



Joellen Killion is deputy executive director of National Staff Development Council.

# Not a cost but investment

**T**he Resources standard challenges most schools and districts because it calls for both the fiscal and human resources necessary to support effective professional learning. This standard sets a high bar for ensuring that all educators have access to the resources that allows effective professional learning. However, practice lags significantly behind this standard.

## Expense or investment

In many schools and districts, professional development continues to be viewed as an expense rather than an investment. Professional development, viewed as an expense, typically comes with a price tag that includes substitutes, registration fees, and consultant honoraria and travel. However, the cost of the professional development experience viewed as an expense increases exponentially when we consider the potentially negative impact on student learning that occurs when teachers are pulled out of their classrooms and students lose instructional time. This expense increases yet again when those who participate in “professional development as an expense” described here have neither the expectation nor the support to implement what they learned during their time away. When viewed through this lens of “professional development as an expense,” it is easy to understand why budgets for professional development continue to diminish.

Another view is possible. Professional development is an investment in human capital. Research is now catching up with what has been known for many years, but not practiced. A significant factor influencing student learning is the quality of teaching experience. One way to improve the quality of teaching is through ongoing professional learning in which teachers learn

together, examine their practice and its results, and refine both their content knowledge and pedagogy. Research emerging in the last few years demonstrates that effective professional development is positively associated with student learning. The simplest explanation is this: What teachers know and do impacts what students know and do.



## RESOURCES

Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration.

When schools and districts begin to recognize that effective professional learning is an investment not only in building capacity of staff, but also in improving student achievement, allocating fiscal and human resources to this crucial function will be easier.

## School-based staff developers as a resource

In schools and districts that invest in professional learning, that investment takes many different forms. One indicator of an investment rather than an expense orientation to professional development is a daily or weekly schedule that facilitates teacher collaborative learning, data analysis, and instructional planning. These schools or districts recognize that trading time for teacher learning for student learning time minimizes the potential for impact of professional learning.

Schools and districts that consider professional learning an investment rather than an expense typically are ones in which school-based staff developers work. These teacher leaders work side by side with teachers in both teams and their individual classrooms helping them

For more information about NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, see [www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm)

deepen their content knowledge, expand their pedagogical repertoire to include strategies for meeting the needs of all students, engage them in reflection on their practice, and build a collaborative culture in which teachers develop a collective responsibility for the success of one another and each student in the school.

Investing in school-based staff developers is just good business. If a coach can improve the content, assessment, and instructional skills of multiple teachers within a school, every student benefits, not just those in one classroom. In addition, the school-based staff developer works with teachers in collaborative teams and models and supports the development of practices the team can continue to implement independently when the coach is working with other teams of teachers. This benefit of school-based staff developers diminishes when they work primarily one-on-one with teachers rather than with teams.

#### **From being the resource to sharing resources**

School-based staff developers are a resource to individual teachers and teams of teachers in a school. One of the roles they fulfill in their work with teachers is to bring resources to improve teaching quality. In this role, school-based staff developers have four key responsibilities. They include:

1. Acting as a resource to support job-embedded professional learning in the school;
2. Ensuring the use of resources to support job-embedded professional learning priorities;
3. Focusing learning team resources on high-priority goals; and
4. Providing external and internal support related to learning priorities (Killion & Harrison, 2006).

In the first area, teacher leaders support principals in assessing and establishing both the time and structures needed for teacher collaboration. They work to ensure that teachers have daily time for professional learning that allows for collaborative planning time, peer-to-peer observation and feedback on one another's practice, learning how to meet the needs of different types of learners, or expanding their instructional repertoire.

The second responsibility, once the schedule

allows for collaborative time, is to help teams use available resources within the school including tapping the expertise of teachers who have demonstrated success with particular students, content, or instructional practices. School-based staff developers also share strategies with teams to make the most of their collaborative time, such as lesson study or examining student work.

Another responsibility of the school-based staff developer is establishing team-based goals both for teacher learning and student achievement and focusing resources on those goals. By maintaining a laser-like focus on specific goals and tapping all available resources both in the school and beyond, teams of teachers can more readily achieve their goals. Too many resources focused on too many diverse areas of need may fragment and diffuse the potential for improvement in teaching practice and student learning.

The final responsibility school-based staff developers have is accessing and employing resources within the school and beyond to address teacher and student learning goals. In most cases, the needed resources exist within a school. Occasionally, schools must reach beyond to access external resources. School-based staff developers need some familiarity with where external resources reside or who their go-to person is for external resources. When the need arises for resources that do not exist within the school, school-based staff developers must have an expedient way to access external resources to support teacher and student learning.

Resource allocation to professional development comes in many forms. Resources include people, time, dollars, and substantive materials. Resources also include access to information and expertise and readily available access to support, feedback, knowledge, and expertise. Availability of resources is one way an organization conveys that improvement is expected and necessary. Without these resources, those engaged in improvement efforts face frustration.

Professional learning can be either an expense or investment. When viewed as an investment, professional learning brings resources to the school and classroom door where effective teaching occurs. ♦

#### **REFERENCE**

**Killion, J. & Harrison, C. (2006).** *Taking the lead: New roles for teacher leaders and school-based staff developers.* Oxford, OH: NSDC.