

DISTRICT LEADERS' GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN



INTRODUCTION

Teacher shortages are a significant issue for districts across the country, with many educators citing insufficient professional learning as a top factor in their decision to resign from their position. By developing a comprehensive professional learning plan, district leaders can ensure they are providing high-quality, relevant, and accessible professional learning to their teachers. The following research guide provides recommendations, strategies, and case studies to inform district-wide professional learning plans. There is also a discussion guide at the end of the guide to help leaders develop their own plans.

Recommendations

An effective professional learning plan should:

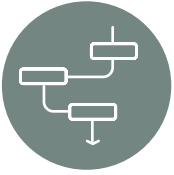
- ▶ Include learning goals, actions to be implemented, a timeline, indicators of success, and an evaluation plan;
- ▶ Ensure professional learning is relevant for teachers by differentiating based on content area, grade level, and career pathway; and
- ▶ Provide professional learning to novice teachers that is focused on classroom management and working with diverse learners.



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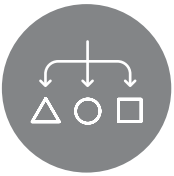
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KEY COMPONENTS



District professional learning plans typically consist of several components.

These components include: learning goals and objectives; related actions and interventions; necessary resources; a timeline for implementation; a person(s) responsible for oversight; indicators and measures of success; and an evaluation plan.



Districts can provide professional learning through multiple delivery methods.

Common delivery methods include blended learning, coaching, mentoring, professional learning communities, online training modules, and in-person sessions. Districts can use a needs assessment to understand teachers' preferences to ensure the delivery methods selected accommodate a range of learning styles.



Districts can use professional learning to strengthen teachers' instructional practice.

For example, professional learning can build teachers' capacity to develop curricula, set learning goals, participate in co-teaching, facilitate project-based learning, and use other research-based instructional practices. For ELA and math, districts typically provide professional learning on curriculum standards, instructional strategies, assessments, and related district programs and initiatives.



Districts can vary topics covered in professional learning to align with teachers' grade levels.

Although the professional learning delivery method is typically the same for all teachers regardless of grade level, the topics addressed often vary. Specifically, teachers should receive professional learning on content and instructional strategies that are relevant to the grade level(s) they teach.



Districts can engage and retain veteran teachers by providing differentiated professional learning opportunities to help them progress in their careers.

These opportunities should not be used to promote personal goals or interests that are unrelated to district or school goals. Districts can provide some flexibility, however, when personal goals also would improve the district or student achievement. For example, Houston Independent School District offers a career pathways program in which teachers can take on more responsibilities and leadership roles while remaining in the classroom.

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLANS

Districts should follow this 7-step process when developing their professional learning plans:

● STEP 1: ANALYZE STUDENT LEARNING NEEDS

- Gather multiple forms of student data

● STEP 2: EXAMINE COMMUNITY, DISTRICT, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT, AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

- Gather data about educators
- Gather data about the learning context
- Analyze the data to identify trends, patterns, and areas of needed improvement
- Identify the features of the learning context that influence student and educator learning
- Identify potential contributors to the current state of learning

● STEP 3: DEVELOP IMPROVEMENT GOALS AND SPECIFIC STUDENT OUTCOMES

- Write SMART goals for student learning

● STEP 4: IDENTIFY EDUCATOR LEARNING NEEDS AND DEVELOP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Develop SMART goals for educators

● STEP 5: STUDY RESEARCH ON SPECIFIC PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS, STRATEGIES, OR INTERVENTIONS

- Review research and evidence on successful professional learning programs or practices
- Identify those relevant to the current goals and objectives

● STEP 6: PLAN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION, INCLUDING ESTABLISHING A LOGIC MODEL FOR SPECIFIC PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

- Develop theory of change with assumptions
- Develop logic model

● STEP 7: IMPLEMENT, EVALUATE, AND SUSTAIN THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

- Enact the plan
- Monitor progress and adjust as needed
- Evaluate progress and results
- Sustain support to achieve deep implementation over time

COMPONENTS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLANS

Throughout the development process, districts should consider the content, process, and context of professional learning.



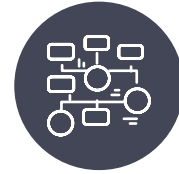
CONTENT

The new knowledge, skills, and understandings that form the basis of professional learning. The content should come directly from a needs assessment that identifies gaps in teacher knowledge that will enhance student learning and achievement.



PROCESS

How professional learning is planned, organized, carried out, followed-up, and evaluated. Ideally, district professional learning plans will contain several elements to guide the development and implementation of professional learning, and they will span anywhere from one to three years.



CONTEXT

The organizational system, or culture, in which professional learning takes place and where the new understandings are to be implemented.

ELEMENTS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLANS

GOALS

Goals specify the desired outcomes of the professional learning. Goals are typically oriented toward student learning.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives define short- and long-term changes that are required to meet the overall goals. Objectives are typically focused on knowledge, attitude, or skill changes in educators.

TIMELINE

The timeline explains when actions will be completed and goals/objectives achieved.

RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S)

The responsible person(s) is the point person or persons who know about the actions and each action's status.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS/INTERVENTIONS

Actions or interventions define what a district or school will do to accomplish the goals/objectives.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Indicators of success describe how the district will know whether the actions have occurred and the goals/objectives have been achieved.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Measures of success identify how the data or evidence will be collected to demonstrate the indicators of success.

EVALUATION PLAN

The evaluation plan measures the success of the professional learning. It uses the indicators and measures of success to guide data collection and determine if the goals/objectives were achieved and if the actions were properly implemented.

RESOURCES NEEDED


Resources may include the staff, technology, funding, materials, and time necessary to accomplish the objectives and goals.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING DELIVERY OPTIONS

District leaders should incorporate different types of professional learning delivery models to meet different needs and preferences. These delivery models include:

- Action research
- Blended learning
- Book study
- College coursework
- Conferences
- Department meetings
- Coaching
- Shadowing
- Mentoring
- Professional learning communities
- Annual trainings
- Summer institutes
- Virtual learning
- Collaborative analysis of student work
- Professional learning sessions
- Case studies
- Classroom visits
- Collaborative curriculum development
- Individual analysis of student work
- Focused conversations
- Journaling
- Online professional learning programs
- Self-reflection
- Study groups
- Workshops

Sources: Coppell ISD, 2017; Clear Creek ISD, 2017; Learning Forward, 2013; and Alberta Education et al., 2005



CASE STUDY:

Salt River Schools (AZ)

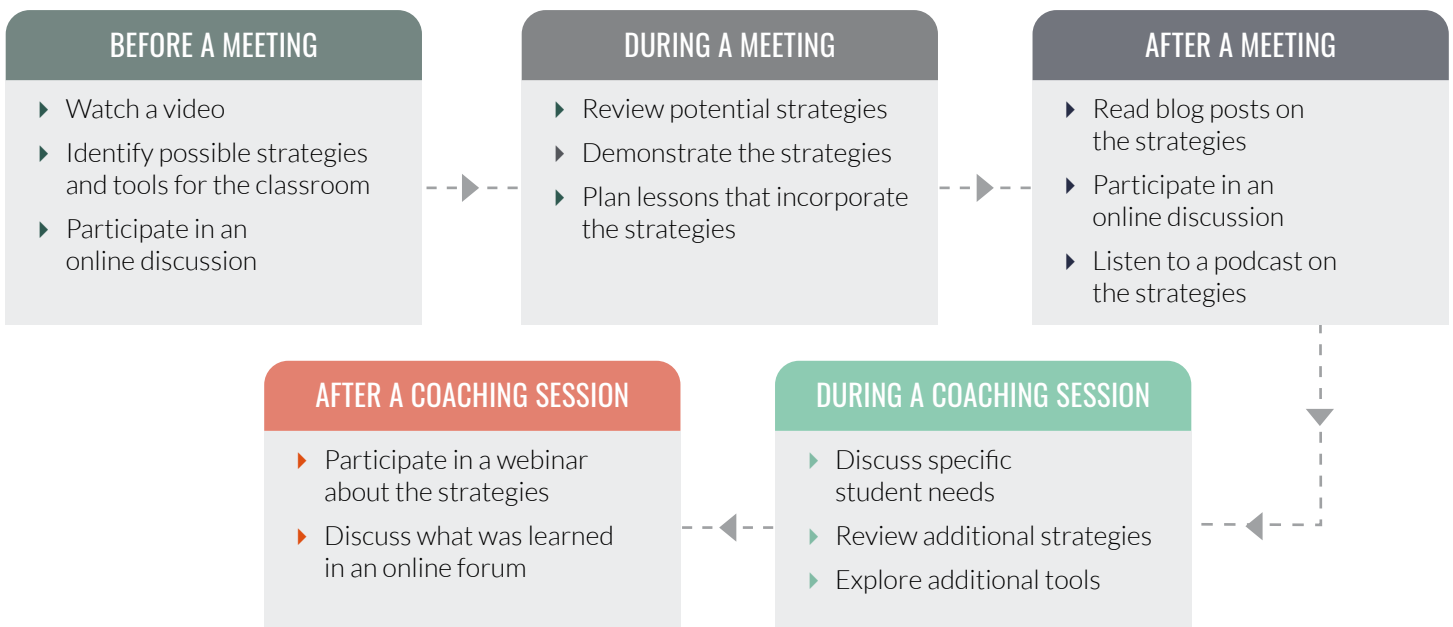
In addition to selecting professional learning delivery methods, districts must also find time in teachers' schedules. Salt River Schools, for example, finds time in various ways, including:

- ▶ Full-day in-services;
- ▶ Early release days;
- ▶ Professional learning community meetings;
- ▶ Before-and after-school;
- ▶ During instructional planning periods; and
- ▶ Saturdays and summer sessions

Source: Salt River Schools, 2017

Blended Professional Learning Process

Blended professional learning, found to be effective for improving the instructional practices of middle school math and science teachers, can be applied to teachers of any subject in any grade level.



Sources: Owston, Sinclair, and Wideman, 2008; Lee, 2014; and Power Up What Works

COMMON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TOPICS

Districts cover a variety of topics in professional learning activities, ranging from classroom instruction to diversity issues. Common topics include:

- **Instructional strategies:** Developing learning goals, co-teaching, facilitating project-based learning, planning lessons, developing curricula, and using other research-based instructional techniques
- **Social-emotional learning:** Substance abuse prevention and positive behavioral interventions and supports
- **Classroom management:** Bullying prevention, responsive classrooms, and conscious discipline

Districts typically do not differentiate between topics covered at the district and school levels in their plans.

Sources: Salt River Schools, 2017; Arlington Public Schools; Connecticut Technical High School System



CASE STUDY:
Arlington Public
Schools (VA)

Arlington Public Schools covers several topics in its professional learning activities, such as inclusion, curriculum, and personalized learning.

INCLUSION

- Co-teaching models
- Understanding English learners
- Assistive technology
- Supporting mental health care

WHOLE CHILD APPROACH

- Bullying prevention
- Social-emotional curriculum
- Substance abuse prevention
- Positive behavioral interventions and supports

PERSONALIZED LEARNING

- Blended learning
- Flipped classrooms
- Project-based learning

CURRICULUM

- Curriculum framework
- Overview of VA Standards of Learning
- Vertical articulation

AUTHENTIC AND ENGAGING LEARNING EXPERIENCES

- Critical, computational, and creative thinking
- Conscious discipline
- Number talks
- Responsive classroom

Sources: Arlington Public Schools

Topics for ELA, Reading, Literacy, and Math

Districts cover a variety of professional learning topics related to various subject areas. Below are some common topics addressed by districts.

DISTRICT	ELA/READING/LITERACY	MATH
Salt River Schools (AZ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group instruction • Text Talks • Managing independent reading • Understanding lexiles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storytelling and literature in math • Effective use of math manipulatives
Connecticut Technical High School System (CT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renaissance STAR and AR programs • Learning centers • Align STAR Curriculum with CCS learning progressions • Strategies to support reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALEKS program • Mastery-based learning • Developing and using common assessments in Algebra • STAR Curriculum
Clear Creek ISD (TX)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum previews, updates, and reviews • When Readers Struggle • Leveled Literacy Intervention training • STAAR Curriculum • Benchmark Writing Score 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum previews, updates, and reviews • Formative assessment in math • STAAR Curriculum
Humble ISD (TX)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundations of Reading • Words Their Way • Expository writing (Grades 3-5) • Spelling/phonics/vocabulary instruction • Foundations of Writing • Essential practices for teaching the writer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundations of elementary math, middle school math, Algebra, Algebra II, or geometry • Elementary math journals • Formative assessment • Understanding elementary math standards

Sources: Salt River Schools, 2017; Connecticut Technical High School System; Clear Creek ISD, 2017; and Humble ISD, 2016

Topics by Grade Level

Although there do not seem to be differences in the methods in which professional learning is delivered to elementary and secondary school teachers, the teachers at these levels should receive professional learning on content that is relevant to the grade levels they teach.



CASE STUDY:
Clear Creek ISD (TX)

Most differences in the professional learning that Clear Creek ISD provides to its teachers at the elementary and secondary school levels are related to each grade level's programming.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

ELA, MATH, AND SOCIAL STUDIES	SCIENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum updates, previews, and reviews • Formative assessment in math • Leveled Literacy training • Social Studies Alive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum review • Formative assessment • STAAR • Science notebooks with inquiry • Technology integration • Discovery Dome training

SECONDARY SCHOOL

ELA	MATH	SOCIAL STUDIES	SCIENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum review and lesson planning • STAAR • Online book review • Benchmark scoring in writing • Leveled Literacy training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum review and lesson planning • Common assessment writing • STAAR • Instructional strategies • Coaching • Curriculum writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course-specific collaboration • STAAR • Reading and writing in social studies • Technology integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum review and lesson planning • Assessments • STAAR • Course-level planning • Data disaggregation • Science Fair • Benchmarking data

Source: Clear Creek ISD, 2017

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR NOVICE AND VETERAN TEACHERS

Guidelines for Effective Professional Learning for All Teachers



BE SUSTAINED AND ONGOING

Professional learning must be ongoing and significant in duration to allow time for teachers to learn a new strategy and grapple with implementation.



PROVIDE TEACHER SUPPORTS

There must be support for a teacher during the implementation stage that addresses the specific challenges of changing classroom practice.



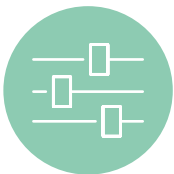
INVOLVE ACTIVE LEARNING

Teachers' initial exposure to a concept should not be passive. Rather, it should engage teachers through varied approaches so they can participate actively in making sense of a new practice.



INCLUDE MODELING

Modeling has been found to be highly effective in helping teachers understand a new practice.



BE CONTENT SPECIFIC

The content presented to teachers should not be generic. Instead, it should be specific to the discipline (for middle school and high school teachers) or grade level (for elementary school teachers).

Source: Center for Public Education

Topics For Novice vs. Veteran Teachers

Novice Teachers

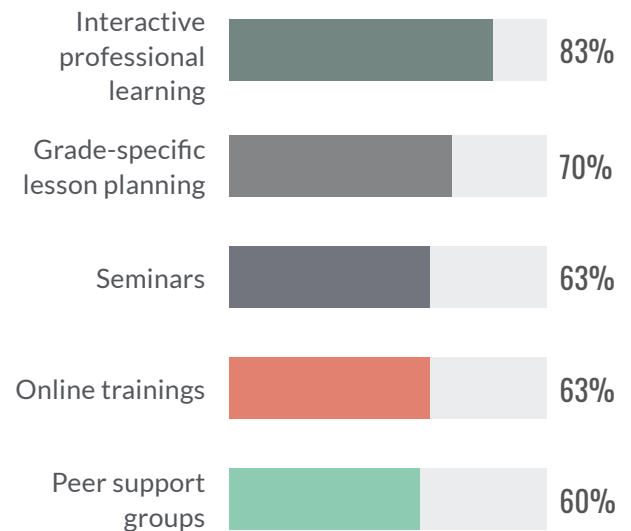
Districts have provided professional learning for novice teachers that focuses on classroom management, instructional strategies, assessments, equity issues, content knowledge, and professionalism.

TOP FIVE CHALLENGES OF NOVICE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS:

1. Working with emotionally-disturbed students
2. Working with students who have psychological disorders
3. Dealing with overactive children (including ADHD)
4. Managing stress
5. Teaching special education students in an inclusive format

Source: Burkman, 2012

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING DELIVERY PREFERENCES OF NOVICE TEACHERS



Source: Burkman 2012

Veteran Teachers

Professional learning can help develop veteran teachers' skills while keeping them engaged in the teaching profession. Examples of offerings for veteran teachers include:

PROVIDING LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Districts should provide opportunities for veteran teachers to take on additional responsibilities and leadership roles. These opportunities can help veteran teachers remain motivated to stay in the classroom rather than seeking leadership positions outside the classroom. Districts can offer these opportunities by providing professional learning for different career pathways.

DIFFERENTIATING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Districts should keep in mind the experience of veteran teachers when planning professional learning to avoid redundant topics. Districts and schools might consider administering needs assessments to veteran teachers to identify those areas. Districts and schools can also observe classrooms to identify areas of need.

CREATING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING TEAMS

Veteran teachers can benefit from collaborative time with other teachers. Collaborative time is also beneficial for novice teachers, who can learn from more experienced teachers.

Source: National Association of Elementary School Principals



CASE STUDY:
Humble ISD (TX)

Humble ISD outlines a three-year plan for novice teachers:

YEAR ONE	
New teacher orientation	Either after school, in the summer, or on Saturdays
40 hours	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom management and the whole child (such as Making Connections 101) • Instructional technology overview • Content-lesson design in the classroom, use of curriculum management system, assessments • Gradebook/grading practices • The whole child (such as understanding poverty) • Courses that support questioning for rigor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom management and the whole child (such as response to intervention) • Instructional technology – mobile, web design • Courses that support writing across the curriculum • Questioning for rigor and special education/504 • Parent conferences and establishing positive relationships with parents • Instructional strategies – district specified • Professional learning communities
YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE
40 hours	40 hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom management and the whole child (such as Making Connections to Opportunity, Freedom, and Self-Respect) • Instructional technology – advanced applications • Differentiation • Sheltered instruction part 1 • Boys in crisis • Formative assessment and instructional strategies – district specified • Content area training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom management and the whole child (such as Making Connections: Building Community in the Classroom) • Technology in the classroom • Content area training • Sheltered instruction part 2 • Continued focus on building relationships with students, parents and community via additional training with Ruby Payne’s group • Instructional strategies – district specified • Content area training

DIFFERENTIATED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR CAREER PATHWAYS

When differentiated to meet teachers' unique needs, professional learning can empower teachers to alter their instructional practices and more effectively support their students. Delivery options for differentiated professional learning are the same as for general professional learning. Differentiated professional learning should not be used to promote individual teachers' personal goals or interests that are unrelated to district or school goals. However, districts can provide some flexibility in professional learning when personal goals also would improve the district or student achievement. For example, a district might provide a particular set of professional learning opportunities for teachers interested in pursuing a career as a literacy coach.

Districts can administer needs assessments before planning and providing any professional learning. Obtaining this information will enable districts to align the professional learning content and delivery methods to best meet their teachers' needs and preferences. Professional learning facilitators should also consider presenting information in multiple formats to accommodate a variety of learning styles. For example, facilitators might follow a lecture-style presentation with a hands-on application of the content. At the end of a professional learning session, facilitators might administer a formative assessment to evaluate what teachers learned during the session.

When differentiating professional learning, districts should consider:

1. **What teachers already know;**
2. **What teachers are interested in learning; and**
3. **The learning styles of individual teachers.**

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Baltimore City Public Schools offers a tiered system of career pathways. Teachers can progress through each tier to gain more responsibilities and leadership roles.

CASE STUDY:

Baltimore City
Public Schools (MD)

STANDARD PATHWAY

- Focus on instruction
- Professional development

PROFESSIONAL PATHWAY

- Focus on classroom success
- Active in school-based roles

MODEL PATHWAY

- Serve as model of excellence
- Play a leadership role
- Create professional development opportunities

LEAD PATHWAY

- Serve as lead academic teacher at a school
- Collaborate with the principal to improve academic performance

Source: Baltimore City Public Schools

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLANS

1. What are your **top two or three instructional goals** for the year, both at the school and district levels?

2. How do our instructional goals translate into **professional learning outcomes for all teachers**, specific teams, and individual teachers?

3. What teacher **professional learning options** are already available to us, both internally and externally?

4. What can we do to make professional learning **practical**?

5. How will we know if our teacher professional learning plan was **successful**?

6. How can we **engage teachers** through the three phases of professional learning: planning, implementation, and evaluation?

7. How can we make sure we have **time** for teacher professional learning?

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OUR SOLUTIONS

- District Operations
- Strategic Planning
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- School Climate
- Student Success
- Teacher Engagement

OUR BENEFITS



EXPERT

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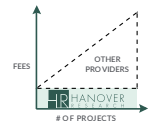
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