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## School's out. It's time to learn!

By Karel Holloway

Summer is the natural time for staff members to engage in high-quality professional development – a chance to learn about new curriculum or new instructional strategies. Summer gives teachers time to reflect on the learning without the immediate pressure of their classroom responsibilities.

But making summer learning a valuable use of time and money requires thoughtful planning and careful follow-through. Many districts have traditionally offered half-day or day-long workshops focused on topics that teachers were allowed to self-select. But, increasingly, districts are presenting week-long institutes devoted to district improvement goals in areas such as literacy, differentiation, mathematics, and more. For such ambitious and focused learning efforts, serious planning should begin as soon as one summer's sessions end.

"It's like a Broadway play. It's a lot of little details," said Jackie Simons, director of instruction for Mountain Brook Schools, near Birmingham, Ala. The district's professional development program won a U.S. Department of Education Model Professional Development Award in 2000. "You have to have a vision. You have to know what quality learning is for the 21st century. Then you have to model that so the teachers can go back and teach it."

Careful  
planning and  
follow-through  
make summer  
professional  
learning  
programs shine

### Step One: Choose your planning team.

Like a Broadway play, good summer learning requires a group effort, with each member contributing a different talent.

Who serves on the planning team depends on the type of planning being done. For school-level summer programs, the planning committee ought to include teachers and building administrators plus the appropriate specialists from central office. Plan-

ning for districtwide programs might be done primarily by the district's director of staff development but still should include members of the target audience. For example, if the institute is focused on improving the communication skills of principals, then some principals ought to be included in the planning. If it's a workshop on introducing Algebra I into the middle school, then middle school math teachers should be involved in the planning.

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# School's out. It's time to learn!

*Continued from Page One*

## **Step Two: Look at the data.**

Like all high-quality staff development, summer institutes need to rest on a solid foundation of student data. Even if a district or school has targeted a particular topic, members of the planning team still should scrutinize student data to pinpoint the areas of focus for the summer learning. For example, a district has identified a need to improve the math skills of its 5th graders. A careful analysis of test data shows that these students have appropriate arithmetic skills but they have difficulty with more complex problems. Hispanic students are having a hard time with English vocabulary, which makes interpreting written problems more difficult. Staff development can then be directed not to teaching general ways to improve reading instruction, but specific methods for helping struggling Hispanic students in mathematics.

## **Step Three: Set goals.**

Be specific and be courageous. Use your data to set specific measurable goals for summer professional learning. A vague goal would sound something like this: All participating teachers will learn new methods of teaching higher-order thinking skills. Instead, write a goal like this: All participating teachers will assign and receive student projects that demonstrate use of higher-order thinking skills during the first semester following the workshop.

The more specific goal gives both participants and facilitators a way to evaluate what has been successful. They can hone and repeat what works the next summer and discard the less effective practices.

## **Step Four: Decide how to achieve those goals.**

Once goals have been identified, the committee plans how they will be achieved. *What skills do teachers need to learn in order to achieve that goal? Which specialists or teachers already in the district can be the instructors for this? If we*

*don't have the expertise in the district, are there established programs through regional educational service agencies or nearby universities that can be used?*

If a ready-made program fits the needs, offering that can be more efficient than planning a new program of your own. However, in making this choice, consider that time spent by your own staff to develop a program focused on your staff's needs will have long-term payoffs.

## **Step Five: Money and location.**

After data has been gathered, goals set, and broad plans made, the planning gets to the nitty-gritty. *Where will the sessions be held? When and for how long? Will there be a charge and, if so, who will pay it?*

If a district is running the sessions, they are most often held in schools. The buildings are convenient and empty, but they may not be the best atmosphere. Because the meetings are close to home, there may be interruptions and participants may be tempted to come late and leave early. Building a sense of community also becomes more difficult.

Whenever the learning is extended over several days, finding an alternate location can provide many benefits.

"It's much more than the official sessions," said Gail Hirst of the Cattaraugus-Allegany Board of Cooperative Education Services in New York. "We have people running together at six in the morning. They are eating together. They are swimming together. Every night we have a social."

Hirst runs a week-long Curriculum Camp at a private retreat center. Classes are from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., but a lot of the learning comes from the intense idea-sharing. It becomes collaborative because people stay up all night talking about kids, she said.

That kind of program can be expensive – Curriculum Camp is \$1,080 per teacher. But districts find it useful enough to pay for teachers' participation. In New York, the state reimburses the districts for most of the cost.

Less expensive off-site options in-

clude universities that often can provide room and meals for a retreat for a reasonable cost. Some bed and breakfasts provide ideal places for small groups to meet for a couple of days.

Most schools and districts find that if they offer high-quality programs, teachers are eager to come. Paying stipends helps, but it isn't always necessary.

"We pay \$50 a day," said Pam Smith, executive director of community and organization development for the Richardson Independent School District near Dallas. "Hopefully, that will cover a babysitter and buy lunch."

## **Step Six: Plan follow-up.**

Planning for follow-up after a summer offering should be done before the program even begins. *Did they take the lessons back to classroom? Did they change something that made their teaching more effective? After some practice with a new idea, what more do they need to learn in order to further improve their work in this area?*

"This is the hardest part for us," Smith said. Often follow-up is as simple as asking a teaching in the hall "How is that new program working? Has it helped students?"

The Dade County, Fla., schools has an annual two-week Writing Institute that includes a variety of follow-up for graduates. Participants meet twice during the year for a breakfast refresher "course" and the district plans half-day and day-long follow-up workshops during each school year. In addition, the district's 50 language arts specialists — all alumni of the Writing Institute — coach writing graduates as they put their newly learned ideas into practice. Each summer, Dade County offers an Advanced Writing Institute for graduates who want to deepen their knowledge.

"I really believe that training without follow-up won't work," Smith said. "If you don't provide some follow-up, the implementation will never occur."

# Before the Planning

**Pre-planning how you will devise your summer professional learning plan is essential. Here are some questions to consider as you begin.**

## **Personnel: Who will participate?**

Determine which groups must be represented on the planning team. Planning teams should include about 6-10 persons.

## **Schedule: How long do we have?**

Serious long-range planning takes three months or more. If you have less time, scale back what you hope to accomplish. Then begin the longer-range planning for next year.

## **Incentives: What can we offer?**

Why would anyone want to serve on the planning committee? The biggest incentive is the opportunity to influence programs that help students. But stipends, released time, recognition, site visits to model programs, meals, media coverage, and occasional prizes can help.

## **Measurement criteria: How will we measure success?**

Before setting training objectives, learn the expectations of key leaders such as the superintendent and school board members.

## **Facilitation: Who will lead the process?**

Will you use an external facilitator? Does someone in the district have the necessary skill and knowledge? Using an outside facilitator need not be expensive. Lead teachers or trainers from other nearby districts may be able to serve.

## **Budget: Do you have funds to support the plan?**

There are really two questions here. Do you have funds to support the planning process — facilitator, retreat, substitutes, long-distance phone calls? Do you have funds to implement the completed plan? If funds will have to be redirected, clarify that early in the process.

## **Retreat: Do you have funds for a retreat setting?**

What other low-cost options exist for providing a suitable, non-school location for professional learning?

## **Approval: Who can veto the plan?**

It's critical that those who participate in planning know who holds the final power.

## **Commitment: Who will ensure the success of the process?**

Identify and cultivate key cheerleaders. Long-range planning cannot rely on the commitment and energy of one individual.

## **Trust: Do we have an organizational context that supports the process?**

Does team members trust each other? Do people within the system have confidence in the process? If not, time must be given to building that trust. Open forums can be used to develop awareness of learning goals and enable all the stakeholders to ask questions and air concerns.

## **Knowledge: Do planning team members have the necessary knowledge to develop a quality plan?**

They must have a working knowledge of the key concepts of change and staff development.

**Source:** "Staff developers as planning facilitators," by Stephanie Hirsh, *Journal of Staff Development*, Spring 1993 (Vol. 14, No 2).

# Process Planner

**Purpose:** This tool will help you define how you will make specific content and activity decisions to achieve your professional learning goal.

**Directions:** Fill in the name of the person completing the tool and the date of the final version. For each organizational level listed, answer each of the questions. When you are finished, review your answers to ensure that decisions at all levels make sense together. Do these decisions fit with how you make other decisions in your school or district? If not, consider other changes that may be needed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Professional learning goal \_\_\_\_\_

Organization level	Who identifies potential content and activities for professional learning? How?	Who else has input into content and activities? How do they provide that input?	Who researches activity costs and benefits?	Who makes final decisions about professional learning activities? How?
<b>Example:</b> Schoolwide PD activities	<i>School leadership team for instruction, leadership, and technology (all academic content chosen at team level). By examining data about student achievement.</i>	<i>Other staff via annual survey and review at staff meetings</i>	<i>Leadership team members (including instructional leaders) accountable for research but may ask other staff for help</i>	<i>Principal, in consultation with leadership team</i>
<b>District</b>				
<b>School</b>				
<b>Team</b>				
<b>Individual</b>				

**Source:** *Professional Development: Learning from the Best* by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, an online professional development toolkit available for free downloading at [www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm).

# Content and Activity Planner

Fill in the name of person completing the tool and the date of the final version. Indicate the organization level and the professional learning goal you are addressing.

On a separate sheet, generate ideas for topics that support the goal. For each topic, brainstorm and research potential activities. For activity, describe the content and process, time required and deadlines, resources, and expected impact.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Level (*check one*)       District     School     Team

Professional learning goal \_\_\_\_\_

Topic	Potential Activity (content and process)	Time: a. Deadlines b. Staff time	Required Resources (funding, expertise, facilities)	Impact on Goal (high, medium, or low)
<b>Example:</b> <i>Enhancing the reading experience for gifted students</i>	<i>Training for reading team in implementing individual reading programs for gifted students using ABC method. Monthly review of achievement of gifted students using ABC method.</i>	<i>a. Initial training = 4 hours (voluntary) b. Initial = 3 hours Ongoing = 30 minutes/month</i>	<i>Materials for training: \$400. Can train and do ongoing work in weekly team time blocks so no substitutes needed; no special expertise or facilities needed.</i>	<i>Expect will maintain "steep" individualized learning curve for gifted readers; help catch problems early; high impact, low cost.</i>

**Source:** *Professional Development: Learning from the Best* by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, an online professional development toolkit available for free downloading at [www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm).

# Taking Ideas Home

Ensure that summer workshop participants know that the district expects them to take summer learning “home” with them into their classrooms during the next school year.

This activity often catches participants off guard and encourages them to think about what they will need to do to transfer what they have learned during a summer workshop or institute into their classrooms.

**Time:** 20 minutes.

**Supplies:** Paper/index cards, pencils, flip chart, and markers.

## Directions

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1. Distribute sheets of paper or index cards to each participant.
2. Write this question on a flip chart and reveal it as you ask participants to answer the question:
  - *What can I do to ensure that I will not change the way I work because of what I learned in this workshop?*
3. Suggest that participants consider these questions as they respond:
  - *What can you think about to prevent/discourage yourself from using new ideas?*
  - *How can you interact with other teachers or with your principal to ensure that you won't try anything new?*
  - *What can you do with your workshop materials to ensure that you won't use them or refer to them again?*
4. Invite participants to share their answers with the rest of the group.
5. Record 10 to 12 of their suggestions on a flip chart.
6. Ask participants to suggest ways to turn those negative responses into positive ones. Record those suggestions on the flip chart as well.
7. Encourage more discussion about how they can take their ideas home. A good reference for this is the April/May 1999 issue of *Tools for Schools*.

**Source:** “After the workshop,” *Tools for Schools*, December/January 2000.

# Resources

*for planning summer learning*

## Achieving Your Vision of Professional Development: How to Assess Your Needs and Get What You Want

David Collins. SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE), 1997.

Offers many tips for building an effective professional development system. The guide includes tips for developing a vision, creating a context for change, planning, investing resources, providing continual assistance, and assessing and monitoring progress. Available in pdf format at [www.serve.org/publications/list.htm](http://www.serve.org/publications/list.htm). Hard copies available by calling SERVE Publications Specialist at (800) 352-6001 or fax (850) 671-6085. Complimentary.

## Designing Powerful Professional Development for Teachers and Principals

Dennis Sparks. NSDC, 2002.

Lays out the case for strong professional development and then demonstrates how it can be implemented. Available online for free downloading at [www.nsd.org/sparksbook.html](http://www.nsd.org/sparksbook.html). Hard copies can be ordered through the NSDC Online Bookstore, <http://store.nsd.org>. Item B206. Price \$30, non-members; \$24, members.



## Designing Successful Professional Meetings and Conferences in Education

Susan Mundry, Edward Britton, Senta Raizen, and Susan Loucks-Horsley. Corwin Press, 2000.

Offers concrete strategies, tips, and suggestions for designing, conducting, and evaluating meetings and conferences that consistently earn high ratings. Designed for novice and veteran event planners. Item B113. Available through the NSDC Online Bookstore, <http://store.nsd.org>. Price \$27.50, non-members; \$22.50, members.



## “Learning by Doing”

Joan Richardson. *Results*, November 2000.

Describes in-depth curriculum-focused summer institutes in writing run by the Dade County, Fla., schools. Available online at [www.nsd.org/library/results/11-00rich.html](http://www.nsd.org/library/results/11-00rich.html).

## “Making Workshops Work for You”

Joan Richardson. *Tools for Schools*, April/May 1999.

Aids workshop participants in understanding their responsibility for their own learning. Provides tools that individuals can use to ensure their time in workshops is well spent. Available online at [www.nsd.org/library/tools/4-99rich.html](http://www.nsd.org/library/tools/4-99rich.html).

## Professional Development: Learning From the Best

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL). [www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm)

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory’s web site contains a complete toolkit for designing staff development. Includes a detailed section on assessing student needs and using that information to plan teacher training. Includes a kit of PowerPoint slides to aid in presentations.

## “Staff Developers as Planning Facilitators”

Stephanie Hirsh. *Journal of Staff Development*, Spring 1993 (Vol. 14, No 2).

A guide to planning staff development. Lists the many questions that should be asked as planning occurs. Available online at [www.nsd.org/library/jsd/hirsh142.html](http://www.nsd.org/library/jsd/hirsh142.html).

## Tools For Schools

### ISSN 0276-928X

*Tools For Schools* is published five times a year (August, October, December, February and April) by the National Staff Development Council, P.O. Box 240, Oxford, OH 45056, for \$49 of standard and comprehensive membership fees. Periodicals postage paid at Wheelersburg, OH 45694.

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# Use workshops to model technology use

## Ask Dr. Developer



**Dr. Developer has all the answers to questions that staff developers ask.**

**(At least he thinks he does!)**

**Q** *Our district is really emphasizing technology use but teachers are tired of spending their summers learning to use new programs. They say they would rather work on improving their teaching skills than learning to use new hardware or software. Is there a way to incorporate technology use in other training sessions?*

**A** While most teachers are familiar with computers and many use them in the classroom, they aren't always comfortable using them as part of a lesson. Summer workshops can model good classroom technology use by making it part of the lesson, not the point of the lesson.

For example, a conference on teaching writing skills can include ways to encourage students to write on their own. There's the usual write-to-Grandma suggestion, but ways to find and use online pen pals can be included. One part of a conference for social studies teachers might include a hands-on lesson

in setting up an online conference with students in another country. Or science teachers could share how they used a Jason Project video conference to teach required curriculum elements. To help teachers see how students actually use their computers, students can demonstrate a class project or present some computer-based hobby. Students run amazing web sites or produce incredible animation. Teachers

could then brainstorm ways to use those student skills in teaching particular lessons.

Follow-up for such demonstrations is key. Once teachers become interested in a particular project, they must be provided with the help they need. A teacher who wants to conference with a school in London needs immediate support in setting that up.

At the least, hand-outs listing relevant web sites or suggestions for online collaboratives, such as ones run by NASA, can be provided. These sheets need to include the names and numbers of other teachers or staff members who can help them use the material.

This is the final *Tools For Schools* for the 2002-03 school year. We hope the topics we've chosen to write about this year have proven helpful to you in your work.

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