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The **BOTTOM LINE** *on* **EXCELLENCE**



What percentage of their budgets should schools and districts invest in professional learning? To answer that question, schools and districts must first know how much they are spending on professional learning and be able to connect that spending to student achievement.

While researchers identify various ways of accounting for expenditures in professional learning (Miles, Odden, Fermanich, & Archibald, 2004; Odden, Archibald, Fermanich, & Gallagher, 2002; Killeen, Monk, & Plecki, 2002), the continuing challenge is that many school systems cannot yet identify what they invest in professional learning and do not link investments in professional learning to student achievement.

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning include the Resources standard, which focuses on the need to prioritize, monitor, and coordinate resources for educator learning. An important aspect of this need is to ensure that expenditures focus on increasing educators'

**A GUIDE TO INVESTING
IN PROFESSIONAL
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performance and student results. After examining research and exploring how high-performing districts and companies invest in professional learning, Learning Forward is increasingly aware that what matters most is how funds are invested. With the current challenges to school funding, it is even more crucial that education agencies carefully examine what investments they are making.



WHAT DISTRICTS SPEND

What districts spend on professional learning varies greatly because of a lack of consensus about what constitutes investments in professional learning. Available examples and research on spending in professional learning report that districts spend between 1% and 8% of their operating budget on professional learning (Miles, Odden,

Fermanich, & Archibald, 2004; Killeen, Monk, & Plecki, 2002; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Chicago Public Education Fund, 2002). Kieran Killeen, David Monk, and Margaret Plecki (2002; Sawchuck, 2010) report that “U.S. school districts do devote approximately 3% of total general expenditures to teacher professional development, which equates to an annual sum of approximately \$200 per pupil” (p. 26). . . . In sum, [studies of average level of spending] demonstrate that teacher professional development expenditures are likely to be well under 10% of overall education expenditures at the school district level” (p. 30).

They add that the studies also point to intra- and interdistrict variability as well as rural and urban variability in spending. Variations are due to how expenditures are defined, calculated, and reported. As noted in a study of professional development practices, what districts report spending on professional development typically accounts for less than two-thirds of actual expenditures (Killion & Colton, 2007). Accounting for investments in professional learning requires more sophisticated accounting and greater vigilance than are currently in place in many school systems.

Some analysis of investments in professional learning in countries outside the U.S. points to variations as well, although comparisons are difficult because of reporting and accounting differences. Singapore provides 100 hours of fully paid professional learning to its teachers annually. When the United Kingdom implemented national curriculum in numeracy and literacy, education policymakers

RESOURCES:

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning (*Learning Forward, 2011*).

recognized the importance of substantive professional learning to support implementation. Because resources were not abundant, the ministry repurposed human and financial resources to provide literacy and numeracy coaches, teacher training, and regional directors (Barber & Mourshed, 2007).

In addition to human and financial resources, top-performing countries such as Finland, South Korea, and Japan build time into daily schedules for teacher collaborative planning, professional learning, observing each others' teaching, and reflecting on their practice. Time in the schedule is a resource that supports professional learning, yet it is not often calculated as a cost factor in many U.S. or international school systems.

Top-performing businesses demonstrate the importance of increasing investments in learning and development. Because the methods for calculating investments vary between education and business, direct comparison is difficult. Spending on workforce learning is increasing rather than decreasing, as reported in ASTD's 2011 analysis of workplace learning and development (Green & McGill, 2011). Findings from this report reflect how companies value learning and development as a means to stay competitive in a challenging economic climate and to prepare employees and the company to meet the next phase of business opportunity.

In order to prioritize, coordinate, and monitor resources for professional learning, as required by the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), those responsible and accountable for professional learning have three core tasks to accomplish. First, they must know what they invest in professional learning. Second, they must know how decisions about investments in professional learning are made. Third, they assess if their investments are producing the returns they expect in terms of results for educators and students. Each of these core tasks is complex and requires coordination of budgeting, decision making, and evaluation. For many school systems, these complex tasks are insufficiently managed or disparately managed by so many different divisions, departments, or people that looking comprehensively across multiple areas is challenging. School systems are not intentionally mismanaging resources, but rather doing their best to meet the multiple demands for accountability when the budgets come from many different sources.

Technology is rapidly growing as a resource schools and districts tap to support professional learning. When used wisely, technology has the potential to increase collaboration among educators, access to learning opportunities and materials, variety of learning designs, personalization, and management efficiency. Decisions to invest in technology to support professional learning require careful deliberation to ensure that the technology

actively engages learners through interactive learning processes to acquire knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, and develop dispositions.

FUNDING SOURCES

Knowing what is invested in professional learning requires understanding the multiple sources of funding for professional learning, how those funds are dispersed, how the funds are coded, and who manages the expenditures.

Resources for professional learning primarily come from four sources. These sources include federal government, state/provincial/regional government, local government, and external agencies. (See table on p. 13 for details about federal funding.) In countries other than the U.S., ministries of education establish both categorical and special funding for innovations such as the Literacy and Numeracy Initiative in United Kingdom primarily by reallocating resources from other initiatives.

States, provinces, or regions provide the second source of funding for professional learning either through per-pupil, employee, or district categorical, noncategorical, or grant funding. States also provide funding through their own discretionary funding. In the U.S., a third source of funding for professional learning is locally raised tax dollars. A fourth source of funding for professional learning comes from external agencies, including private, public, and corporate foundations as well as other nonprofits. These dollars are typically awarded to support a particular initiative and may not be available for reallocation to other priority areas.

To understand fully what schools and school systems invest in professional learning, it is crucial to know the source of funds invested in professional learning and the parameters for expending those funds.

CATEGORIZING EXPENSES

Understanding what is invested in professional learning requires consensus on what constitutes an expense, consistency in coding expenditures, and sophisticated accounting systems that can aggregate and analyze expense categories across multiple income areas by program, school, or income source. Adequate accounting systems increase districts' and schools' ability to analyze, prioritize, coordinate, and monitor resources for professional learning.

Allan Odden and his colleagues (2002) provide one example of categorizing expenditures in professional learning. While their descriptions of expenditures may not be universally applicable, improving the return on investments in professional learning requires districts and even federal, regional, or grant-making agencies to reach consensus about what constitutes an expense in professional learning and how to account for those expenses. For example, Odden et al. recommend structuring costs for professional learning into these five categories.

1. Teacher time used for professional learning: Includes

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FEDERAL SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Many federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Education, National Science Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, offer grant funding to improve educator effectiveness. Included here are several details about federal funding.

— M. René Islas, Director, Center for Results

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The U.S. Department of Education offers more than 40 multimillion-dollar formula and discretionary grant programs that fund professional learning for Pre-K-12 educators.

- **Formula grants** go to grantees on the basis of a predetermined formula. State educational agencies usually receive these funds and in turn subgrant them to local educational agencies and schools. These often considered state-administered programs, though the funding is federal.

- **Discretionary grants** are awarded on a competitive basis.

The two largest federal programs that provide consistent formula funding for states, districts, and schools for professional learning are: Title I, Part A — Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, and Title II, Part A — Improving Teacher Quality State Grants.

- **Title I, Part A** has provided nearly \$14.5 billion per year since 2009 to state and local educational agencies for various activities. Title I, Part A schoolwide and targeted assistance programs stipulate that districts and schools receiving these funds “devote sufficient resources” for professional development. The program also requires that schools that fail to meet adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years must reserve at least 10% of Title I, Part A funds for professional development (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Communications and Outreach, 2011).

- **Title II, Part A** is the most direct source of federal funding for professional development. The program has provided states, districts, and schools \$20 billion since 2005 for activities that improve educator quality. The average individual Title II, Part A grant award for 2011 was \$42 million, with some grantees receiving up to \$268 million.

The U.S. Department of Education commissions an annual study of how grantees use Title II, Part A funds to improve teacher and leader effectiveness. The 2010-11 study finds:

- **97%** of school districts received Title II, Part A funding in 2010-11, with the highest-poverty and largest districts receiving the majority of the funds.

- **There are more than 10** allowable uses of Title II, Part A funds but professional development and class-size reduction are the two most common uses of the funds.

- **66%** of districts use the funds for professional development with 9% of all districts spending all of their funds for teacher professional development (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

both time within and outside the normal school day for collaborative and individual planning, days set aside for professional learning, and time outside the contract for professional learning.

2. **Training and coaching:** Includes the costs for staff for professional learning, school and district coaches, consultants, registration fees, tuition, and stipends for master teachers, team facilitators, grade or department chairs when their primary purpose is to facilitate professional learning.
3. **Administration of professional development:** Includes district or school staff responsible for supervising or administering programs for professional learning, learning management, and other support staff who manage the professional learning.
4. **Material, equipment, and facilities:** Includes equipment such as technology, maintenance, or rental of facilities used for professional learning, subscriptions, books, or other materials needed for professional learning.
5. **Travel and transportation:** Includes staff and consultant travel for professional learning both within and outside the district.

Since time is the greatest portion of investment in professional learning, understanding what time is currently available for professional learning and analyzing its use and effectiveness are first steps in increasing the effectiveness and results associated with time available. This analysis can lead to recommendations on how to leverage and improve the use of time for professional learning and common guidelines for coding time expenditures to increase comparability across districts and schools.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles will guide districts and schools in allocating and assessing resources in professional learning. For many districts and schools, these principles require a shift from how they have traditionally supported professional learning to emphasize structures and policies that lead to practices linking educator learning to student learning.

- **Build individual and collective expertise.**
Higher-performing countries tout their commitments to prioritizing collective expertise. They are clear that equity demands educators share collective responsibility for the success of all students. This is translated in the form of higher standards for membership in the profession and accountability to peers and results for all students. Companies, too, recognize the importance of building internal expertise and collaborative environments to support collaboration among employees. A core competency of high-performing educators at the school and system levels shows a commitment to building colleagues' expertise to minimize classroom-to-classroom and school-to-school variance in instruction and learning. Placing the development of collective as well as individual expertise as a criterion

for decisions about resources for professional learning will lead to broad-based improvement efforts that will cultivate ongoing improvement among teams of colleagues.

- **Advance school and system vision and goals.**
Higher-performing school systems and countries have powerful alignment between school and system vision and goals. Resources for professional learning are allocated in a coordinated way to increase effectiveness and efficiency in attaining both a school system's and an individual school's vision and goals. District central office staff coordinates cross-school collaboration and professional learning when individuals, teams, or whole-school faculties share common needs and goals. Professional learning disconnected from school system and school goals is given secondary status and even eliminated when funding for professional learning is lean.
- **Tap expertise of internal and external experts.**
High-performing companies and school systems rely on both internal and external experts for success. Relying too heavily on internal experts minimizes access to research or emerging ideas and competitiveness among peers. Depending too heavily on external experts alone can be costly, increases dependency, minimizes internal capacity building, and is frequently suspended when budgets decrease.
- **Reward contributions, performance, and results.**
In many school systems, there is a practice of awarding stipends for achievements, such as National Board certification or completion of selected courses. There is considerable debate on the benefit of these extra payments to educators. Leveraging these expenditures to ensure they are tied to demonstration and application of new knowledge and skills and impact on classroom performance strengthens the purpose and impact of the investment.
- **Provide comprehensive professional learning.**
A lack of comprehensive professional learning is the norm in too many school systems. Resorting to introductory or awareness-building sessions in lieu of comprehensive support for learning, implementation, and refinement of new practices diminishes the impact of professional learning. Rather than continuing to address multiple priorities, districts that focus on those priorities closest to student learning and prioritize implementation support maximize resources. Districts would benefit from identifying which awareness-level professional learning efforts are nonessential and can be eliminated, and redesign those that are essential for maximum impact.
- **Invest in teachers, support staff, and administrators.**
Research has shown that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching in ensuring student achievement. Within

most school principal job descriptions is expectation to support instructional improvement. Yet few districts develop and implement comprehensive professional learning for principals and other key district staff members. A well-prepared and supported principal is one more important resource for professional learning. In addition, districts and schools must ensure that all support staff meet performance expectations and provide top-level service to students, their families, educators, and community members.

- **Support both collaborative and formal learning.**

In many school systems, what is considered professional learning is only formal or more traditional forms such as training courses, workshops, or conferences, often described as adult pullout programs. Many district and school leaders pay less attention to collaborative learning as formal learning. In studies of workplace learning and of professional learning in high-performing countries, more learning occurs through collaboration with colleagues, just-in-time learning, or modeling in practice. While it is often difficult to quantify less formal learning, it is as important and constitutes a large portion of a school's or district's professional learning program. Collaborative learning occurs during peer observation, instructional rounds, collaborative planning, lesson or book studies, or problem-solving sessions, among other forms. Both formal and collaborative professional learning are necessary to achieve school and district goals for increasing educator effectiveness and student achievement.

- **Differentiate support for educators at various career and performance stages.**

Professional learning frequently follows the one-size-fits-all formula. Yet over the years as the work of educators became increasingly more sophisticated, this approach to professional learning is no longer viable. Providing different options for achieving professional learning outcomes can accomplish two ends. It meets the needs of participants and reduces the overall cost. For example, if teachers can demonstrate mastery of differentiated instruction, why are they required to participate in training on differentiation? Perhaps they provide demonstration classrooms or support to peers as a way of extending their own learning and that of their peers.

There are multiple ways to differentiate learning for educators to align with their career stages, career goals, and performance level, yet many school systems are not providing this level of differentiation as a core part of their comprehensive program for professional learning.

- **Allocate resources to schools and departments based on a weighted formula.**

School systems typically allocate professional learning funding to central office departments and schools. In many districts, formulas are used to allocate funding rather than need. While

a simple formula such as a per-pupil allocation for professional learning may be easy, it is not always equitable if student learning needs differ among schools or because of district program goals. Weighted formulas allocate funds for professional learning to identified need areas such as poverty, English language learners, underperforming students, novice staff or those needing improvement, percentage of special needs students, etc.

- **Expend resources on authentic professional learning.**

Authentic professional learning is frequently confused with informational meetings, gatherings of specific groups, or routine tasks. For example, the back-to-school convocations and celebratory events are not legitimate expenditures for professional learning. Meetings to update, share, or review procedures, policies, or regulations are not professional learning; rather, they are information sharing frequently required by state or district regulations. Districts might look for alternative ways to conduct information sharing, such as through video streaming or web conferences and pay for celebrations from more appropriate budgets. This will allow districts to reallocate resources toward authentic professional learning focused on substantive improvement of educator performance and student results.

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- **Align professional learning to individual, team, school, and system improvement goals.**

Districts that provide resources to support individual professional learning plans with goals disconnected from school and district goals waste resources. Establishing parameters for individual, team, and school professional learning plans that use the district and school vision and goals as the focus accelerates achievement of the vision and goals. Through careful alignment, individuals, teams, and schools can streamline resources and efforts to achieve a small number of high-priority goals rather than diffusing resources and effort across numerous individual goals.

- **Employ technology to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and results.**

Technology solutions for professional learning have emerged rapidly in the last two decades. Early solutions increased the efficiency of knowledge acquisition primarily through passive learning processes. Emerging solutions have the potential to reach well beyond efficiency to increase effectiveness and results as well. To achieve these ends, technology solutions must create dynamic, personalized, and collaborative learning experiences that address needs identified from analyzing student and educator data.

- **Build schedules to include time for ongoing collaborative learning.**

Time is one of the most significant resources available for professional learning. How time is scheduled reflects a school system's or school's beliefs about professional learning. For example, a few occasional days for professional learning scattered throughout a school year sends a message that professional learning is an occasional rather than ongoing part of an educator's work. Creating a schedule that incorporates district, schoolwide, team, and individual time must begin with establishing parameters and agreements about professional learning.

For example, not every school or even every teacher needs to have the same schedule. Novice teachers might have a slightly shorter workday to provide flexibility for more professional learning. Teams of teachers working with students might meet several times per week or weekly based on the learning needs of students, the curriculum, their instructional sophistication, and student results. Building schedules with time for collaboration as an essential rather than add-on condition leads to better results. Time for professional learning does not mean that students are away from school. New and even more effective forms of professional learning, such as coaching and collaboration, can occur while students are learning alongside educators. Altering the structure of the school day, adding time to the school day, using extended learning, scheduling elective classes, differentiating class size, and partnering with community resources open

more possibilities to including frequent, ongoing time for professional learning within the school day without diminishing student learning time.

LINK INVESTMENTS TO LEARNING

Accountability for investments in professional learning requires clear accounting, ongoing analysis of data on investments in, quality of, and results from professional learning, and strategic, continuous improvement effort. In the field of professional learning we lack two essential factors to improving accountability for investments in professional learning: consensus on what constitutes an expense and on what level of investment is needed to produce a return. Taking small steps within school systems to determine current investments for adequacy, analyze those investments for returns, and improve accounting systems so that they provide accuracy and cross-funding stream analysis will improve both the effectiveness and results of professional learning. District efforts to link learning management systems to educator and student data and investing in rigorous evalua-

tion of initiatives with significant amounts of professional learning are beginning to change how districts think about the role of professional learning in improvement efforts. Without commitment to improve data available about professional learning investments, it will continue to be difficult to answer questions about how much is invested in professional learning and determine whether it is enough to improve student and educator performance.

Using the accounting system recommended by Odden et al. and the tool on pp. 17-21, districts will be better able to connect their investments in professional learning to results for students. Ultimately, as Sawchuk concludes, "The bottom line is that truly focusing professional development requires administrators to figure out where their dollars are spent, whether those patterns align to strategic goals for teacher improvement, and, if not, institute changes to the spending" (2010, p. 16).

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