

## Key points in Learning Forward’s definition of professional development

### 1. FOSTERS COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Because teachers have traditionally worked and sought professional development on their own, their learning opportunities have benefited only them and the students assigned to their classes. To achieve ambitious school performance and student learning goals, schools must strive to provide effective teaching schoolwide. Effective professional development fosters collective responsibility for all students rather than individual responsibility for some students. Professional development conducted in teams creates an environment of shared responsibility.

In the corporate world, team-based organizations are largely successful in having all of the people in the firm feel accountable and responsible for the operation and success of the entire enterprise, not just a few people in senior management positions (Farren, 1999; Gregory, 1999).

### 2. PRIMARILY OCCURS SEVERAL TIMES PER WEEK

It is the responsibility of professionals to continuously improve their knowledge and practice every day. High-performing businesses understand this notion. Randy Nelson, dean of Pixar University, the professional development arm at one of the most successful movie production companies, explains that learning is the secret to the company’s success: “We’re trying to create a culture of learning, filled with life-long learners. ... Every employee is encouraged to devote up to four hours a week, every week, to his or her education.” This is part of everyone’s work (Taylor & LaBarre, 2006).

In education, we need this type of workday learning, learning that takes place when teachers are at school and requires that districts make time for learning and improving practice. Many schools have schedules to ensure this. Before- and after-school meetings work for some, early-release days work for others, and fine-tuned schedules work for others. When teacher learning is a priority, schools can find strategies to put it in place.

### 3. CONTINUOUS CYCLE OF IMPROVEMENT

American business knows the importance of continuous improvement. Businesses compete for the recognition asso-

**Learning Forward is seeking legislative amendments to include this definition in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. These amendments will clarify what practices qualify for federal, state, and district funding, while stating that professional development needs to directly impact a teacher’s classroom practices and student achievement.**



(34) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT — The term “professional development” means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement —

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(A) Professional development **fosters collective responsibility** for improved student performance and must be comprised of professional learning that:

(1) is aligned with rigorous state student academic achievement standards as well as related local educational agency and school improvement goals;

(2) is conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders;

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(3) **primarily occurs several times per week** among established teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff members where the teams of educators engage in a **continuous cycle of improvement** that —

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(i) evaluates student, teacher, and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance;

(ii) defines a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of the data;

(iii) achieves the educator learning goals identified in subsection (A)(3)(ii) by implementing coherent, sustained,

#### References

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and evidenced-based learning strategies, such as lesson study and the development of formative assessments, that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement;

(iv) **provides job-embedded coaching** or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom;

(v) regularly assesses the effectiveness of the professional development in achieving identified learning goals, improving teaching, and assisting all students in meeting challenging state academic achievement standards;

(vi) informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning; and

(vii) that **may be supported by external assistance.**

(B) The process outlined in (A) may be supported by activities such as courses, workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences that:

(1) must address the learning goals and objectives established for professional development by educators at the school level;

(2) advance the ongoing school-based professional development; and

(3) are provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities outside the school such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations.

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ciated with the Baldrige Award and the company results associated with it. While most schools believe they are in the business of continuous improvement, the steps outlined in the definition describe a process that leads to results for students.

#### 4. PROVIDES JOB-EMBEDDED COACHING

A preponderance of research in education as well as business shows that while adults are exposed to new ideas and practices in workshop settings and team meetings, they need on-the-job support to make the new ideas part of their daily routines (Joyce & Calhoun, 1996; Joyce & Showers, 2002). In evaluating this evidence, Odden et al. (2007) conclude that states reap greater benefits in terms of student achievement when they invest in classroom-based coaches as opposed to more costly and less effective innovations, including smaller class size or full-day kindergarten.

Similarly, businesses have found success in building employee knowledge by having experienced employees who demonstrate “deep smarts” — that is, those with a corporate understanding at a systemic level — methodically and individually share their insights about the company’s processes and problems (Leonard & Swap, 2004).

#### 5. MAY BE SUPPORTED BY EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

Educators guided by data on their students and school are in the best position to identify the help they need to address their most important challenges. On occasion, answers are not available inside the school and must be sought from experts outside. King and Newmann (2000) found that “ensuring the constant interaction of great ideas inside and outside an organization promotes improvement for all.” Any organization enlisting external assistance must ensure that the help they seek aligns with the internal goals of the school or company.

When GE was looking to boost its leadership practices, CEO Jack Welch sought help from an outside expert, Noel Tichy. The result: the development of an organization-wide culture that embraced teaching and learning, an emphasis on results, and the ability to adapt and change (Rothenberg, 2003). The company achieved its goals under the skillful guidance of an outside expert.

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