by skilled staff: “Because coaching is so customized, it can create faster and deeper insights for teachers about what can work in their classroom... Great advice from a coach is often cited as making all the difference.”¹¹ Although there are many different models, core tenets include a one-on-one teacher-coach relationship, classroom observations, lesson modeling, goal-setting, real-time feedback, and follow-up activities. As opposed to traditional professional development, instructional coaching is tied directly to content and occurs in the classroom with students present. Shifting funds from workshops and other forms of PD to coaching can yield a better return.

In one recent experimental study of 50 teachers by researchers at the Center for Research on Learning, teachers who were coached after attending a professional development workshop were shown to be more likely to use new teaching practices and implement them with a higher degree of quality than teachers who had attended only the workshop. Another study linked reading gains with intensive coaching programs that were implemented with fidelity. Though

the research base is limited, it seems that a well-implemented and intensive coaching program can lead to changes in both teacher practice and student outcomes.

Many districts seem to see the value in starting or expanding coaching programs, but believe that they cannot afford them. The funds currently used for traditional professional development could, however, cover most, if not all, of the costs of a robust coaching program.

Allan Odden suggests that a robust coaching model requires at least one coach per 500 students.¹² Therefore, a typical school district of 50,000 students would need at least 100 instructional coaches, an investment of about \$7.5 million. If a typical district of 50,000 students spends over \$3.5 million per year on contracted PD services, then reallocating those funds could free up enough money to cover nearly half of the coaches. The remaining \$4 million represents less than 1% of

Shifting funds from workshops and other forms of PD to coaching can yield a better return.

the total operating budget for a typical school district of 50,000 students. If half of coaching is one-on-one and half of it is in grade-level teams or PLCs, each core teacher could have approximately 2.5 hours of instructional coaching per week.

If districts believe that coaching is a powerful lever for change, then the good news is that most districts can shift existing professional development dollars to fund a comprehensive effort.

3 Target professional development strategically

In most districts, most teachers receive roughly equal amounts of professional development, with the exception of brand new teachers who receive a bit more support. Professional development is spread thin and wide. There is an opportunity to improve the cost-effectiveness and effectiveness of professional development by targeting resources to teachers more strategically.

McKinsey & Company, for example, suggests segmenting teachers based on experience and effectiveness and providing different professional development to each segment in terms of intensity and topic covered. Other types of segmentation could also make sense (Exhibit 1).

In this model, districts potentially get more “bang-for-the-buck,” while teachers receive professional development that better meets their specific needs. Topics can be tailored, for example, to provide more focus on classroom management for new teachers, or very advanced student engagement strategies for highly-effective teachers. It also allows districts to spend more on staff with greater needs, without raising total costs.

Exhibit 1

SEGMENTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL EXAMPLE			
Effectiveness	High	Significant Investment	Low Investment
	Medium		Medium Investment
	Low		Low Investment
		0-2 Years	2-3 Years
			3+ Years
		Years of experience	

Source: Adapted from Kartik Jayaram, Andy Moffit, and Doug Scott, “Breaking the Habit of Ineffective Professional Development for Teachers,” McKinsey & Company, January 2012, http://mckinseysociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/MoSociety_Teacher_PD-v4.pdf [accessed June 30, 2013].

4 Consider the evaluation system as professional development

Recently, many districts and states throughout the country have made significant investments in redesigning teacher evaluation systems. Historically, teacher evaluations rated almost every teacher satisfactory or excellent and failed to identify areas for development. The influential report, “The Widget Effect,” found that in twelve districts studied, three out of four teachers did not receive any specific feedback on how to improve their practice.¹³ As districts build and implement new evaluation systems, there is an opportunity to connect evaluation and professional development.

Since a major component of many evaluation systems is to improve teaching (not just to rate teacher performance), there is much overlap with the goals of professional development. Shifting funds from other professional development areas toward supporting and improving teacher evaluation makes sense.

- Evaluation ratings can help to identify top-performing teachers for coaching positions. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s recent study on teacher effectiveness has found that it is possible to identify effective teachers, and these teachers can be put into roles where they have opportunities to help their colleagues.
- Evaluation ratings and identified needs can set the priorities and participants for professional development.
- Change in evaluation ratings and classroom observation data can serve as one leading indicator of the effectiveness of professional development.
- Classroom observations can be integrated into the work of instructional coaches.
- Investing in freeing up time for principals to do classroom observations and give feedback to teachers is an indirect way of increasing high-quality professional development. Something as simple as providing additional clerical support to principals can free up time for principals to increase their impact.

A systems-thinking approach to evaluation and professional development will require adaptive change. Many districts view professional development and evaluation as separate, and even oppose a connection. This may be a missed opportunity to both improve teaching and use the limited resources of time and money most effectively.

Looking at the familiar with fresh eyes

Districts certainly value PD and invest heavily in it, but by tracking costs, measuring effectiveness, and shifting resources, many districts will be able to do more for less. Strategic management of professional development activities can make PD more cost-effective, improve the impact on student outcomes, and free up funds for other strategic priorities. PD has always been an important tool for school districts, but taking a step back and looking at it through a different lens can improve these important efforts.

¹Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement, *Econometrica*, VOL. 73, No. 2, Mar 2005, 417-458.

²“Professional Development: Quality, Impact, and Outcomes: What is your Professional Development Return on Investment (ROI)?, Knowledge Delivery Systems, <http://www1.kdsi.org/about-kds/whitepapers/> (accessed July 25, 2013).

³“A New Vision for Teacher Professional Growth & Support: Six Steps to a More Powerful School System Strategy,” Education Resource Strategies, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, May 2013, <http://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/1800-gates-pgs-white-paper.pdf> (accessed July 2013).

⁴Karen Hawley Miles and Matthew Horbeck, “Reinvesting in Teachers: Aligning District Professional Development Spending to Support a Comprehensive School Reform Strategy” Education Resource Strategies, New American Schools, 200, <http://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/930-professionaldevelopmentspending1.pdf> (accessed July 25, 2013).

⁵Marguerite Roza, “Frozen Assets: Rethinking Teacher Contracts Could Free Billions for School Reform,” Marguerite Roza, Education Sector at American Institutes for Research Reports, December 22, 2007.

⁶“Reviewing the Evidence on How Teacher Professional Development Affects Student Achievement,” Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, U.S. Department of Education, 2007.

⁷“A New Vision for Teacher Professional Growth & Support: Six Steps to a More Powerful School System Strategy,” Education Resource Strategies, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, May 2013, <http://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/1800-gates-pgs-white-paper.pdf> (accessed July 2013).

⁸Linda Darling-Hammond, Ruth Chung Wei, Alethea Andree, Nikole Richardson, Stelios Orphanos, National Staff Development Council, “The Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad,” National Staff Development Council, 2009, <http://learningforward.org/docs/pdf/nsdestudy2009.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2013).

⁹Karen Hawley Miles, “Rethinking School Resources,” New American Schools, 2013, <http://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/918-rethinking-resources.pdf> (accessed July 15, 2013).

¹⁰“Continuing to Improve Teaching Quality During Tough Economic Times,” Education Resource Strategies, 2009, http://www.edweek.org/media/ppt_download_2.pdf, (accessed July 15, 2013).

¹¹Kartik Jayaram, Andy Moffit, and Doug Scott, “Breaking the Habit of Ineffective Professional Development for Teachers,” McKinsey & Company, January 2012, 7, http://mckinseysociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/MoSociety_Teacher_PD-v4.pdf (accessed June 10, 2013).

¹²Allan Odden, *Improving Student Learning When Budgets are Tight* (California: Corwin, 2012), 67.

¹³Daniel Weisberg, Susan Sexton, Jennifer Mulhern, David Keeling, “The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness,” <http://widgeteffect.org/downloads/TheWidgetEffect.pdf> (accessed July 15, 2013).

GETTING STARTED

IMPROVING THE COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Reducing Expenses while Increasing Impact

Research is clear that teacher effectiveness is the most important school-based factor in raising student achievement. Providing effective professional development (PD) that actually raises teacher effectiveness – and therefore student achievement – has been difficult to achieve at scale. As most districts already spend a great deal on PD (often \$10,000 or more per teacher, when all costs are counted), districts have an opportunity to shift significant resources to more effective PD efforts, rather than look for new funds.

HERE'S HOW TO GET STARTED:

- 1 **FIND OUT HOW MUCH YOU ALREADY SPEND ON PD**
Many districts are surprised to discover the full cost of their PD efforts, especially when they include resources from grants and other funding sources as well as costs not traditionally labeled in the budget as “professional development,” such as teacher time and pay increases tied to graduate degrees. This broad definition of PD helps highlight the often-significant resources of time, money, and people that can be redeployed.
- 2 **CONSOLIDATE ALL PD EFFORTS AND LEADERSHIP**
Consolidated authority, responsibility, and accountability for results can help ensure that limited funds are spent wisely and on efforts that are aligned to the district’s strategic priorities and vision for effective instruction.
- 3 **COMMIT TO A FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORT**
Research shows that at least 50 hours of learning, applying, and practicing a single topic is needed to change teacher behavior in ways that correlate with student achievement gains. It is essential that leadership reallocate and integrate resources to sustain such substantial and focused PD efforts.
- 4 **SCHEDULE TIME FOR PD WITHIN THE REGULAR SCHOOL DAY**
Time for PD – including common planning time, professional learning communities (PLCs), or data meetings – can be built into virtually every elementary school schedule (and most secondary school schedules) within the confines of the regular school day and in accordance with existing collective bargaining agreements. Scheduling support and expertise from the central office can help.
- 5 **CONSIDER COACHING AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL PD**
Some traditional PD strategies – often in the form of short-term workshops, conferences, and courses – have not been effective in changing teacher practice or raising achievement. Job-embedded instructional coaching is a promising alternative, and can be less expensive than traditional models if designed thoughtfully.

A word to the wise: DO NOT TREAT PD AND EVALUATION SEPARATELY

As many districts are reforming their educator evaluation systems, some are using new evaluation data from observations and data on student growth by teacher to target future PD and measure the effectiveness of past PD efforts.



 DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®

IMPROVING THE COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Reducing Expenses while Increasing Impact



DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®

Recent trends in K-12 public education have resulted in growing demands being placed on teachers. The implementation of new Common Core State Standards and related assessments in the majority of states raise expectations at a time when student populations are becoming increasingly diverse and their needs more varied and intense. Meanwhile, new evaluation systems have put teacher effectiveness and teaching practice under additional scrutiny. Given these new challenges, districts have an even greater responsibility to provide the best professional development possible.

Lessons from the field

LESSON
1

Put someone in charge of *all* professional development

LESSON
2

Map the time, people, and money associated with professional development

LESSON
3

Time for professional development can almost always be found in the regular school day

LESSON
4

Coaching can be a cost-effective alternative to traditional PD, but only if structured appropriately

LESSON
5

Treat teacher evaluation and professional development as two sides of the same coin

The challenge most districts face is how to simultaneously improve the effectiveness of professional development and at the same time reduce cost. Districts that have improved the cost-effectiveness of their professional development programs have reimagined the way professional development is managed, designed, scheduled, implemented, and evaluated. Here are five lessons they have learned along the way.

**Most districts
spend much more
on professional
development than
they realize.**

LESSON

1

Put someone in charge of all professional development

In many districts, there is no one person or department in charge of professional development. Typically, building principals, district content-area leaders, and directors of special education, Title I, and other grant programs all share responsibility across multiple budgets and funding sources. Even when a district does have a director of professional development, that person rarely exerts much, if any, influence over the decisions of others who have access to funding for professional development through their own budgets, especially grant-funded budgets. As a result, professional development efforts are often splintered, shallow, inconsistent, sometimes contradictory – and rarely cost-effective.

Most districts that have been successful in dramatically improving the cost-effectiveness of professional development have put one person in charge of all district efforts and all associated funds. Montgomery County Public Schools (MD), for example, developed an Office of Staff Development (OSD), headed by an associate superintendent, to oversee all funding for professional development. The group was tasked with ensuring that all professional development in the district was aligned with its strategic priorities and that resources were used strategically and effectively. This dual mission yields benefits for both the budget and pedagogy.

First, having one leader with authority, responsibility, and accountability spurs development of a common understanding of what effective instruction looks like. In Montgomery County, district leadership articulated a comprehensive and specific vision for effective instruction that focused on high standards and differentiated instruction, a vision that OSD then reflected in all professional development efforts. All teachers in the district participated in common training, a research-based program focused on developing educator capacity to identify learning differences among students and adapt instruction to better meet individual needs. Managed through OSD, this unified approach fostered a common understanding across buildings, content areas, and grade levels. Teachers shared “a united view about the characteristics and importance of high-quality teaching and learning, and its link to student outcomes.”¹

In another large, diverse district, a leadership team charged with professional development for the entire district came to a common understanding of what good instruction looks like by watching videos of actual lessons. Together, they debated to what degree the videoed lessons demonstrated characteristics of effective instruction. The process was more difficult than anticipated, as debate highlighted different views and perspectives. In the end, the team codified what effective instruction looks like and used that as the basis for professional

development offerings.

Second, consolidated authority, responsibility, and accountability for results help ensure that limited funds are spent wisely on efforts that are aligned to strategic priorities and to the district’s vision for effective instruction. For example, a large urban school district combined nearly all of its professional development efforts to improve reading instruction the year following the adoption of the Common Core State Standards. Senior leaders knew they “couldn’t afford to splinter our efforts.” They pooled nearly all professional development spending across departmental budgets and grant funding sources to support training and coaching for all teachers at the district and school level and focused their efforts on reading and reading only.

There is a third reason to consolidate responsibility and accountability for professional development. The intensive and sustained professional development necessary to change teacher practice and improve student outcomes is nearly impossible to achieve if spending is fractured. Research is clear that substantial and sustained professional development – not much fewer than 50 hours learning, applying, and practicing a single topic – is needed to change teacher behavior in ways that correlate with student achievement gains.² For many districts, no one department or funding source can provide fifty hours of professional development for core-content teachers (let alone all teachers) on one high-leverage topic. Only consolidated responsibility can reallocate and integrate the resources needed to support such substantial PD.

LESSON

2

Map the time, people, and money associated with professional development

Most districts spend much more on professional development than they realize. Much of this spending goes to professional development activities that are unlikely to raise student achievement such as conferences, and workshops. Many districts pursuing more cost-effective PD have mapped their PD resources in order to identify patterns, gaps, and opportunities. Resource mapping typically starts with taking stock of all the time, people, and money being devoted to professional development using a comprehensive definition of the term.

A broader, more complete definition of professional development includes, for example: contracted non-teaching days; school-based professional development including faculty, department, and grade-level meeting time; instructional coaching; time school and district administrators devote to classroom observations and feedback; and, increases in compensation for master’s degrees and advanced study. Along with payments to outside vendors and stipends for staff, professional development costs also include pro-rated portions of the salaries of those employees who have a hand in coordinating,

managing, or leading professional development.

Exhibit 1 is an example of the kinds of costs districts have identified across departments and budgets during the resource mapping process.

In one large southern district, broadening the definition of PD required leaders to make a cultural shift. For example, central office monitoring and support for special education teachers came to be considered professional development whereas it had previously been considered management. This broad definition highlighted previously unidentified professional development costs – as well as resources of time, money, and people that could be redeployed to more strategic purposes.

In addition to capturing expenditures and programs, resource mapping also highlights how people, time, and money are being deployed. For example, one large southern district had ten paid days in the teacher collective bargaining agreement that it considered professional development costs. Some of the days were designated for common planning and other group activities while some were designated for individual planning time. Through a resource mapping process that included interviews with staff, district leaders found that while some teachers used those days to collaborate with colleagues on their own initiative, many others did only individual planning or little schoolwork at all. The resource mapping process also brought to light that a major PD investment had little likelihood of improving teaching practice.

Few large urban districts that have comprehensively and effectively mapped their resources have done so without support from an outside partner. Resource mapping requires a specific set of statistical and analytical skills, and many districts do not have the needed capacity in-house. Additionally, resource mapping may include benchmarking data to compare resource allocation to other like districts. These efforts require data sets and analytical capacity that are often not readily available in-house. Once an initial analysis is performed, many districts are able to replicate the resource mapping process in future years without additional outside support. The goal of the outside partnerships should be to build capacity to conduct the needed data collection and analysis year after year.

Districts should regularly and systematically use resource mapping to reveal the full costs and breadth of professional development investments and highlight opportunities to

increase their cost-effectiveness, reallocate resources, and align efforts to district priorities.

LESSON 3

Time for professional development can almost always be found in the regular school day

Up to 55% of total professional development spending goes to pay for time for teachers to participate in professional development;³ this represents up to \$20 million for a school district of 50,000 students. Some of this spending goes to additional compensation (e.g., stipends) for teachers to participate in professional development outside of the regular school day and year. However, time for common planning, professional learning communities (PLCs), or data meetings is achievable in virtually every elementary school – and most secondary schools – within the confines of the regular school day and existing collective bargaining agreements.

For example, Duval County Public Schools (FL) wanted to provide opportunities for core content teachers to collaborate and plan together; this had been identified as a key professional development strategy in their reform plan. Through its resource mapping process in 2011,⁴ the district found that it already invested approximately \$100 million (almost \$12,000 per teacher) in teacher time outside of the student day, including planning time, faculty meetings, and early release time. Although 73%

Finding time for teacher teams to meet and learn within the regular school day, as opposed to before or after the school day or year, is important, can be done, and will have immediate impact on the budget.

of the time was contractually obligated to be allocated toward individual planning as opposed to common planning, the remaining 27% still proved to be enough for district leaders to provide common planning time for core content teachers, and even non-core and elective staff in some grades. At the elementary level, for example, schedules were created so that resource teachers (e.g. PE, music, art) who were shared between schools could meet all together once a week with one principal for training and collaborative planning. This kind of creative scheduling required significant involvement, support, and technical assistance from central office.

Another large urban district redesigned its middle-school schedule to make time for teacher collaboration within the parameters of the teacher contract. In 2013-14, all eleven middle schools are piloting common schedules that allocate staff according to enrollment and need as opposed to historical precedent. The district has scheduled a daily common

Exhibit 1

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COSTS			
EXPENDITURE AREAS			
Item	General Fund	Grants	Total
Teacher Time			
Cost of weekly hours spent on...			
PLC meetings			
Faculty meetings			
Team / department meetings			
Data meetings			
Other meetings			
Cost of annual hours spent on...			
Required PD sessions			
Working with coaches			
Principal/teacher coaching session			
Educator evaluation			
External PD sessions			
Department-specific required sessions			
School-wide required sessions			
District-wide required sessions			
Dedicated PD positions			
External fees and expenses			
Stipends			
Tuition reimbursement			
Workshop Consultant			
Educational Consultant			
Professional Consultant			
Registration Fees			
Other Professional Services			
Travel			
Travel-Board Approved			
Pay increases tied to training			
Salary due to grad degrees			
Salary due to PD points			
Substitutes			
Certified Subs			
Classified Subs			
Grand Total			

preparation period for every subject across all schools. In addition, teams of educators at each school who have demonstrated effectiveness (including proven instructional coaches) provide college- and career-themed courses to students. These courses free up core content teachers to participate in a full day of professional learning with their content area teams every ten days. Often, designing and implementing these kinds of substantial scheduling changes – within the constraints of teacher contract requirements – require expertise. Districts can engage outside scheduling experts to help them.

Finding time for teacher teams to meet and learn within the regular school day, as opposed to before or after the school day or year, is important, can be done, and will have immediate impact on the budget. However, creating the meeting time is only half the battle. Districts that have been successful in cutting costs and improving the effectiveness of their PD have not just made time for team PD during the regular school day. They have also put systems in place to ensure that the time is used effectively. Typically, they borrow heavily from the guidelines of Learning Forward, the leading national organization for staff development professionals⁵. Although a full description of such systems is not within the purview of this document, some of the key questions districts have considered when they build job-embedded professional development centered on effective teacher teams include:

- How does the time support the district’s vision for improving teacher practice?
- How does teacher assignment strengthen or weaken teacher teams?
- What team norms, roles, and responsibilities need to be established to support team effectiveness?
- What support from principals, department heads, and others do teams need in order to be successful?
- How will instructional coaching be integrated to enhance individual and collective learning?

LESSON

4

Coaching can be a cost-effective alternative to traditional PD, but only if structured appropriately

Some traditional professional development efforts – often in the form of short-term workshops, conferences, and courses – have not proven to be effective. Of more than 1,300 studies that address the effects of teacher professional development on student achievement, only nine meet the What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards.⁶ Former superintendent of Boston Public Schools (MA), Tom Payzant, writes that after participating in some traditional professional development, teachers “all too often return to their classrooms without being able to see the connection between their teaching

challenges and the professional development sessions they were required to attend.”⁷

Many districts are turning to coaching as a promising alternative. As opposed to much traditional professional development, instructional coaching is tied directly to classroom practice. Although there are many different models, core tenets include at least some one-on-one coaching, classroom observation, lesson planning and modeling, goal-setting, real-time feedback, and follow-up assessment and monitoring. Some districts are focusing more and more of their coaches’ time on working with content-specific teams of teachers to help them build their individual and collective skills at analyzing data about student learning (including student work samples), identifying adaptations and modifications in instruction through lesson planning and modeling, and assessing the effectiveness of the instructional changes.

Districts that have implemented successful coaching models have understood that coaching is not a silver bullet. They found that coaching programs can only be effective if they have the following characteristics:

- **Instructional coaches are selected based on their ability to teach adults in addition to their ability to teach students.** One large southern district found that principals were hiring coaches based on demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom; however, many of these educators felt uncomfortable leading and coaching their peers. The district centralized the recruitment, interview, and selection process for school-based coaching positions, and specifically hired for leadership skills in addition to pedagogy. Recognizing the need for ongoing development for the coaches, the district provided monthly professional development opportunities for coaches to collaborate and continue to improve their coaching and leadership skills.
- **Coaches report to a district curriculum director.** Centralized coaching positions helped ensure that the coaches who were hired had the strengths and skills needed to fulfill their roles. In addition, this practice has helped ensure that coaches have authority in their buildings, can improve schools across the district (as opposed to developing “lighthouse” classrooms and schools), and have opportunities to collaborate with one another across schools.
- **Roles and responsibilities are clear.** Without clear roles and responsibilities, some coaches are used to fulfill non-instructional duties, such as lunch monitoring, substitute teaching, or administrative tasks. Clear articulation and monitoring of roles and responsibilities can help ensure that coaches’ time is used effectively. For some districts, this begins with

the job description. For example, one district now requires that 75% of coaches' time be spent with teachers; the district made explicit that coaches are responsible for providing: 1) one-on-one instruction coaching and 2) group coaching by leading PLCs. Although the district already had an instructional coach in every school, they credit this clarification of roles and responsibilities with improving and revamping their efforts.

- **Teachers and coaches plan together.** Coaching models that have been proven effective have prioritized time for individual and group planning meetings between teachers and coaches. Many teachers, especially new teachers, have trouble anticipating student confusions, planning for differentiating instruction, and using data to inform lesson planning. Planning sessions can be more effective than observation and feedback sessions in addressing these concerns. One district with a robust and effective coaching program invested heavily in training for its instructional coaches to lead PLCs in using data to plan for differentiating instruction and re-teaching priority standards. They found that the leadership of the coach helped ensure that PLC time was used effectively and built team capacity to design effective lessons.
- **Coaching is tied to classroom practice.** Some districts have found that of the school-based coaching models implemented across the district, the most effective models are based upon direct, in-the-classroom coaching. In these schools, key components of programs were classroom observation, model lessons, and feedback sessions.

The above list is not meant to be comprehensive. Rather, it synthesizes some of the key considerations of districts that have changed teacher practice and increased student learning through coaching.

LESSON 5

Treat teacher evaluation and professional development as two sides of the same coin

Recently, many districts and states have made significant investments in redesigning teacher evaluation systems, in part, to help teachers improve their practice. The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project has found that a combination of multiple measures – including student surveys, observation data, and students' past performance – can identify effective teachers and predict student outcomes.⁸ Most new evaluation systems include at least these measures, although they are weighted differently depending on the system. As a result, many districts have, or will have in the near future, a

wealth of evaluation data from multiple measures at their disposal. Districts looking to reduce the cost of professional development and improve its effectiveness are using this newly-available data to target PD and to measure the effectiveness of PD efforts.

First, the new educator evaluation systems can help districts focus and target professional development by examining trends and patterns in teacher-effectiveness. Areas in which teachers need additional support can be identified by level (elementary, middle, high), by school, and by content area. Principals can even target school-based professional development down to the teacher level.

Second, some districts have used the data available for measuring and monitoring the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of professional development. In order to determine the effectiveness of professional development, districts must ask two questions: “Has teacher practice changed as a result of the professional development?” and “Has student learning also increased as a result?”

To answer the first question, districts use evaluation data from classroom observations tied to the specific professional development undertaken by each teacher. In all the classroom observation instruments used in the districts participating in the MET Project, teachers are assessed across multiple competencies or standards of effectiveness. Many evaluation systems tie specific goals and feedback to each standard, providing data on multiple aspects of teachers' classroom practices. Multiple observations throughout the year afford teachers and administrators the opportunity to track progress and growth for all the competencies. If professional development is effective, teachers and administrators can expect to see teachers making significant progress, meeting or exceeding their goals for the specific competencies that the professional development was intended to address. Furthermore, districts should consider abandoning PD that does not tie to core competencies and reallocate those resources to PD that does.

To answer the second question – “has student learning increased as a result of professional development?” – some districts use value-added measures or other measures of student growth. Some districts have eased implementation by starting small and involving teachers from the outset. For example, in one district, every teacher selects one standard of the evaluation system to focus on for the year. Job-embedded coaching and other professional development are targeted to support improvement on that particular standard. Progress is monitored throughout the year through classroom walk-throughs and, at the end of the year, is assessed through final ratings. Through this process, principals, teachers, as well as coaches and other instructional leaders evaluate the effectiveness of professional development on an individual basis. The district has found that this process has increased teacher “buy-in” and

engagement.

In many districts, recognizing classroom observations and principal walk-throughs as development (not just as evaluation) represents a significant change in and of itself. Yet, principal feedback is a form of professional development and as this increases, other types of professional development can decrease. For example, in one district, principals had rarely ever visited classrooms to give feedback. Since a new evaluation system was implemented, they conduct eight to ten observations and feedback sessions per teacher per year. This investment in professional development could offset other spending.

A systems-thinking approach to professional development and educator evaluation requires that both work in tandem to provide flexible and adaptive solutions to individual teacher needs. This is hard work and will not happen overnight, but new educator evaluation systems provide the impetus and necessary data to propel change.

A challenge, but not an impossibility

Improving instruction to meet the increasingly high demands created by new standards, teacher evaluations, and increased student need is one of the most critical challenges districts face today. But it need not mean adding millions of dollars to the budget. Many districts that have improved the cost-effectiveness of their professional development programs have mapped resources, consolidated resources and leadership, found time for development in the regular day, provided effective instructional coaching, and integrated evaluation and professional development. In doing so, they have saved dollars and reallocated funding to their highest priority strategic imperatives.

¹Stacey M. Childress, Denis P. Doyle, and David A. Thomas, *Leading for Equity: The Pursuit of Excellence in the Montgomery County Public Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2009), 80.

²“Reviewing the Evidence on How Teacher Professional Development Affects Student Achievement”, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, U.S. Department of Education, 2007.

³Karen Hawley Miles, “Rethinking School Resources,” *New American Schools*, 2013, <http://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/918-rethinking-resources.pdf> (accessed July 15, 2013).

⁴Jonathan Travers and Kristen Ferris, “Realigning Resources for District Success: Duval County Public Schools Final Report,” *Education Resource Strategies*, September 2011, http://www.jaxpef.org/media/757594/duval_final_report_sept192011v6.pdf (accessed June 10, 2013).

⁵For more information on Learning Forward’s standards for professional learning, visit <http://learningforward.org/standards#.UlqtqICsiSo>, and for guidelines for coaching, visit <http://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/jsd-june-2013/heineke343.pdf>.

⁶U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, *Reviewing the Evidence on How Teacher Professional Development Affects Student Achievement*, Institute of Educational Science, 2007.

⁷Tom Payzant, *Urban School Leadership*, (San Francisco: Josse-Bass, 2011), 184.

⁸“Ensuring Fair and Reliable Measures of Effective Teaching Culminating Findings from the MET Project’s Three-Year Study”, *The MET Project*, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, January 2013, http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET_Ensuring_Fair_and_Reliable_Measures_Practitioner_Brief.pdf (accessed July 15, 2013).

SPENDING MONEY WISELY

Getting the Most from School District Budgets

This chapter is from *Spending Money Wisely: Getting the Most from School District Budgets* by Nathan Levenson, Karla Baehr, James C. Smith, and Claire Sullivan of The District Management Council. To access this chapter and the rest of the series, please go to www.dmcouncil.org. Topics in this series include:

1. **Calculating Academic Return on Investment: A Powerful Tool and a Great Investment**
2. **Managing to Existing Class-Size Targets: Systems and Tools to Staff More Closely to Current Policy**
3. **Adding Precision to Remediation and Intervention Staffing Levels: Data-Driven Guidelines Improve Schedules, Building Assignments, and Workload**
4. **Finding Politically Acceptable Ways to Increase Class Size or Teaching Load: Freeing up Funds for Strategic Priorities**
5. **Strategically Spending Federal Entitlement Grants: Making the Connection to District Priorities**
6. **Ensuring More Students Read on Grade Level: Cost-Effective Strategies**
7. **Improving the Cost-Effectiveness of Professional Development: Reducing Expenses While Increasing Impact**
8. **Rethinking Purchasing: A Strategic Approach to Increasing the Value of Each Dollar Spent**
9. **Lowering the Cost of Extended Learning Time: Creating Financial Sustainability**
10. **Targeting New Investments: Funding a Better Future Despite Declining Resources**

About the Authors

Nathan Levenson is Senior Managing Director of The District Management Council (DMC). After a career in the private sector and six years as an elected school board member, he served as superintendent in Arlington, Massachusetts. His work at DMC has led him to more than 50 districts, always looking to help them do more with less.

James C. Smith, Senior Director at The District Management Council, has a combination of human capital consulting and classroom teaching experience. James works on projects across several areas including human capital, strategic planning, special education, and stakeholder engagement.

Karla Baehr is Senior Advisor and Consultant at The District Management Council. Her many years of experience as a superintendent in both urban and affluent districts provide a unique perspective. Karla also served as deputy commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Claire Sullivan is a Senior Associate at The District Management Council. Having worked in the classroom prior to joining DMC, Claire now works with a number of districts on mapping resource allocation, with particular focus on data-driven budgeting and improving special education and remediation and intervention staffing.

About the District Management Council

The District Management Council (DMC) partners with public school district leaders to help improve student outcomes, operational efficiency, and resource allocation. DMC was founded in 2004 to address the most pressing and important management challenges facing American educators. The trusted advisor to school district leaders, DMC works with districts on these important issues to achieve measurable results. With the firm belief that leadership and management matter, DMC helps to strengthen and increase the managerial capacity of the people leading school districts to systemically improve the performance of the American public education system. To learn more, visit www.dmcouncil.org.

Support for this series was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.



DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®