

The following quotes refer to evidence based on research about what works best to support teacher learning that leads to improvements in practice which result in increases in student learning. These principles may be used to guide planning and reflection on professional learning structures and strategies.

“Standards for professional learning enumerate the conditions, processes and content of professional learning to support continuous improvement in leadership, teaching, and student learning. The standards stress that effective professional learning is embedded in a culture committed to continuous improvement and informed by data and research on student and educator performance. The standards emphasize that continuous learning and development are essential for the entire education workforce, community members, and government officials who share responsibility for improving student learning. Further, the standards define requisites of effective professional learning so that every educator can demand and advocate for it as a fundamental driver for education reform. -- Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning*. Oxford, OH.

“The subject matter, how learners master the content, the attitudes that learners bring to the subject, the pedagogy for connecting content to how students learn, and the demographic and social context of schools all affect the range of pedagogical strategies that teachers use.” -- Elmore, R.F. (2002). *Bridging the Gap Between Standards and Achievement: The Imperative for Professional Development in Education*. Washington, D.C.: Albert Shanker Institute.

While we found no set of specific development strategies that would result in widespread teacher improvement on its own, there are still clear next steps school systems can take to more effectively help their teachers. Much of this work involves creating the conditions that foster growth, not finding quick-fix professional development solutions. To do this, we recommend that school systems:

REDEFINE what it means to help teachers improve

- Define “development” clearly, as observable, measurable progress toward an ambitious standard for teaching and student learning.
- Give teachers a clear, deep understanding of their own performance and progress.
- Encourage improvement with meaningful rewards and consequences.

REEVALUATE existing professional learning supports and programs

- Inventory current development efforts.
- Start evaluating the effectiveness of all development activities against the new definition of “development.”
- Explore and test alternative approaches to development.
- Reallocate funding for particular activities based on their impact.

REINVENT how we support effective teaching at scale

- Balance investments in development with investments in recruitment, compensation and smart retention.
- Reconstruct the teacher's job. • Redesign schools to extend the reach of great teachers.
- Reimagine how we train and certify teachers for the job.

--The Mirage: Confronting the Hard Truth About Our Quest for Teacher Development (2015). Retrieved from TNTP website: <http://tntp.org/publications/view/evaluation-and-development/the-mirage-confronting-the-truth-about-our-quest-for-teacher-development>

There are simple, proven, affordable structures that exist right now and could have a dramatic, widespread impact on schools and achievement — in virtually any school. An astonishing level of agreement has emerged on this point. Indeed, Milbrey McLaughlin speaks for a legion of esteemed educators and researchers when she asserts that “the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is building the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community.”

-- Mike Schmoker, "Tipping Point: From Feckless Reform to Substantive Instructional Improvement," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 85, No. 6, February 2004, pp. 424-432.

In the late 1980s, I began to work closely with schools to develop such strategic (sometimes “comprehensive” or “systemic”) plans. Led by sharp, well-intentioned people, the work required days of dialogue involving large swaths of school and community stakeholders. There were procedures for conducting wide-ranging “needs assessments”; for writing lofty-sounding (but ultimately irrelevant) “mission,” “vision,” and “belief statements”; for “reaching consensus,” setting “goals,” and listing “action steps” and “objectives.” We then designated “persons responsible,” “resources needed,” “evaluation,” and “timelines” for the abundance of goals, action steps, and objectives we had set. All of this was then transferred into fat, published plans, replete with columns and boxes for each term and category.

Some of us began to notice that, once under way, the planning juggernaut was hard to control. Invariably, we wound up committing to far more activities and initiatives than anyone could possibly monitor, much less successfully implement. In selecting the professional or staff development activities that filled our plans, novelty and surface appeal overwhelmingly trumped evidence of school success — or any direct connection to improvements in teaching.

Clarity and coherence suffered. These processes were conducted with no clear definitions of key terms. We worked for years before we learned that the right definition of “goals” was central to success: to have any impact on instruction, they had to be simple, measurable statements linked to student assessments — not commitments to offer workshops or implement programs; that coherence required that the number of goals be severely limited.

-- Mike Schmoker, "Tipping Point: From Feckless Reform to Substantive Instructional Improvement," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 85, No. 6, February 2004, pp. 424-432.

“To help young people learn the more complex and analytical skills they need for the 21st century, teachers must learn to teach in ways that develop higher-order thinking and performance. To develop the sophisticated teaching required for this mission, education systems must offer more effective professional learning than has traditionally been available. ... In the last two decades, research has defined a new paradigm for professional development — one that rejects the ineffective “drive-by” workshop model of the past in favor of more powerful opportunities (Stein, Smith, & Silver, 1999). Research has begun to create a consensus about

the content, context, and design of high-quality professional development (Hawley & Valli, 1999).” Darling-Hammond, L. & Richardson, N. (2009, February). Research Review / Teacher Learning: What Matters? *Education Leadership*. 66 (5), 46.

“The most useful professional development emphasizes active teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection rather than abstract discussions (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Professional development that focuses on student learning and helps teachers develop the pedagogical skills to teach specific kinds of content has strong positive effects on practice (Blank, de las Alas, & Smith, 2007; Wenglinsky, 2000).” Darling-Hammond, L. & Richardson, N. (2009, February). Research Review / Teacher Learning: What Matters? *Education Leadership*. 66 (5), 46.

“To avoid disparities between what teachers learn in professional development work and what they can actually implement in their classrooms, schools should seamlessly link curriculum, assessment, standards, and professional learning opportunities.” Darling-Hammond, L. & Richardson, N. (2009, February). Research Review / Teacher Learning: What Matters? *Education Leadership*. 66 (5), 46-53.

“The tolerance for ineffective professional development is rightfully low right now. Teachers themselves find that many of their experiences aren’t meeting their needs, as they indicated in last year’s [Teachers Know Best](#). Teachers and schools are in the spotlight while districts and states across the country implement college- and career-ready standards, new assessments, and revamped educator effectiveness systems. Given these high-stakes demands, the need for deep understanding of effective professional learning is critical.” Hirsch, S. (2015, October 30). *Pushing Professional Learning to New Heights: What Will it Take?* Retrieved January 18, 2016, from <http://gettingsmart.com/2015/10/pushing-professional-learning-to-new-heights-what-will-it-take/>.

“Research on effective professional development also highlights the importance of collaborative and collegial learning environments that help develop communities of practice able to promote school change beyond individual classrooms (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hord, 1997; Knapp, 2003; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Perez et al., 2007).” Darling-Hammond, L. & Richardson, N. (2009, February). Research Review / Teacher Learning: What Matters? *Education Leadership*. 66 (5), 46-53.

“In a review of nine studies, Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley (2007) found that sustained and intensive professional development was related to student achievement. The three studies of professional development lasting 14 or fewer hours showed no effects on student learning, whereas other studies of programs offering more than 14 hours of sustained teacher learning opportunities showed significant positive effects. The largest effects were found for programs offering between 30 and 100 hours spread out over 6–12 months.” Darling-Hammond, L. & Richardson, N. (2009, February). Research Review / Teacher Learning: What Matters? *Education Leadership*. 66 (5), 46-53

“Ensuring student success requires a new kind of teaching, conducted by teachers who understand learning and pedagogy, who can respond to the needs of their students and the

demands of their disciplines, and who can develop strong connections between students' experiences and the goals of the curriculum." -- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009, Spring). State of the Profession. *Journal of Staff Development*, 30 (2), 42.

"Collaborative approaches to professional learning can promote school change that extends beyond individual classrooms.... Research shows that when schools are strategic in creating time and productive working relationships within academic departments or grade levels, across them, or among teachers school-wide, the benefits can include greater consistency in instruction, more willingness to share practices and try new ways of teaching, and more success in solving problems of practice. -- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009, Spring). State of the Profession. *Journal of Staff Development*, 30 (2), 44.

"Effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong working relationships among teachers." -- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009, Spring). State of the Profession. *Journal of Staff Development*, 30 (2), 44.

"Today, as in previous decades, most professional development for teachers comes in the form of occasional workshops, typically lasting less than a day, each one focusing on discrete topics with their connection to the classroom left to teachers' imaginations.... intensive and sustained professional development activities, especially when they include applications of knowledge to teachers' planning and instruction, have a greater chance of influencing teaching practices and, in turn, leading to gains in student learning." -- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009, Spring). State of the Profession. *Journal of Staff Development*, 30 (2), 44.

"Teachers say that their top priorities for further professional development are learning more about the content they teach (23%), classroom management (18%), teaching students with special needs (15%), and using technology in the classroom." -- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009, Spring). State of the Profession. *Journal of Staff Development*, 30 (2), 47.

"When time for professional development is built into teachers' schedules, their learning activities can be ongoing and sustained and can focus on a particular issue or problem over time." -- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009, Spring). State of the Profession. *Journal of Staff Development*, 30 (2), 48.

"In place of professional development dictated by national boards of education, the content of professional learning is determined according to local needs and is often embedded in the work of 'teacher teams' or 'teacher units' at particular schools, which are empowered to make decisions around curriculum and evaluation." -- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009, Spring). State of the Profession. *Journal of Staff Development*, 30 (2), 49.

Learning teams must also know what they need to accomplish. Andrew Tolksdorf, a music teacher in Green Bay, Wisc., explains that success can depend on asking the right questions and follow through: What do we want each student to learn? How will we know when each student has learned it? How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

“You and your colleagues have to know what you’re looking for as you analyze the data together. You have to know what the goals and plans are for the next month. There are a lot of skills involved in making a learning community work,” Tolksdorf explains. “And it takes time to see any results. Like with everything else, the devil is in the details.”

--From “No More ‘Sit and Get’: Rebooting Teacher Professional Development (NEA Today; April 29, 2013)

In a compelling 2011 report from the National Center for Education and the Economy, Marc Tucker makes the case that, in top-performing nations, teachers are prepared with research skills in their preservice training so that they can lead the alignment of professional development with instructional improvement processes (including evaluation). The narratives penned by our teacher colleagues from Shanghai and Singapore inform us as to how they experience the nexus of professional learning and teaching effectiveness. On the other hand, Tucker pointed out: In the United States, teachers are generally the objects of research rather than participants in the research process itself. The topics for professional development are often chosen by administrators in the central office rather than by teachers seeking to improve their own practice on terms of their choosing. Because the topics chosen for professional development are typically not the topics the teachers would have chosen, they often perceive the professional development they get as not particularly helpful. In a March 2014 report from Grattan Institute, Ben Jensen offered cutting-edge information and practical advice on how to find more time for teachers to learn and lead. He also points out clearly the characteristics of intensive professional learning programs found in high-performing education systems across the globe: (1) teacher mentoring and coaching that is intensive and involves regular classroom observation and feedback; (2) lesson and grade groups, in which teachers work together to plan lessons, examine student progress, and discuss alternative approaches; (3) research groups of teachers who identify a research topic (how to introduce a new pedagogy, for example) and analyze the evidence of what works and what doesn’t; (4) teacher appraisal where teachers receive meaningful feedback on how they can improve teaching and student learning; and (5) classroom observation that provides constructive and immediate feedback. But perhaps most importantly, Jensen’s previous report noted that in top-performing locales such as Shanghai and Singapore, teachers are “partners in reform.”

--“A Global Network of Teachers and their Professional Learning Systems” (Center for Teaching Quality Study; May 2014. Retrieved from: http://www.teachingquality.org/sites/default/files/CTQ_Global_TeacherSolutions_Report_Professional_Learning_Systems_07112014.pdf