



Do the homework on your investment in professional learning

At least once a month, I get a call from an educator asking what percentage of the budget should the school system allocate to professional learning. In the most distressing cases, the caller is facing a budget cut and is seeking a rationale to fight to keep the budget allocated to professional learning. In more positive cases, the person is developing a strategy for increasing the budget for professional learning. Unfortunately, there is not a definitive answer to the question (read the article I wrote with Joellen Killion on p. 10 about the complexities of this question). But one thing I am sure about: Whatever information the person provides had better include answers to the following questions.

ON THE INCOME SIDE

What is our current commitment to professional development? This is not easy to answer; however, collecting and summarizing responses to these three questions can help:

- How many federal and/or state dollars do we receive to support

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- professional development?
- How much is allocated in the school system budget to directly support professional development?
- Are there other sources of financial support for professional development, and what does that total?

ON THE EXPENSE SIDE

How much are we spending on professional learning? While it is difficult to account for every single dollar, knowing the answers to these questions is useful:

- What is the approximate personnel cost attached to professional learning? What titles do these people have?
- What is the approximate professional development cost related to program implementation, and what are the most significant expenditures?
- What other kinds of expenditures make up the rest of the budget expense?

ON THE IMPACT SIDE

What are our dollars doing for educators and students? I doubt educators will be successful in safeguarding dollars or adding resources unless they can answer the most important questions:

- What are examples of impact of our investment in personnel? What compelling evidence do we have to show for it?

- What are examples of impact of our investment in program implementation? What compelling evidence do we have to show for it?
- What about the rest of the dollars — what is our return on their investment?

BUILDING THE CASE

With the answers to these questions in hand, educators will be equipped to answer the next set of questions that likely will be raised as they make their requests:

- How many additional dollars are you seeking, or how many dollars can you not afford to lose?
- What will these dollars support specifically?
- What data will you collect, and how will you report the impact of this investment?

As a former staff developer, I know it is difficult to account for every dollar that is spent on professional learning. And yet this should not prevent us from attempting to answer the questions that arise.

We must find understandable ways to answer the questions our critics and advocates raise. We must recognize that we are the most authoritative source on these questions when we can produce our own data and attach them to results. Results are the universal language. We know we can't achieve results without investment. It is our obligation to align the two. ■