

THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING—AND DETERMINING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NEEDS

Research, insights from practice, and common sense all indicate that skilled teachers have a significant impact on student learning. Helping teachers develop the knowledge and skills they need begins with rigorous teacher training programs at our colleges and universities. Subsequent to such educator preparation programs, schools and school districts must provide ongoing effective professional learning, support, and mentoring that helps teachers continue enhancing their knowledge and skills throughout their careers.

The design of professional development must be clear in its purpose. If the goal for the selection of a particular professional development approach is improved student achievement, the new knowledge and skills expected of teachers need to be clearly articulated so that they can be transferred and implemented in their classrooms.

High-Quality Professional Development

“High-quality professional development” meets the criteria contained in the definition of professional development in Title IX, Section 9101(34) of ESEA and includes activities that

- *improve teachers’ knowledge of academic subjects and enable teachers to become highly qualified;*
- *are an integral part of school-wide and district-wide educational improvement plans;*
- *give teachers the knowledge and skills to help students meet challenging state academic standards;*
- *improve classroom management skills;*
- *are sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused and are not short-term workshops;*
- *advance teacher understanding of effective instructional strategies that are based on scientifically based research; and*
- *are developed with the extensive participation of teachers, principals, parents, and administrators (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).*

We believe school and district leaders should engage all district staff in creating a long-term as well as an annual professional learning plan. The voices of teachers in any school/district must be sought when planning professional learning events. One way to solicit staff voice is to simply conduct regular (at least annual) professional learning needs assessments. During the needs assessment component, the following questions should be addressed:

- What are the priority needs of the system/school?
- What are the current gaps in student performance?
- What are the current gaps in subgroup performance?
- What patterns stand out (strengths/weaknesses)?
- What are the existing system wide/school wide initiatives?
- What do we need to do differently?
- What should we stop, start, and continue doing?
- What professional knowledge, skills, and strategies will address the priority needs and root causes?
- In what ways and times do educators in our district learn best?

As educators committed to preparing all students for success in college, careers, and life, we recognize that the quality of the educational experiences we provide depends in large measure on the preparation and support of our staff in terms of professional learning. For that reason, we must be focused on the continual improvement of our professional development initiatives.

Teacher surveys are the most common way to identify perceived needs for professional development offerings. In addition, professional development needs should be linked to achievement goals and reflect the priorities of the school district.

SAMPLE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

(Option 1)

Please note: *The following generic professional learning needs assessment is merely a starting point for soliciting stakeholder input regarding what, how, and when educators within a school and/or district need to grow professionally. This sample should be modified considerably to meet the unique needs of the local school or district interested in determining the following:*

- 1. What is it our teachers need to know and be able to do?*
- 2. How will we/they know if they know and are able to do these things?*
- 3. How will we support those teachers who struggle to acquire such knowledge and skills?*
- 4. How will we support teachers who have already mastered the intended professional learning targets?*

Team Communication

We are currently in the process of identifying professional learning opportunities for the upcoming academic year, and developing a long-range professional learning plan based on a comprehensive needs assessment. We are interested in your opinions about how we can best help you achieve your professional learning goals.

DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SURVEY

Teacher Input

The survey should take about ____ (e. g., 10) minutes to complete. Please return your completed survey by _____ (e. g., Submitting the Google Form). The results will be compiled by and shared in aggregate form only. Your individual responses will be seen only by ____ (e.g., Professional Learning Staff) and will not be available to anyone else. Thank you.

DEMOGRAPHICS:

How long have you served as an educator in our district?

- Less than 1 year
- 1–3 years
- 4–7 years
- 8–12 years
- 13–18 years
- 19–24 years
- 25 years or more

At which site do you work?

-
-
-
-
-

What are the best days, months, and times for you to attend professional development events? Please rate each one using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 equals "Least Convenient" and 5 equals "Most Convenient."

<i>Day</i>	<i>Least Convenient</i>				<i>Most Convenient</i>
Monday	1	2	3	4	5
Tuesday	1	2	3	4	5
Wednesday	1	2	3	4	5
Thursday	1	2	3	4	5
Friday	1	2	3	4	5
Saturday	1	2	3	4	5

<i>Month</i>	<i>Least Convenient</i>				<i>Most Convenient</i>
January	1	2	3	4	5
February	1	2	3	4	5
March	1	2	3	4	5
April	1	2	3	4	5
May	1	2	3	4	5
June	1	2	3	4	5
July	1	2	3	4	5
August	1	2	3	4	5
September	1	2	3	4	5
October	1	2	3	4	5
November	1	2	3	4	5
December	1	2	3	4	5

Time	Least Convenient			Most Convenient	
	1	2	3	4	5
Early morning, 2 hours	1	2	3	4	5
Late morning, 2 hours	1	2	3	4	5
Half day, morning	1	2	3	4	5
Lunch hour	1	2	3	4	5
Early afternoon, 2 hours	1	2	3	4	5
Late afternoon, 2 hours	1	2	3	4	5
Half day, afternoon	1	2	3	4	5
Evening sessions	1	2	3	4	5
Full day	1	2	3	4	5
Multi-day retreats/seminars	1	2	3	4	5
Other (Specify):	1	2	3	4	5

What obstacles are there to your participation in professional learning opportunities? (Please check all that apply)

- None
- Parking
- Inconvenient times
- No interest in topics
- Too busy
- Travel problems
- No office coverage
- Not informed about availability
- Transportation
- No support/encouragement to attend
- Other (specify): _____

Approximately how many professional learning events per year would you be interested in attending?

In general, how interested are you in each of the following presentation formats?

<i>Presentation Formats</i>	<i>Strong Interest</i>	<i>Some Interest</i>	<i>Little or No Interest</i>
Demonstration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hands—on workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lecture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discussion or group dialogue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Webinar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keynote address followed by related break-out sessions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teleconference/video	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Site-Based Visits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Twitter Chats	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
EdCamps	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Instructional Rounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (<i>Specify</i>):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<i>Current Status</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Currently, I feel well-informed about professional learning opportunities at . . .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My work schedule hinders participation in professional development workshops.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am satisfied with my current professional learning opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like opportunities to create my own professional learning opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<i>Professional Learning Topics</i>	<i>Strong Interest</i>	<i>Some Interest</i>	<i>Little or No Interest</i>
Literacy			
Common Core			
Classroom Management			
Social Media in the Classroom			
Developing Personal Learning Networks			
Assessment Practices			
Standards-Based Grading			
Maker Spaces			
Google Apps for Education			
The 4 Cs Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Critical Thinking			
Mystery Skypes			
Genius Hour			
The Flipped Classroom			
Social Emotional Learning			
Other (Specify):			

What other workshops or professional learning events, topics, formats not listed above would you be interested in attending?

Would you be willing to lead professional learning opportunities next school year? If yes, please describe your areas of interest. If no, leave blank.

IN-DEPTH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SELF-ASSESSMENT

(Option 2—Future Ready Self-Assessment)

Future Ready is a free, bold new effort to maximize digital learning opportunities and help school districts move quickly toward preparing students for success in college, a career, and citizenship, run by the Alliance for Excellent Education and US Department of Education. The effort provides districts with resources and support to ensure that local technology and digital learning plans align with instructional best practices, are implemented by highly trained teachers, and lead to personalized learning experiences for all students, particularly those from traditionally under-served communities.

As part of the Future Ready effort, the Alliance has offered a comprehensive digital learning self-assessment, complete with scores, gap analysis, strategies, and customized resources. Professional learning is one area embedded inside the in-depth self-assessment and once complete, scores, strategies, and resources are available in this area.

Inside the Future Ready dashboard, a deep dive professional learning assessment is also available. Each of these assessments is free and can be found at dashboard.futurereadyschools.org.