

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When teachers implement a new curriculum, they plan and use teaching activities and assessments that align with the new curriculum, and this enables them to gather data about student learning. During this process, teachers also identify additional training they need. In this day of limited budgets, the Curriculum Coordinating Council (CCC) must be creative in identifying financial and time resources for the training. In planning the staff development, there are characteristics of effective professional development that decision-makers should keep in mind. The National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching has summarized characteristics of good professional development as the "Nine Design Principles for Professional Development Programs." Each of the principles is listed below, followed by discussion that puts them in the perspective of a district using a curriculum, instruction, and assessment model (similar to CLI's) for improving student learning.

Principle 1: The content of professional development (PD) should focus on what students are to learn and how to address the different problems students may have in learning the material.

The first principle directs us in professional development content, which is centered on what students are to learn. This principle presumes that the school has a clearly defined curriculum that is aligned vertically and horizontally within the district. Without such a curriculum and a system to maintain the curriculum district-wide, the professional development effort takes on the appearance of a scattergun approach — trying to hit multiple, moving targets. This principle also indicates the need to have implemented the curriculum so that the problems of students in accomplishing the curriculum have been identified by data.

Principle 2: Professional development should be based on analyses of the differences between (a) actual student performance and (b) goals and standards for student learning. Principle 3: Professional development should involve teachers in the identification of what they need to learn and in the development of the learning experiences in which they will be involved.

The second principle requires that schools collect and analyze data of student performance to identify staff development needs. In the past, staff development has too often been planned for "perceived" problems. With the requirement that teachers be more knowledgeable in the collection and use of data and the application of that data to identify student needs, districts make more effective use of professional development resources. The comparison of how students are actually performing on curricular goals and the district's expectations for student performance provides the basis of determining professional development needs. Principle 3 is closely related to this effort in that classroom teachers help: (1) analyze the collected data, (2) identify their needs based on that data, and (3) plan how they can best learn what the needs indicate.

Principle 4: Professional development should be primarily school-based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching.

Principle 4 identifies the need for teachers to practice and reinforce the learned skills within their classrooms. This application of learning enables self-reflection and leads to correcting performance, depending on the success of the strategy. By implementing new strategies with actual students and collecting new data on student performance, teachers improve their own performances and "internalize" their learning. Designing professional development to occur during the school year, as part of the day-to-day work of teaching, demands creativity in the use of time and resources. Frequently used methods include early dismissal, common planning periods, use of "floating" substitute teachers for collaboration opportunities, the use of "experts or specialists" from outside

the district for intensive instruction or coaching activities, or study teams providing critiques of teacher implementation. We know that implementation of a new idea or technique will be more successful if the implementation directly follows instruction. The idea of summer in-service may work well for initial instruction in a new method or strategy, but it must be implemented with support in actual classrooms.

Principle 5: Professional development should be organized around collaborative problem solving.

Collected data is analyzed to determine the degree of student learning and staff development that could help improve results. The staff development part of this analysis occurs when teachers collaborate to determine where problems exist and how they can be solved. Teachers, administrators, and/or the CCC research the possible professional development options related to the problem solutions and then select the best one(s).

Principle 6: Professional development should be continuous and on-going, involving follow-up and support for further learning — including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and new perspectives.

The sixth principle involves the duration of the professional development effort. In the research supporting the nine principles, H.L.B. Hodges concludes from a large-scale training program developed by Bruce Joyce and colleagues (1996) that significant change in educational practice only occurs after a three- to five-year period, and that the need for on-going support is more critical in the first two years of implementing a new strategy or methodology. In the CLI Model, curriculum is addressed in five-year cycles. Since implementation occurs in the second year of the cycle, the identification of staff development needs begins in that year. This leaves at least three years for the implementation of professional development efforts before the curriculum will be revised. Although the public seems always to prefer quick results, professional educators know that true change in student performance is not quick. School improvement is an on-going process that produces gradual growth — both in the implementation of new teaching strategies and in student achievement. In addition to length of time needed for professional development, Principle 6 also stresses the need for on-going support — both internal and external. Internal support occurs during the day-to-day implementation of strategies, as administrators support teachers, and teachers support one another. External support requires periodic use of consultants or specialists who can provide necessary resources and an outside perspective.

Principle 7: Professional development should incorporate evaluation of multiple sources of information on (a) outcomes for students and (b) the instruction and other processes that are involved in implementing the lessons teachers learned through professional development.

The effectiveness of professional development should be measured in terms of student learning. Planning the methods for this evaluation occurs before the process is initiated, and should include multiple perspectives. In the CLI model, the CCC coordinates the staff development effort, and within that function, evaluates its effectiveness. The use of student data and teacher input enables the CCC to objectively determine the success of a particular professional development process within the district. Principle 7 addresses this need for evaluation and points out the importance of multiple sources for data.

Principle 8: Professional development should provide opportunities to gain an understanding of the theory underlying the knowledge and skills being learned.

The eighth principle provides teachers with the opportunity for continued growth. By understanding the theory behind the knowledge and skills being learned, teachers are able to personalize the methods and strategies to fit their own teaching personalities without compromising the effectiveness of the strategy.

Principle 9: Professional development should be connected to a comprehensive change process focused on improving student learning.

Principle 9 addresses the need to have a process in place so that change occurs systematically. This is why districts should implement a school improvement “model.” The CLI Model, for example, provides step-by-step processes that allow the district to make thoughtful and deliberate changes over time. Principle 9 also makes connections between professional development and the improvement of student learning. The focus of all activities within a school should be to improve student learning. By using a group such as the CCC to make all decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment, professional development efforts do focus on student learning, and the success of all professional activities is measured in those terms.