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## Focused, job-embedded learning leads to quality teaching

All of us need to think and talk about the essential criteria required for effective professional development, a way to distinguish great professional development from merely good professional development. To improve teaching, state departments in particular need to **assist school and district leaders in creating criteria and applying it to the selection of staff development programs and providers to enhance quality teaching** (Hord, Hirsh, & Roy, 2005, p. 34). In an examination of more than 1,300 professional development studies, researchers found that teachers who were involved for at least 49 hours with a single focus could be expected “to boost their students’ achievement by about 21 percentile points” (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007, p. iii). This finding adds a more definitive measure to the idea of ongoing, continuous improvement.

A review of the characteristics of professional development that lead to teacher practices that improve student achievement (AERA, 2005, p.2) found that student reasoning and problem-solving are enhanced when teachers:

- Know how students learn within a specific content area;
  - Know and use instructional strategies specific to the content area; and
  - Enhance their own understanding of content area knowledge.
- Further, teachers’ professional learning was found to impact student achievement when teachers’ learning was job-embedded — when it helped teachers *apply* new knowledge and practices to their teaching. When professional development “connects the curriculum materials that teachers use with the district and state academic standards that guide their work and the assessment and accountability measures that evaluate their

success,” teachers view the learning as more relevant and immediately useful (AERA, 2005, p. 2).

The *collective participation* of groups of educators who worked at the same grade level and/or school also influenced the impact of the professional development. When teams of educators were involved, more opportunities were present for a variety of follow-up activities that strengthen and support changes in classroom practice, such as peer observation and feedback, team planning, examining student work, and leading discussions (AERA, 2005, p.3).

Active learning also was found to be an important aspect of effective professional development. Educators are more likely to enhance their classroom practices when they experience hands-on learning activities connected to their real work, real curriculum, and real classrooms.

### REFERENCES

- American Educational Research Association (AERA). (2005, Summer).** Teaching teachers: Professional development to improve student achievement. *Research Points*, 3(1).
- Hord, S., Hirsh, S., & Roy, P. (2005).** *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation configurations, Vol. II: The state education agency.* Oxford, OH: NSDC.
- Yoon, K., Duncan, T., Lee, S., Scarloss, B., & Shapley, K. (2007).** *Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2007-No. 033). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

### NSDC STANDARD

#### Quality Teaching:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators’ content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.