In the early 1990s, a number of Australian states shifted responsibility for staff development from the state and district level to individual local elementary and secondary schools.

The change moved the focus for staff development programs to the school site, where the collective ownership and control of professional learning were in the hands of those the activities affected. Schools and teachers had control over a significant proportion of their own funds, allowing them to use staff time flexibly, to pay for outside experts or specialists, to mount staff and community development courses, and to plan coher-
ently. Most importantly, staff development occurred within the context of teachers’ work.

Research into the trials, tribulations, and successes of this move offers vital information as to what constitutes best practice in providing school-based staff development programs. Our study conducted in 1994 across three Australian states (New South Wales, Queensland, and Tasmania) involved 1,446 teachers and 322 staff development coordinators from 340 secondary schools. Staff members were questioned about the extent to which they viewed staff development as an integral part of their professional lives, as well as on the organizational structures and management practices used to implement school-based staff development. They also were asked which structures they saw as most effective. The teachers were of different genders, ages, from various sized schools and faculty areas, and had taught in their school throughout the previous year.

DELIVERING

Providing school-based staff development programs is a complex undertaking involving design, implementation, and coordination.

Our research in Australian schools showed the school-based staff development model was most successful in schools that paid attention to:

- Establishing organizational or support structures;
- Creating school-based staff development plans;
- Selecting their own staff development content;
- Delivering staff development content;
- Allocating financial and material resources; and
- Evaluating each step.

When setting up a site-based staff development model, the Australian experience can offer key lessons.

PROCESS ONE:
Establishing organizational or support structures.

The move to a school-based staff development model entails more responsibilities for school personnel. Staff must take charge of planning and developing policy, deploying resources, analyzing needs, providing staff development activities, and short- and long-term evaluation of the program’s outcomes. To carry out such functions, the school must have appropriate supports in place.

The Australian experience suggests the best strategy to develop a successful program is to create a staff development group or committee and appoint a coordinator who also is part of the team. Most secondary schools formed a staff development committee and appointed a staff development coordinator to manage school-based staff development.

A committee is able to complement existing school decision-making structures and individual leaders, including the school principal and individual faculties. The committee may comprise teachers, school administrators (the principal, deputy principal, heads of faculties), support staff, parents, community members, and students. Alternatively, membership can be based on criteria such as age, seniority, gender, area of teachers’ specialization, or relevance, expertise, jurisdiction, and influence within the school (Owens, 1984, as cited in Loucks-Horsley et al., 1987).

School administrators charged with establishing the organizational structures must carefully select and discuss the criteria for committee membership. They also consider whether committee members should be appointed, elected, or volunteer. While Australian teachers did not identify one structure as more effective, most committee members were volunteers. Using volunteers allows those who are most interested to be involved, but also may allow those with specific motives to influence policy decisions. Appointing committee members may mean that people with the relevant experience and qualifications make the decisions, but not allowing teachers the opportunity to have a role in planning and implementing activities that affect their professional lives. Electing committee members demonstrates to teachers that staff development is valued within the school and essential to the school improvement process.

The committee’s major role is to establish policies to develop the school-based program and to generate policies related to management tasks, such as resource allocation, priorities for training and development, the approval process, and how the staff development program will be evaluated.

The complexity of the work virtually requires that each site appoint a staff development coordinator. Evidence from both Australia (Rowland, 1999; Department of Employment, Education, and
Training, 1991) and Britain (Galloway, 1993) suggests the coordinator should be a member of the school administration as well as an experienced teacher, but should not be the school principal.

The staff development committee should have a clear role statement that delineates between policy decision making and administrative or clerical functions for both the school staff development committee and the staff development coordinator.

**PROCESS TWO:**

Creating school-based staff development plans.

Administrators, academics, and teachers in Australia (Rowland, 1999; Crowther & Gafney, 1993; Louden, 1994) and internationally (NSDC, 1995) see professional development as having a central role in improving schools. Carefully planning professional learning signals to teachers that staff development is important in the school’s professional life. Thoughtful planning enables schools to better meet the needs of teachers, schools, and the system; to clearly define the desired outcomes of the staff development program; to coordinate existing activities with new initiatives; and to access available resources. The most successful staff development plans clearly define the program’s goals, processes, and desired outcomes.

The Australian experience suggests staff development plans should be linked to the school improvement (or management) plan in either of two ways: Staff development may be identified as a separate focus within the school improvement plan, along with areas such as curriculum, teaching practice, student welfare, community involvement, communication, and administration of resources; or staff development may be linked to each of the focus areas just mentioned, with staff development planning tied to changes in curriculum, teaching practice, student welfare, community involvement, communication, and administration of resources.

In either case, a school-based staff development plan should address the rationale for the program, state its broad aims, define long-term delivery strategies, describe performance criteria, and describe how resources are to be allocated.

Which comes first, the committee or the plan? The Australian experience suggests that the committee be established first, and the committee then should set the planning agenda and establish focus areas.

**PROCESS THREE:**

Selecting staff development content.

Schools always have a plethora of needs and a scarcity of resources, so it’s no surprise that Australian secondary school teachers and staff development coordinators said selecting content was the most contentious part of the process. Staff development programs should address various levels of need within the school (Laws & Eltis, 1994; New South Wales Department of School Education, 1994).

Teachers in the study said students’ needs were best served when the staff development program’s content was based on a balance of system, school, and teacher priorities. Of course, this is easier said than done.

In the study, teachers said adamantly that prioritizing staff development needs cannot be based on a single source of information. Staff development coordinators used written surveys, group forums, self-evaluation questionnaires, appraisal interviews between supervisors and teachers, and classroom observations to hear from teachers and school leadership, as well as parents, community members, and students.

**PROCESS FOUR:**

Delivering staff development content.

Schools responsible for their own professional development must understand that teachers learn in many different ways.

Teachers said they especially valued opportunities to share expertise with colleagues in highly collaborative, ongoing programs. Teachers shared ideas in groups established to model exemplary practices around common issues or across the curriculum and in professional areas such as student welfare, literacy, technology, assessment, and beginning teaching.

**Key idea:**

Use many sources of information to determine the needs of different levels — the system, school, and teachers — and identify areas where there is the greatest overlap.

**Key idea:**

Eliminate traditional one-day, whole-staff events, and provide opportunities for individual and collaborative activities through structured or unstructured environments.

The teachers most preferred using ongoing faculty meetings or continuing workshops that in some cases required having substitute teachers so all staff were able to participate. A number of states used mandated stu-
dent-free professional learning days, usually four per year for sustained time to either initiate or continue staff development activities.

Teachers also valued having colleagues either from within their own school or from other schools share their expertise and lead or facilitate staff development activities rather than having outside experts deliver staff development programs. The implication for district personnel and schools is that teachers need additional support and training in their growing role as staff developers.

**PROCESS FIVE:**

*Allocating financial and material resources.*

A major feature of moving to a school-based model for staff development is shifting responsibility for financial management from the central office to the school site. In the early 1990s, most of Australia’s state education departments gave schools increased control over a range of management functions, generally including financial responsibility for staff development. The funding formula varied between states, but the change meant school staff development committees had to decide on criteria for allocating funds to individual teachers or groups within the school, how best to distribute the money within the school, and which items to fund.

Funding issues can create considerable conflict within the school community, fracturing the spirit of cooperation and collaboration necessary for effective site-based staff development.

The Australian schools minimized conflicts using a range of strategies. The school staff development committee should have clear criteria for deciding which activities to fund, including whether the activity aligns with goals and priorities outlined in the school improvement plan. The committee should set the staff development budget and keep the money in a central pool, rather than allocating the funds to individual groups or departments. Teachers also applied for individual funding for personal growth opportunities. It was important that decisions were not made on a first come, first served basis or personal preference, but based on open criteria.

Most Australian schools provided funds for released time for teachers and grants to cover conference registration fees, travel, and accommodations. Schools rarely provided support for clerical and technical assistance or scholarships or fees for teachers working on advanced degrees.

**PROCESS SIX:**

*Evaluating each step.*

System-level administrators and teachers often expect an evaluation to include simply inputs and outputs — participation levels and expenditures. However, the most successfully managed Australian schools gathered data about student learning goals and the degree to which student achievement improved after staff development activities. They allowed teachers to report on the results of their professional development activities through various means, such as written and oral reports, questionnaires and journals. The variety of reporting mechanisms helped develop a more accurate assessment of whether staff development goals had been met.

In these schools, a specific person or group in the school was responsible for the evaluation, usually the staff development committee.

In addition, by linking the evaluation to the school improvement plan and student outcomes, staff gained a tool to guide future school planning. Given schools’ limited funding for staff development, teachers must understand how to evaluate the impact of staff development activities on their own and students’ learning.

**CONCLUSION**

Changing to a school-based framework to provide staff development programs is no easy task. The Australian experience has shown school-level staff must commit considerable time and energy to preparing for change, implementing various management processes, and evaluating their effectiveness.

While the school should have the authority to make final decisions about change and specific improvements, the school and district’s expectations must be aligned. System-level administrators, staff developers, and the school leadership team must coordinate support and guidance to ensure the school-based staff development program effectively promotes teacher learning and student achievement.

**REFERENCES**


Department of Employment,


