



Serve up a pie chart to illustrate investment in professional learning

Pie charts, also known as circle graphs, are fascinating visuals. Very simply, they illustrate different proportions that constitute a whole. A pie chart promotes accountability because it enables non-experts to quickly understand what makes up the whole, what portion of resources come from various sources of funding, or how an organization uses those resources.

What does this have to do with professional learning?

Everything, because too few people — educators, policymakers, and taxpayers — understand the sources or amounts of revenue that support professional learning, or how school systems allocate those resources.

There are also questions of who participates in professional learning and how, as well as sources and use of expertise that support new learning experiences.

Here are first steps school system leaders can take towards developing pie charts useful for improving professional learning quality, effectiveness, management, and communications.

Collect and analyze professional learning data. Credible data about professional learning is essential to collect and display, and in most school systems that will require new, systematic data collection. The first step is to frame big questions that drive the search for data. Such questions might include a focus on funding, designs

for learning, use of time, intensity, participation, and results.

Identify funding for professional learning. Funding for professional learning comes from a variety of sources and is used for multiple purposes. Understanding the sources of funding and how funds are allocated can inform decision making.

- During the past school year, what were the major sources of funding for all school system-sponsored professional learning, and what was the total amount derived from each source?
- Based on the school system's total expenditures for all professional learning during the past year, what was the aggregate allocation for each major type of learning experience (teacher time used for professional learning; training and coaching; administration of professional development; materials, equipment, and facilities; travel and transportation, etc.)

Identify professional learning time and venues. Professional learning occurs in many different places for different amounts of time. Both factors are important variables in the effectiveness of professional learning. However, most school systems have little data about professional learning contexts or time. Without it, they can neither monitor the adequacy of time for professional learning nor make informed judgments about how time is used. Professional learning in extended blocks of time, focused on a single area, for example, is associated with

increases in student achievement. Data produced by posing these or related questions could yield information that helps improve the quality and effectiveness of professional learning.

- Among all school system-sponsored professional learning during the past year, what proportion occurred at each type of venue (school, central office, professional development center, regional service center, out-of-district, out-of-state, etc.)?
- What portion of professional learning occurred during the school day or contract year and what occurred outside those parameters?
- Among those participating in school system-sponsored professional learning during the past year, what proportion participated in professional learning focused on a specific area of development for up to eight hours, nine to 20 hours, 21 to 40 hours, 41 to 60 hours, and more than 60 hours? Determining the most salient, narrowly focused questions to produce useful data will require collective discussion and deliberation among school system leaders and teachers who make decisions about professional learning. In all cases, though, the purpose of collecting data must be deemed useful in explaining and improving professional learning and investments in it.

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