

# 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.



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For more information about NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, see [www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://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
<b>TEACHER TIME</b>	<p><b>Time within the regular contract:</b> 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><b>Time outside the regular contract:</b> 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>
<b>TRAINING AND COACHING</b>	<p><b>Training</b> Salaries for district trainers Outside consultants who provide training; may be part of Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program</p> <p><b>Coaching</b> 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>
<b>ADMINISTRATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	Salaries for district or school level administrators of professional development programs	Salary for administrators times the proportion of their time spent administering professional development
<b>MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT, AND FACILITIES USED FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<p><b>Materials</b></p> <p><b>Equipment</b></p> <p><b>Facilities</b></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>
<b>TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION</b>	<p><b>Travel</b></p> <p><b>Transportation</b></p>	<p>Costs of travel to off-site activities</p> <p>Costs of transportation within the district</p>
<b>TUITION AND CONFERENCE FEES</b>	<p><b>Tuition</b></p> <p><b>Conference fees</b></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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