

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

Utilize Your Existing Resources for Cost-Effective Staff Development

Similar to meeting the varying needs of students in the classroom, it can be difficult to meet the staff development needs of all teachers in a school building. Some teachers are more experienced in the area of technology, while others feel quite inadequate. Some teachers have had recent course work in their subject area, while others are searching for new strategies. Why not utilize the strengths currently present in your school to address areas of concern? Have your resident professionals share their expertise with peers in the casual learning environment of their classrooms.

A starting point for this process is to have each teacher designate his or her areas of desired training. If the instructional coach or professional development leader is already aware of some areas of need, then a checklist can be created in advance so the teacher can just quickly complete and return it to the building leader. Areas of professional strengths can be identified in the same manner. Not all teachers feel comfortable about presenting to other adults, so be sure to ask teachers if they would be willing to share their skills with building peers.

Next, narrow the list of topics teachers would like to learn more about to around five or six. Have teachers identify their top priority in that topic list with a one, followed by the second choice with a two, and so forth. This information is returned again to the building leader to determine the top four topics. Those with the fewest votes can be noted for possible future use. The next step is to ask the willing staff to provide twenty-five minute mini-lessons. Some topics, especially technology, may involve a team-teaching atmosphere, so keep that in mind if there is more than one teacher comfortable providing instruction in a high-priority area. Don't overlook possible leaders – newer as well as veteran teachers can provide fresh ideas and share best practices.

Providing the presenters adequate planning time for their mini-lessons is important too. Schools have funds set aside for professional development, so use some of this money for a floating sub to cover classes throughout the day, so each presenter can have an extra planning time. Or, draw on after-school hourly pay to compensate the presenters for their preparation work.

As teachers, we have to remember that giving our students too much information at a time can overwhelm them. When planning the staff development mini-lessons, consider twenty-five minutes to be just enough of a sample to keep educator interest without overload. Half-days of professional development are ideal for this format.

Divide the staff into four groups. Plan a starting and ending time for each session with movement to another room built-in. A sample schedule appears below.

	Room 32 <u>English Language</u> <u>Learners</u>	Room 14 <u>Classroom</u> <u>Management</u>	Room 25 <u>SMART Board</u>	Library <u>Accelerated</u> <u>Reader</u>
1:00-1:25	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
1:30-1:55	Group D	Group A	Group B	Group C
2:00-2:25	Group C	Group D	Group A	Group B
2:30-2:55	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group A

Follow-up is an important piece to this type of staff development. A suggestion is for teachers to share in a grade-level team meeting how some of the new knowledge has been implemented in their classrooms. Another suggestion is for a teacher to observe the presenter using the content, technology, or strategy in action, if that is possible. Also, at the next full staff meeting, teachers who are trying to implement the new ideas should have the opportunity to ask further questions of the presenters.

There are times when it is necessary to bring in the experts, but sometimes the experts are already here. With budget belts becoming tighter, this effective type of professional development can provide collegiality and teacher-directed staff development in a most cost-effective way.