



Creating the Context and Employing Best Practices for Teacher Professional Development:

A Brief Review of Recent Research

A review of the research on teacher professional development identified an emerging consensus on important contextual and implementation characteristics that can promote or inhibit teachers' use of new knowledge and skills in their classroom practice. These findings are summarized below.

Findings. Teachers' professional development does not happen in a vacuum and should not be a purely individual pursuit. Research suggests that professional development is best viewed as one component in an overall system that also requires alignment among tests, policy, and curriculum. Further, when curriculum for improving teaching overlaps with curriculum and assessment for students, teaching practice and student learning are more likely to improve. On the other hand, when policies and implementation do not meet these conditions—for example, by introducing new assessments or curriculum without offering teachers adequate opportunities to learn them or by offering professional development that is not well aligned—the chances for success are greatly reduced. Within this context, research has shown that effective professional development tends to have the following elements:

- *Content and content pedagogy focus*—This element includes both deepening teachers' knowledge of the subject matter they are teaching and the pedagogical approaches that have been shown to be successful in helping students learn that subject matter. Effectiveness is improved if the professional development uses the curriculum materials that teachers will later use with their students.
- *Coherence*—This element involves providing professional development experiences in a progression that builds on previous experiences and aligns with school goals and with state standards, curriculum, and assessments. Coherent professional development programs encourage continuing professional communication among teachers, either in their own school or with others in the district who teach similar subject matter or students.
- *Active learning*—Opportunities for active learning can include reviewing student work, practicing a new skill and obtaining feedback, planning how new curriculum materials and new teaching methods will be used in the classroom, and engaging in discussions and in written work.
- *Collective participation*—Professional development that has collective participation of teachers from the same school, department, or grade helps increase opportunities to discuss concepts, skills, and problems that arise when teachers work to integrate what they have learned into their classroom practice. Over time, it can lead to a professional culture in which teachers in a school or teachers who teach the same grade or subject develop a common understanding of instructional goals, methods, problems, and solutions—an understanding that is sustained over time, even when some teachers leave and others join the group.
- *Duration, including time span and contact hours.* Depending on the complexity and difficulty of the knowledge and skills teachers are learning, the number of contact hours may vary, but research suggests that at least 30 hours are needed to impact student achievement. Sustaining the experience over one or more school years is also important, allowing for more opportunity for teachers to try out new practices and benefit from additional feedback and communication with trainers, coaches, or colleagues in professional learning communities in their schools.

For more information, contact author Patricia Cahape Hammer, Office of Research (author@access.k12.wv.us), or download the full review and bibliography from the WVDE Office of Research website at <http://wvde.state.wv.us/research/reports2013.html>.

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