



## Align your professional learning resources when facing limited budgets

**D**oing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is sometimes referred to as insanity.

Although the psychology community has not adopted this popular definition commonly attributed to Albert Einstein (among others), it's certainly one that gets quoted often. Perhaps one of the reasons we routinely refer to this adage is our human nature to live it. We eat the same fatty foods, get little exercise, and get frustrated when we're not losing weight. We hit the snooze button several times each morning, take the same traffic-heavy route to work, and fret about being late. What about us enlightened educators? When resources get tight and we hear calls for fiscal responsibility, district and building school leaders tend to follow the same strategy over and over: cutting the budget for professional learning while at the same time wondering why effective teaching is waning and fewer students are learning at high levels.

In each example above, there's research and data that should push us to make better choices. Doctors and nutritionists have laid out clear formulas for losing weight. Data collected over the years should convince anyone it makes sense to travel to work at times and via routes that are

less popular. When it comes to teaching and learning, research and years of practice have been sending consistent messages as well:

- The effectiveness of the classroom teacher is the #1 school-related factor that contributes to how well students do in school; and
- One of the most powerful strategies school systems have at their disposal to improve teacher effectiveness is high-quality professional learning.

Given what we know about the critical link between professional learning, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement, it's fascinating to me how quickly districts take the misguided approach and immediately slash their professional learning budgets when times

get tough ... essentially doing the same thing over and over again while expecting that teachers will do just fine without continuing their learning.

I do not want to give the impression I'm naïve to the realities facing many district and school leaders. I fully recognize there will be moments when resources are limited and choices need to be made. So how should school leaders respond when resources become limited and there are calls to trim the budgets? I offer the following suggestions:

1. Stop spending money on inef-

fective professional learning; bringing in speakers and haphazardly sending people to conferences and institutes without plans for follow-up or sharing what's learned rarely bring about long-term changes in practice.

2. Think differently about how teacher leaders are used to support the learning of their colleagues, how veteran teachers support the learning of novices, and how coaches and department chairs support the learning of their teams.
3. Restructure the school day so grade-level and subject-area teams have time to meet and develop structures that hold all accountable for demonstrating their learning and its impact on students.
4. Examine how current technology is used to support professional learning to ensure that technology solutions are aligned in principle with the Standards for Professional Learning.

Yes, we can always use additional resources to effectively do this endeavor we call teaching and learning. However, much of what we need is right at our fingertips. We just need to harness it much more effectively in order to avoid repeating past mistakes over and over again.

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