

Research Brief

A Review of Literature

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Research shows that Professional Learning (PL) that positively affects student achievement and growth have the following characteristics:

- Focuses on individual teachers' strengths and needs and is grounded in teachers' content area and/or grade level
- Sets specific goals for learning that are based in research on best teaching and learning.
- Focuses on content knowledge, how students learn, instructional goals and effective strategies
- Links knowledge with practice and provides opportunities for teachers to try new skills, receive feedback, and adjust multiple times --it takes 20 instances of practice on average for a teacher to master a new skills (more if very complex)
- Allows collaboration with colleagues
- Uses modeling and internship processes for coaching
- Employs two to six modes of active learning: coaching, mentoring, internship, professional networks, study group, coursework or initial in-service education
- Is sustained over 14 hours or more and deep with follow-up of initial learning over time
- Balances individual learning needs with collaborative learning at the school, grade, or department level
- Engages teachers in assessment of students, review of student work, and curricular design
- Aligns with larger organizational goals and learning activities, has outcome measures aligned with learning goals of the PL, and includes evaluation over time by the teachers of the effectiveness of implementation of the PL
- Is supported by leadership through working with teachers and supporting the PL goals.

Beware of these pitfalls

- One-time workshops
- Motivated primarily by pay or licensure requirement
- Not job-embedded or integrated with the improvement goals of the school or district
- Coaches meant to support system-wide reforms who received training framed as coaching individual learning tend to focus on being responsive to individual needs, often at the expense of school and district goals.
- Districts beholden to agendas defined by external grant funders may have more difficulty sustaining a coherent and integrated PL strategy as they may get sidetracked with the influx of new funding from external entities.



What can school leaders do?

- To sustain the positive effectiveness of PL over time: foster a climate of trust and open communication and build an active "collective leadership" that involves teachers, leaders, teacher leaders and support staff in goal setting, progress monitoring, curriculum review, assessment/data use, and active participation in on-going intensive PL for continuous improvement
- Actively participate in setting clear goals for improvement--working with teachers
- Facilitate key points in the PL activities
- Ensure key resources such as time, scheduling, and appropriate uses of data to set PL goals and monitor PL impact--working with teachers

What can the district do?

- Invest in PL for both school leaders and teachers
- Provide good data and model its use for guiding the development or selection of PL
- Communicate compelling rationale for reforms that clearly link to teacher individual goals for PL

Need help in putting this information into practice?
Email professional_learning@dpsk12.org