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WEEKEND WISDOM

Stimulus funds boost professional learning and add Saturday option

By Valerie von Frank

Saturday School isn't just for students anymore. Students have been able to get tutoring in Milwaukee Public Schools on the weekend. And now this year, the district is using federal stimulus money to



Some sessions are offered at a community college with computer labs and LCD projectors.

create Saturday Academies for teachers' professional learning.

Milwaukee Public Schools has so far received just over \$100 million in stimulus money through various funds for the next two years, bolstering its \$950 million annual 2009 budget as state aid is being cut. Of that stimulus money, about \$15 million or 15% is allocated to additional professional development districtwide. "Professional development is the key strategy both for closing the achievement gap and retaining staff," Superintendent William G. Andrekopoulos said in presenting the 2009 district budget to the Board of School Directors' Strategic Planning and Budget Committee.

One part of that emphasis is the Saturday Academies, offered monthly. Teachers voluntarily attend half-day sessions and are paid based on their daily rate for their time. The district has budgeted \$3.4 million of the stimulus money for these learning opportunities over the next two years.

The focus on professional development

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Lessons from a coach

Take along those people skills when working with several schools.

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Focus on NSDC's standards

Time and money for professional learning need careful tending.

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NSDC tool

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came out of six years of not making Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind Act, according to Takisha Weatherall-Jones, professional development specialist.

“Being a district identified for improvement under NCLB and having multiple mandates for corrective action spurred us toward more coordinated efforts” that include ongoing learning for teachers, she said. “There are increased expectations for teachers’ professional development.”

The district cannot mandate professional learning outside teachers’ workdays under the teacher association contract, so the federal money is allowing teachers to improve their practices in a way not previously possible in the cash-strapped district by providing pay for their added time.

“We believe teacher effectiveness is the No. 1 factor in student achievement,” Weatherall-Jones said. “Professional development enhances our ability to affect student achievement through teacher learning.”

Saturday learning

The Academy learning experience is structured on a staff development model articulated by Joyce and Showers (1980) that includes five components, the first of which is imparting knowledge, followed by modeling, practice, feedback, and coaching. The Academy focuses on the first step. Follow-up sessions help extend the learning in a particular area, according to Weatherall-Jones, along with the district’s other professional development efforts.

The Saturday Academies are offered monthly from October through May at multiple district and local education sites. Some sessions that support teachers in using new technology, for example, are offered on the campus of a local community college with computer labs and classrooms that have LCD projectors.

Sessions are three hours, either from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. or 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Teachers are not limited in the number of sessions they can attend.

Teachers can see all the sessions available online and sign up via computer. The district maintains a database showing which sessions each

NSDC’S BELIEF

Every student learns when every educator engages in effective professional learning.

teacher has attended, a sort of professional development transcript, that allows for follow-up. Weatherall-Jones said the district then may contact teachers to suggest ways for them to continue their learning.

The sessions are taught by curriculum specialists in the content areas, some consultants when the content is highly specialized, and coaches and teacher leaders from within the district.

While the Academies currently do not provide continuing education credits, Weatherall-Jones said the district may consider that in the future.

Weatherall-Jones said individual schools in the district determine what professional learning teachers should focus their efforts on based on data analysis that then is incorporated in their School Improvement Plans. The schools’ plans, then, are reviewed and combined with data on student needs districtwide to determine what is offered in Saturday Academy.

“It’s based on teachers’ needs as they relate to the district’s strategic initiatives,” she said.

A strategic effort

More professional development had been site-based in the past, she said. While some schools had budgeted for specialized training, others had not. Some received professional development grants. Centralizing support and providing an alternative time for professional learning outside the work week were measures through which the district attempted to address that disparity, Weatherall-Jones said.

Schools continue to have five full days during the school year for individualized professional development that each determines is needed for that site. In addition, principals can use monthly after-school meeting time for professional learning specific to the school.

But Weatherall-Jones works with other content-area specialists in the district’s Department of Educational Services to plan to meet needs based on efficiency of scale, and all offerings are reviewed for how well they meet five strategic goals the district has set.

Centralizing some professional learning allows for that alignment, Weatherall-Jones said, and adds

- In 2005-06, the baseline year for Milwaukee Public Schools’ strategic plan, Working Together, Achieving More, **38%** of students in grades 3-8 and grade 10 were proficient or advanced on the state’s test in math.
- In 2008-09, **47%** were proficient or advanced, a **9%** increase.
- Improvements were noted in every grade tested in 2008-09, with the largest increase being **10%** at grade 8.

more accountability for high standards in professional development. She noted that the district has adopted NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, and all professional learning now must meet those standards.

"Because we had such decentralized professional development, now that everything has to be measured by the standards, we have to teach it as such in a centralized way," she said. "We don't want to hold teachers accountable for something that we don't provide support for; for example, teaching in longer blocks of time requires some professional development. Our goal is to improve teacher effectiveness."

The district's approach overall is to move from a site-based to outcome-based strategic management that centers on achieving districtwide goals and is aligned with core beliefs, the superintendent said in June 2009 at the district's "Hot Topics" event, an annual two-day session focused on professional development for staff. Andrekopoulos presented an overview of the district strategic plan, Working Together, Achieving More. Professional development is the focus of one of eight strategic goals in the plan.

The plan, adopted in 2007, calls for "leaders and staff (to) demonstrate continuous improvement through focused professional development." Weatherall-Jones said the district then developed the "big five" in professional development improvement goals, with professional learning built around emphases on data analysis; high-yield, research-based instructional strategies; an aligned curriculum; extended learning time; and differentiated instruction.

A positive response

The response to the academies has been positive and is growing, said Weatherall-Jones. The number of participants tripled in one month, from 586 in October to 1,513 in November. Nearly 140

Milwaukee Public Schools Milwaukee, Wisc.

Schools: 121 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, 49 high schools, 16 with combined grades

Enrollment: 82,444

Staff: 5,766

Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	11.9%
Black:	56.6%
Hispanic:	22.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	4.8%
Native American:	0.8%
Other:	3.2%

Limited English proficient: 9.5%

Free/reduced lunch: 80.9%

Special education: 19.2%

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of the district's 198 schools were represented, with some sending a dozen or more teachers to the learning day.

Enhancing lessons through technology has been well received, along with sessions on differentiating reading instruction.

Both teachers who have new access to more professional learning and coordinators who want greater contact across the district are enthused about the Saturday Academies, Weatherall-Jones said.

"Teachers are excited," she said. "As the buzz is growing, teachers are saying, 'Ooh, can you offer this? Can you offer that?'"

Reference

Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (1980). Improving inservice training: The messages of research. *Educational Leadership*, 37(5), 379-385. ♦

DISTRICT'S BIG 5 OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

- Data analysis
- High-yield, research-based instructional strategies
- Aligned curriculum
- Extended learning time
- Differentiated instruction



Taffeta Young was named assistant principal at Oakcliff Traditional Theme School in Doraville, Ga., in 2009-10 after serving for nine years as a coach for DeKalb County Schools. You can contact her at Taffeta_y_young@fc.dkalb.k12.ga.us.

Navigating cultures is a key skill

Q How did you work effectively with multiple schools?

I worked with four schools at one time. Every school has a different culture. You have to have people skills working with so many personalities. You need to know how to present yourself, how to have respectful conversations. You have to be respectfully pushy.

It all comes back to the administrator. Sometimes if you have an administrator for whom instruction is not a strong point, you can take the lead if you go over the data and analyze it together, then figure out the professional learning that's needed. You have to get your foot in the door. I get materials together and do my research. We used varied assessments. We looked at district-level data and local assessments. We analyzed data and planned professional learning with individual grade levels.

We did focus walks where we gathered a team of individuals, not classroom teachers, but specialists, counselors, assistant principals. We would look

for what we wanted to see and hear, what evidence in student work we wanted to see to show students were moving in the right direction. I had conferences one-on-one with teachers, modeled for them, observed in their classrooms.

Through all of that, I kept a coaching log documenting who I saw, the days I saw that teacher, the professional learning focus or grade-level meeting notes if I assisted with individual professional learning. It was very important to document what we had done and the next step.

In some cultures I could take the lead with no problem. Other administrators felt they needed more control. I always said, 'At the end of the day, the test scores are going to come back to your school. You've got to be responsible.' Once you give them the information, they can take it or leave it. I tell them I'm not there to take over their job; I'm there to support them. I try not to grandstand.

Cultures differ. Teachers sometimes can get caught between. So I always tell the teacher, "At the end of the day, she's your principal, so take her lead." ♦

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

Keep an eye on learning investments

Investments in professional learning are investments in teaching quality and student learning. However, when school district and state education budgets are reduced, one of the first cuts to occur is professional development. The logic of this is questionable, particularly when a consensus among researchers for nearly two decades confirms that teacher quality is the single greatest contributor to student academic success with the second factor being the quality of school leadership. Most educators acknowledge that the cuts are necessary and are ready to step in and do whatever it takes to ensure that student education continues at the highest levels. Teacher leaders have responsibilities to ensure that available resources for professional learning are invested effectively on what will matter most in teaching quality and student learning.

Make wise investments

Teacher leaders have the power to influence investments in professional learning. First, they must ensure that existing resources are invested wisely. They can ask for data from their school, district, state, and province about spending in professional learning. Unfortunately, in these lean economic times, those investments are declining rapidly. It is crucial that teacher leaders help school and district leaders consider viable options for teacher professional learning that can continue even when resources are reduced. Educators will frequently acknowledge that lack of time and money are barriers to more effective professional learning. Yet evidence about the results of current investments is lacking. Requesting additional resources without evidence about the impact of current expenditures is premature. Teacher leaders might begin to gather the evidence and tell their story about how their current professional development impacts teaching and student learning.

NSDC STANDARD



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

In 1995 NSDC Board of Trustees adopted a resolution about resources for professional learning (see p. 6).

When educators read this resolution, they typically respond with a resounding, “Impossible,” and immediately discount it. Yet on further consideration, those responsible for professional learning in schools and districts realize how probable it is to achieve the recommended levels of investment in professional learning.

These resources — time and money — are interrelated. It is difficult to separate one from the other. The greatest cost factor for professional development is time. Two problems exist with resources for professional learning. The first is that schools, districts, states, and provinces have inadequate data about their investment in professional development. The second is the disparity in resources district-to-district, state-to-state, or province-to-province in expenditures for professional learning.

For more information about NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, see www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

In a recently released National Center for Education Statistics report about 2006-07 school-year expenditures for instruction and instructional support, the disparity is obvious (Zhou, 2009). In this category that includes in-service teacher training as well as other instructional costs such as teachers and teaching assistants, libraries, curriculum development, student assessment, and instruction technology, the variance is evident. New York, for example, invests 71.9% of its education expenditure in this area while New Mexico spends only 59.7%. It is not possible from these data to determine what portion of the instruction and instructional support funds is allocated to professional development. An analysis of 1997-98 school district data conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy gives more insight into disparity in professional development funding. That study reports that, “the states’ modal level of investment in professional development was 2.82% of their general funds. Only five states spent less than 2% (Delaware was lowest at 1.34%). Slightly more states — eight — spent more than 4% of their general expenditure budgets (the District of Columbia was far ahead of every other entity, reporting an expenditure amounting to 8.5%)” (Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 2002, p. 2).

Keeping track of costs

Teacher leaders can advocate for more accurate accounting for professional development resources and for appropriate levels of funding and time to ensure that their professional learning results in increased student achievement. By raising the question about how much a school or district spends on professional development, they can use these data in decision-making situations on leadership teams within the school or district. They can use these data to advocate for changes in local, state, or provincial policies related to professional development expenditures. In a comprehensive study of how schools and districts account for investments in professional learning, Odden, Archibald, Fermanich, and Gallagher (2002) identified the following cost factors: teacher time both within and outside the school day; training and coaching;

NSDC TIME AND RESOURCES RESOLUTION

The National Staff Development Council believes that high quality staff development is essential to school reform and that school systems have an obligation to ensure that employees are thoroughly prepared to successfully discharge their responsibilities. Time for these activities can often be provided via extensive on-the-job-opportunities and collaborative work with no additional resources.

Therefore, the National Staff Development Council recommends that school systems dedicate at least 10% of their budgets to staff development and that at least 25% of educator’s work time be devoted to learning and collaboration with colleagues.

Passed by the NSDC Board of Trustees, December 1995.

administration of professional development; materials, equipment, and facilities; tuition and registrations; and travel and transportation. See full explanations in the Tool on p. 7.

While teacher leaders can advocate for appropriate investments, an even bigger responsibility is to influence the way available resources are spent and to promote effective practices for professional learning that will ensure that it continues when budgets are strained. In two blog postings on effective professional learning in lean economic times, Stephanie Hirsh, NSDC’s executive director, cited a number of options for schools and districts to continue and even grow their professional development opportunities for educators even when resources are declining. That list includes 10 ways to leverage limited resources for professional learning. See the April blog postings at <http://snipurl.com/tho8u> and <http://snipurl.com/tho9s>.

Some suggestions include focusing on what teachers need to know to support student learning and establishing clear priorities for professional learning. Selecting evidence-based professional learning processes and programs rather than experimenting with new ideas helps increase the likelihood those resources will be well invested. Dramatically increasing opportunities for follow-up support is another strategy that will increase effects from professional learning. Using experts within the school and creating structures to support team learning bring professional development needs directly into the classroom. Using local experts and

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Cost structure for professional development

This cost framework provides a method of organizing information in terms of six cost elements. Collecting information on professional development costs using this framework will ensure that all studies are comparable.

COST ELEMENT	INGREDIENT	HOW COST IS CALCULATED
TEACHER TIME	<p>Time within the regular contract: When students are not present before or after school or on scheduled inservice days, half days, or early-release days Planning time used for professional development</p> <p>Time outside the regular contract: Time after school, on weekends or for summer institutes Released time provided by substitutes</p>	<p>Teachers' hourly salary times the number of student-free hours used for professional development</p> <p>The cost of the portion of the salary of the person used to cover the teacher's class during planning time used for professional development</p> <p>The stipends or additional pay based on the hourly rate that teachers receive to compensate them for their time Substitutes' wages</p>
TRAINING AND COACHING	<p>Training Salaries for district trainers Outside consultants who provide training; may be part of Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program</p> <p>Coaching Salaries for district coaches including on-site facilitators Outside consultants who provide coaching; may be part of Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program</p>	<p>Sum of trainer salaries Consultant fees or comprehensive school design contract fees</p> <p>Sum of coach and facilitator salaries Consultant fees or comprehensive school design contract fees</p>
ADMINISTRATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	Salaries for district or school level administrators of professional development programs	Salary for administrators times the proportion of their time spent administering professional development
MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT, AND FACILITIES USED FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	<p>Materials</p> <p>Equipment</p> <p>Facilities</p>	<p>Cost of materials, including required materials for implementing Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration programs</p> <p>Cost of equipment needed for activities</p> <p>Rental or other costs for facilities used</p>
TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION	<p>Travel</p> <p>Transportation</p>	<p>Costs of travel to off-site activities</p> <p>Costs of transportation within the district</p>
TUITION AND CONFERENCE FEES	<p>Tuition</p> <p>Conference fees</p>	<p>Tuition payments or reimbursement for university-based professional development</p> <p>Fees for professional conferences</p>

SOURCE: "A Cost Framework for Professional Development," by Allan Odden, Sarah Archibald, Mark Fermanich, and H. Alix Gallagher, prepared for the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Wisconsin Center for Education Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

building local networks of content area specialists are other ways to provide professional development in lean times. When available resources are focused on the needs of schools and classrooms and teachers have opportunities for learning with and from each other, even limited professional development funds can go a long way.

It is important to note, however, that resources alone are not the key to effective professional learning. Resources such as time and money make it possible to ensure that educators have access to effective learning experiences; alone they do not ensure quality. It is also important to note that the quality of professional development cannot be measured by investments in it. What is essential to pair with resources is sound decision making about how those resources are used and assurance that investments are made in evidence-based professional learning aligned directly to teacher and student learning goals.

Teacher leaders know that professional learning is what helps teachers stay current, bring the evidence-based practices into their classrooms, and build a culture of collaboration in which teachers

support the success of one another and all students within a school. Even when resources are reduced, they will continue to learn and use their voices to advocate for appropriate investments in their expertise so that all students succeed.

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Lisa Mank Reddel
Principal, Cherry Creek Schools,
Englewood, CO,
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"Our entire organization is thinking differently about professional learning. It is more of a vital part of our organization than ever before. Our administrative team understands the importance of things like follow-up and evaluating impact... so do a lot of the teachers... slowly, we are building an understanding of professional development as much more than Institute Days."

Jeanne Spiller
Staff Development Coordinator,
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Buffalo Grove, IL, Academy Class of 2008

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