



841 SQUARE MILES *of* COMMITMENT

DISTRICTWIDE PLAN MAKES PROFESSIONAL LEARNING A PRIORITY

By Nancy Ames Slabine

Without adequate time and resources, it is impossible for school districts and schools to support professional learning that leads to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results. That's why one of the seven new standards in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional

Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) focuses specifically on resources. The Resources standard states: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

For the last eight years, Duval County (Fla.) Public Schools has focused its school improvement efforts on enhancing professional learning. Although its annual budget has grown by only 9% since 2003-04, the amount of funding for professional development has nearly doubled during that same period. As a result, teacher practice and

student achievement have both improved. It hasn't been easy, however. The district's 7,300 teachers serve a large student body spread over 841 square miles and four clusters, and 800 to 1,000 new teachers enter the system each year. Moreover, this year, the district experienced a \$97 million shortfall in its overall budget, although it still managed to retain most of its professional learning resources. For all these reasons, Duval County Public Schools serves as a model for others seeking to find adequate time and resources for professional learning.

Dawn Wilson, the district's executive director of professional development, believes that finding these resources is more important than ever because of two national trends. "First, education is increasingly recognized as the major currency of the 21st century, and our schools are the key to an educated electorate and to economic prosperity," Wilson said. "To ensure equity in education, educators will need to improve their practice continuously through professional learning." Second is the increasing emphasis on teacher quality. Wilson believes that educators will seek opportunities for professional learning to enhance their instructional practice and improve student performance. Further, she notes, "when teacher compensation is tied to student success, adequate and equitable resource allocation becomes increasingly important."

Duval County Public Schools has a longstanding commitment to professional learning. By approving the NSDC standards in 2005 and the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning in 2011, the school board recognized that policy was essential to moving the standards into practice. Board adoption of the standards increased public awareness that the investment in professional learning means high expectations for quality teaching and improved student performance. It also signaled the board's strong commitment to learning designs that integrate theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

FUNDING

According to a report by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, "In order to ensure the effective implementation of high-quality professional development, states and districts must have a plan for financing

the costs of professional learning activities" (Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, & Goe, 2011). Florida's Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol states districts must provide sufficient financial resources to conduct the professional learning that faculty in the district need (Florida Department of Education, 2010).

The amount of funding for professional learning in Duval County has grown from \$19.9 million in 2003-04 to nearly \$38.3 million in 2010-11 (see table below). As a percentage of the total budget, this figure has risen from 2.10% to 3.66%.

The district has been able to achieve this level of funding for professional learning despite significant budget shortfalls for three major reasons:

1. The district views professional learning as a top priority. One of its core beliefs is that "high-quality teachers, supported with high-quality, ongoing professional development, must drive our rigorous, intellectually and

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

Duval County Public Schools

SCHOOL YEAR	TOTAL OPERATIONAL EXPENDITURES	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPENDITURES *	% OF TOTAL
2003-04	\$951,117,800	\$19,949,207	2.10%
2004-05	\$1,000,419,319	\$29,833,249	2.98%
2005-06	\$1,090,396,257	\$31,962,937	2.93%
2006-07	\$977,194,172	\$33,652,788	3.44%
2007-08	\$1,017,532,009	\$37,326,887	3.67%
2008-09	\$1,012,269,221	\$37,799,841	3.73%
2009-10	\$1,027,831,047	\$39,530,587	3.85%
2010-11	\$1,046,082,332	\$38,275,731	3.66%

*These numbers underestimate the total cost of professional learning in Duval County because they only cover the costs of professional development for teachers, not for administrators or noninstructional personnel.

Source: Duval County Public Schools.

artistically challenging curriculum.” (Duval County Public Schools, 2012a). Therefore, it allocates a relatively large portion of its own resources to professional learning activities. In fact, in a recent study of resource allocation in several large urban districts, researchers discovered that Duval County spends the lowest amount of its funds on district management and the highest on instruction, including professional learning (Travers & Ferris, 2011).

“Collaboration results in high-performing networks of professionals, including parents and community members, with collective responsibility for greater student learning and achievement.”

— Dawn Wilson, executive director for professional development

2. The school system coordinates all its professional learning resources.

These include funds from federal programs such as Title I, Title II, Title III, Title V, and Race to the Top; state funds including the Supplemental Academic Initiative; and funds for Exceptional Student Education.

3. It seeks competitive grants and additional funding from a range of sources.

For example, the district applied for and received a five-year, \$9.6 million Teacher Incentive Fund grant from the U.S. Department of Education. By the end of the grant, it will have served more than 2,600 teachers

and principals in 36 of the district’s highest-need schools, affecting nearly 30,000 students. It also received a major Smaller Learning Communities Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, Duval County has received funding from national foundations and several local foundations and high-profile businesspeople over the years. In fact, a recent Fordham report naming Jacksonville the fifth-best city in the nation for school reform cites the high level of civic engagement as a key resource given low public funding (Hess, Palmieri, & Scull, 2010). Wilson asserts that “during a time of diminish-

ing resources, public-private partnerships are critical to leverage resources.”

HUMAN RESOURCES

The district’s vision for professional development states:

“All Duval County Public School stakeholders share a collective responsibility to participate in continuous professional learning resulting in increased and sustained achievement of all students” (Duval County Public Schools, 2012b).

This means that professional learning is facilitated by a combination of district and school coaches and mentors; teachers and teacher leaders; administrators at the district, regional and school level; noninstructional personnel, and consultants and other external service providers. The pie chart below shows the distribution of professional development funds for 2009-10 across the major service providers, a pattern that holds true for 2011-12.

SCHOOL-BASED PERSONNEL

Nearly seven in 10 dollars are devoted to school-level professional learning, primarily to support school-based coaches and mentors. This distribution of resources reflects the district’s commitment to keeping learning primarily at the school level and the fact that each school is required to develop its own professional development plan that encompasses planning, learning, follow-up, and evaluation (Duval County Public Schools, 2012c).

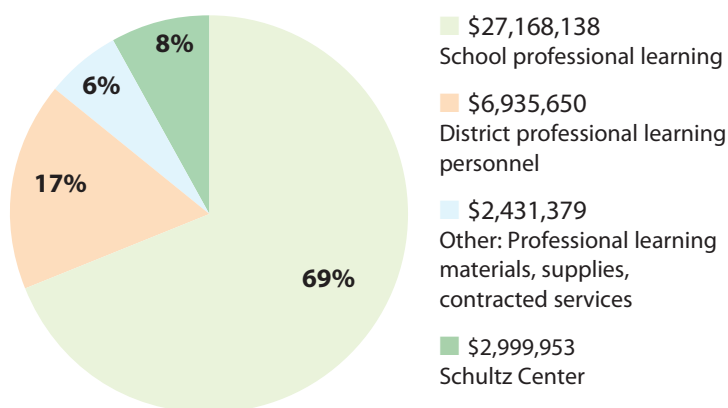
The highest-need schools in the district are designated as turnaround schools based on a complex set of criteria, including performance on state assessments and status on Florida’s Differentiated Accountability System. Each turnaround school receives three site-based coaches, one each for reading, math, and science. These content-based coaches share their content expertise with teachers, model effective instruction, give teachers an opportunity to practice effective instruction, and provide feedback. In the past, non-turnaround schools also had a half-time coach, but these school-based coaches were eliminated due to budget cuts in 2011-12. District coaches continue to provide support to these schools, however.

All school-based instructional coaches receive professional development one day a month through the district’s coaching academy. These interactive sessions, which are designed and facilitated by teams of district coaches, include content, pedagogy, case studies, assessments, application, documentation, and resources. The sessions are anchored on the principles of cognitive coaching and norms of collaboration.

DISTRICT PERSONNEL

Only 17% of the funds remain at the district level, primarily to fund district coaches and mentors. The coaches include 26 professional development coaches who provide assistance with developing professional learning communities, lesson study,

2009-10 professional learning fund distribution
TOTAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FUNDS = \$39,535,121



Source: Duval County Public Schools.

ESOL/diversity, collaborative teacher leadership, instructional strategies, assessment for learning, aligning curriculum and instruction, and using student data to differentiate instruction. Another 30 coaches in the Academic Services Department provide assistance in specific content areas, especially reading and language arts, mathematics, and science. In addition, a cadre of 24 district mentors supports novice teachers and trains school-based mentors.

District coaches and mentors are required to complete the coaching academy. The academy focuses on the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning and helps coaches and trainers deepen content knowledge, understand adult learning theory, model professional learning communities through the use of protocols, integrate technology into classroom learning, and learn cognitive coaching skills.

THE SCHULTZ CENTER

Another major resource for professional learning is the Schultz Center for Teaching and Leadership, which receives approximately 8% of the total professional development budget. A major service provider, the center provides professional development services to Duval County and other school systems in the area at its facility, at local school sites, through two-way video conferencing, and through online learning.

OTHER EXTERNAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

Duval County spends approximately 6% of its funds to bring in external consultants from Learning Forward, university partnerships, including Urban Professional Development Schools with the University of North Florida, and school-based initiatives with the University of Florida's Lastinger Center for Learning. Among the issues they address are lesson study, supporting novice teachers and evaluating professional learning. For a complete description of Learning Forward's role in professional learning in Duval County, see the report *Evidence of Effectiveness* (Slabine, 2011).

RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS BASED ON NEED

Wilson states, "The primary factor in allocating resources is ensuring improved teaching quality and student achievement." Therefore, professional learning resources are distributed based on 1) district priorities and initiatives as identified in the strategic plan; 2) student and teacher needs as identified in the teachers' individual professional development plans; and 3) the school improvement plan, which identifies professional learning goals based on teacher needs.

Within these overall guidelines, the district allows variation in resources if the difference gives needier schools the resources they require. For example, in the past, each district mentor was assigned to schools with varying numbers of novice teachers without regard to other school resources. With the needs-based, differentiated model, the cadre of district mentors is assigned

to schools based on the number of novice teachers and additional school resources, which may include content coaches and supplemental funding.

In general, novice teachers receive a significant share of the district's professional learning resources because of their greater needs. According to Wilson, about half of the district's novice teachers enter the system as non-college of education teachers. While they may have content knowledge, these teachers lack formal teacher preparation. To obtain Florida professional educator certification, they must participate in the teacher induction program to master the knowledge and skills of effective teaching. Duval County Public Schools offers novice teachers a range of differentiated programs based on their level of experience and previous preparation, in both face-to-face and online formats.

To ensure that this new learning is applied in practice, each novice teacher also has a school-based resource team to provide ongoing support: 1) the principal; 2) a professional development facilitator who coordinates the teacher induction program at the school; 3) a school-based mentor — a classroom teacher trained to observe and coach new teachers; and 4) a district cadre representative. School-based mentors may elect to participate in a professional development program that includes a summer mentoring academy and additional learning opportunities after school. Once trained, these school-based mentors "build the school's capacity to support additional novice teachers as they come on board," says Wilson.

The district gives each school a great deal of leverage in how it uses the available resources so that it can address its own

HOW TO FIND TIME TO LEARN

At Holiday Hill Elementary School, teachers find time for professional learning in several ways:

- **WOW (Working on the Work) Wednesdays.** One day a week, the principal and assistant principal meet with a grade-level team to look at student work, analyze student data, focus on differentiated instruction, or engage in other learning.
- **Early morning minilessons.** From 7:30 to 8:25, teachers can participate in minilessons to strengthen their practice in literacy, mathematics, and science. Lessons are taught by district coaches and the assistant principal, a former literacy coach.
- **Early dismissal time** gives teachers the opportunity to engage in professional learning after students go home.
- **Class coverage.** The principal and assistant principal cover teachers' classrooms so that they can observe fellow teachers practicing new instructional strategies.

needs and priorities. For example, at Holiday Hill Elementary, a non-turnaround school, principal Denise Ahearn devotes a substantial portion of her resources to the school’s large exceptional student education population. In addition, district coaches provide site-based learning sessions as well as classroom support in reading, math, and science. Teachers may also participate in district professional learning at the Schultz Center, and Ahearn attends professional learning sessions herself. When she returns, she shares what she learns with her leadership team, which then shares it with the teachers. Ahearn says, “The most important thing in this school is that teachers train each other.” When they attend professional learning sessions, they are expected to share what they learn with their peers. Her aim is “generating a lot of conversation, which is essential to improving teacher practice.”

FINDING TIME

Florida mandates that teachers spend 30 hours a year in professional learning, but Duval County provides far more — 97 hours per year. That number includes 73 hours dedicated to professional learning and pre- and post-planning (10 days per year at 7.3 hours per day). It also includes 24 hours a year for early dismissal time, which occurs twice per month. These hours are prescribed in the district’s collective bargaining agreement, as well as in its five-year professional development plan. They do not include hours that teachers spend learning during

the regular school day in professional learning communities — the centerpiece of the district’s professional learning strategy.

Based on state requirements and the district’s own commitment, all elementary and secondary teachers are expected to participate in formal lesson study during the school year. The district uses funding from both Race to the Top and Title II to fund substitutes so teachers may participate in this program. At the secondary level, every school participates in

what the district calls the PLC Plus program, while at the elementary level schools participate in what is called the Continuous Learning Cycle. Both programs involve developing a learning partnership between students and their teachers with the goal of improving teaching and student achievement. The

model focuses on analyzing data, setting goals, developing balanced assessments, integrating student voice, timely analysis of student work, and collaboratively planning lessons. Every school develops a schedule allocating common time for this work.

In addition, schools use common planning time and early dismissal for teachers’ professional learning throughout the year. According to Wilson, that means that Duval County schools meet Learning Forward’s recommendation that schools provide at least three hours of professional learning time for teachers each week, and in most cases they provide much more.

Finally, the school system offers many opportunities for learning during the summer. These include two-day or three-day just-in-time learning opportunities as well as sustained 60-hour courses in various content areas, with a heavy emphasis on literacy, math, and science.

About 350 people from the district’s turnaround schools also participate in a four-day urban institute. While some stipends are available for after-school and summer learning, Ahearn says that “a primary incentive for most novice and veteran teachers is receiving professional development points for recertification.”

USING TECHNOLOGY

Technology is a cost-effective way to facilitate professional learning. Therefore, the district uses technology frequently to “gather information, aid professional networking, obtain research, and gain access to internal and external expertise,” says Wilson.

For example, the district uses web cameras to video novice teachers so that cadre mentors and other content experts can observe them in their classrooms and provide virtual feedback. Cadre mentors and coaches can also use Adobe Connect to have discussions about effective instructional strategies, rituals, and routines. This networking system creates a virtual learning community involving mentors and novice teachers as well as experienced teachers.

As noted above, new teachers have three years to get their certification, which takes 300 hours of coursework. ESOL and reading courses are also required for certain teachers. To make it easy for them, the district provides online courses for every course mandated by the state. Online courses are also offered to other teachers in various content areas.

Finally, a challenge at the high school level is finding common planning time for teachers to meet or observe each other’s practice.

To address this problem, Duval County uses the TeachScape Reflect camera — a hands-free camera that provides a panoramic view of the classroom. It can capture teacher practice, the level of student engagement, what’s on the walls, and any writing on the chalkboard. The web-based system allows teachers, coaches, and mentors to observe other teachers’ lessons and add commentary to the video lesson at their convenience, day or night.

Duval County Public Schools

Jacksonville, Fla.

Number of schools: **172**

Enrollment: **124,288**

Staff: **7,300**

Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	38.9%
Black:	44.5%
Hispanic:	8.3%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	4.5%
Native American:	0.2%
Other:	3.6%

Limited English proficient: **3.1%**

Languages spoken: **Spanish, Burmese, Myanmasa, Arabic, Haitian Creole**

Free/reduced lunch: **54.3%**

Special education: **10.6%**

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INVOLVING MULTIPLE PLAYERS IN PLANNING AND MONITORING

The Professional Development Advisory Council — an advisory board that includes school and district staff, parents, community, PTA, and the teachers' organization — meets regularly to discuss professional development initiatives, monitor progress, and gather input from stakeholders. Duval County looks for evidence of professional learning impact at the individual, school, and district levels. A major asset is the district's information management system, which includes professional development data. Wilson considers the system invaluable because "it allows individual educators, schools, and the district as a whole to analyze information about professional learning."

At the individual level, teacher practice is monitored through observation by principals, coaches, and mentors, examination of individual professional development plans, use of learning rubrics, and changes in student work. At the school and district level, Duval County uses multiple data sources to monitor progress: state and district assessments, progress monitoring tools, lesson study guides, student portfolios, student performance assessments, Learning Forward's Standards Assessment Inventory, and other surveys. Teachers also provide information on changes in practice based on lesson study and district coaches and cadre mentors also provide monthly progress reports. In addition, Duval County Public Schools participated in the state's Merit Award Program, which provided performance pay rewards to outstanding district personnel at schools based on the performance of their students. The district also has a sophisticated system for measuring student growth over time.

RESULTS

In the past, the Schultz Center has carried out a number of evaluation studies on the district's coaching and mentoring programs, reading and math initiatives, teacher induction program, reading/literacy and PLC Plus, and several more studies are under way, including ESOL. Therefore, the district has a growing body of evidence regarding the impact of its professional learning efforts. For example, the center's evaluation of the district's standards-based literacy training for teachers included 2,300 teachers and 58,000 students from 2003-04 to 2007-08. The analyses revealed that the more days that teachers participated in professional learning, the greater the gains in student achievement on Florida's statewide reading assessment. Moreover, each day a teacher spent in literacy training produced discernible results. The average achievement gain in scores on the reading assessment for students whose teachers had less than five days of professional learning was 108.4, five to 15 days of professional learning was 113.2, and more than 15 days was 130.6, statistically significant differences. Literacy training affected teachers at all experience levels, and the relationship between teacher professional development and achievement gains was greater for students from low-income families (Schultz Center, 2008).

These data suggest that if school districts are serious about improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap, they must devote even more time and resources to professional learning.

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