

theme

EXPLORE THE STANDARDS
FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

RESOURCES

In their full essay for *Reach the Highest Standard in Professional Learning: Resources*, authors Karen Hawley Miles, top, and Anna Sommers note that more rigorous instructional requirements combined with tighter budgets



challenge school systems to think more deliberately about where and how they invest in teaching effectiveness. They write



that forward-thinking school systems see adoption of a comprehensive, integrated approach to professional learning as

necessary — but also fraught with challenges.

In this excerpt, they outline ways in which school systems can repurpose people, time, technology, and money to enhance professional learning and more effectively build and retain a powerful teaching force.

TAKE A WHOLE NEW LOOK AT HOW TO USE RESOURCES

By Karen Hawley Miles and Anna Sommers

Let's investigate in detail the most powerful resource levers for improving instruction. The following strategies, incorporating our findings from district research, case studies, and research on best practices, provide school system leaders with proven options for monitoring, trading off, reallocating, and coordinating professional learning resources in ways that maximize teaching and learning.

A system's ability and desire to implement these strategies depend on its current funding, capacity, and context. Identifying strengths, needs, and current limitations helps systems determine which areas to prioritize in the short term and which will require adjustments to current policies and contracts in the future.

A long-term perspective allows systems to tackle these levers for improving instruction, trading off and shifting precious resources in ways that, over time, balance the needs of individual teachers, teams, schools, and the system.

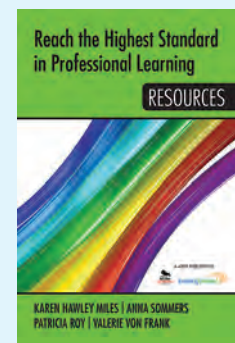
While we focus on the system level, individual principals can also act independently or in collaboration with district leaders on some of these steps.

Restructure compensation and career paths to increase teachers' effectiveness throughout their careers.

A look at a typical 30-year veteran teacher's compensation reiterates the trend in traditional districts of lockstep increases in pay for years on the job and self-directed continuing education, despite the fact that education credits and additional degrees have minimal impact on teaching effectiveness. The figure on p. 29 shows the drivers of salary increases for teachers with 30 years of experience in nine urban school districts (Education Resource Strategies, 2013b).

Most of these districts compensate for experience, then education, with only

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students **requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.**



ABOUT THE BOOK

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Denver, Charlotte, and Los Angeles devoting even a relatively significant portion of spending to pay for increased teacher responsibility and performance.

To understand current compensation structures and opportunities to direct resources in ways that are more closely linked to outcomes, consider the breakdown of total compensation spending by component in two fairly traditional systems. The specifics of salary and benefits structures provide slightly different alternatives for reallocation.

System A devotes slightly more to base salary and benefits,

providing less for education and years on the job than System B. Neither system invests in teacher leaders or other career junctures aside from induction.

As these two systems look to find more resources to increase pay for teachers who contribute the most, dollars going to support education credits and longevity may provide an important source of resources for reallocation in the long term.

Changing the compensation structure could potentially free funds for professional growth as well as dollars that could be used to pay teachers for taking on roles that expand their impact. Dis-

districts can reduce spending by eliminating increases for experience after the novice years or reducing the number of times or span of time over which they continue to give these increases.

Systems can reduce spending on education credits by eliminating them entirely or having fewer increments. In a district where this represents up to 10% of total compensation, these kinds of changes could enable the reallocation of significant dollars.

Redirect typical investments from general coaching to job-embedded teacher growth through school-based content experts and teacher leaders who work with teacher teams.

Some districts will have an opportunity to redirect a portion of the current investment in coaching positions to better support expert-led collaboration and team- and classroom-based instruction common in high-performing schools. Given the high teacher-to-coach ratios and tendency to concentrate coaches in the lowest-performing schools, providing sufficient expertise across entire districts to individual teacher teams around grade- and lesson-specific content can be difficult.

Replacing some coaches with rigorously selected teacher leaders — classroom teachers with partial responsibility for leading grade or subject teams — is one cost-effective solution. Successful teacher leader models, such as Touchstone Education’s Merit Prep, D.C.-based Ingenuity Prep, and Aspire charter schools, rely on teacher leaders, who are accountable for team and student success, to develop, craft, and support effective teams.

The T3 program, operated by the non-profit organization Teach Plus, provides another potentially powerful option for school districts that may not have sufficient teacher expertise in-house. Teach Plus recruits and rigorously screens high-potential teacher leaders from inside and outside the district, places them to work in cohorts together in schools, and provides professional growth opportunities for them throughout the year (Education Resource Strategies, 2013d).

School systems typically provide few formal opportunities for teacher leadership roles, and they invest little to develop teacher leadership (Education Resource Strategies, 2013b). But providing opportunities for the most effective teachers to extend their reach can encourage a teacher’s professional growth, incentivize and reward performance, and increase retention of the most effective teachers without requiring broad changes to compensation models (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007).

Teacher leaders receive an increase in pay and a reduced classroom teaching load to allow time to oversee, support, and

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develop individual teachers while working directly with their students. Funding for these positions comes from reducing the number of nonclassroom specialists and the salaries of those with narrower instructional roles and fewer work hours.

Additionally, giving effective teachers leadership roles extends their reach to more students and teachers and should have a significant effect on student performance. In fact, highly effective teachers in teacher leader roles can reach up to four times more students. Research shows that children with highly effective teachers, those in the top 20% to 25%, demonstrate three times the learning as children with teachers in the bottom 20% to 25% (Hassel, 2011).

Placing these teachers in leadership roles should compound those gains, because research shows that highly effective teachers who also serve in coaching roles can support more effective instruction among their peers (Blase & Blase, 2006; Killion & Harrison, 2006; Larner, 2004).

Also essential to the success of teacher leaders is the power of the teacher teams that they support. Not only do teachers prefer the camaraderie and idea sharing across classrooms, but teaming also improves effectiveness. According to research by Carrie Leana (2011), teachers who are less effective can perform as well as average teachers with consistent and valuable interaction with expert peers.

To leverage this investment in teacher leaders, school systems must ensure support and vigilance in teacher teaming. Effective teacher leaders need regular assessment data, collaborative planning time, and teams that are deliberately balanced in terms of skills.

To succeed, teacher leaders incorporate the school’s specific curricular, faculty, and student needs (Miles & Ferris, 2015; Suescun, Romer, & MacDonald, 2012). Therefore, the selection and training process of these leaders must be rigorous. This focus on candidate screening and expert quality has helped make Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s Strategic Staffing Initiative a keystone in its school turnaround strategy (Travers & Christiansen, 2010).

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Extend and maximize the use of teacher time for collaborative learning and planning.

Time is a prerequisite to a well-coordinated and powerful professional growth and support system, whether the strategies involve using teacher leaders as they work with teacher teams during collaborative planning time, introducing new curriculum related to the Common Core, or interpreting student assessment data to improve individual practice.

Despite its importance, time for teacher development is a rare commodity due to rigid state seat time requirements, collective bargaining agreements, and daily schedules that do not support collaboration. Making more time for teacher development can seem to conflict with the important goal of extending student instructional time. The majority of noninstructional time goes to released time and individual planning.

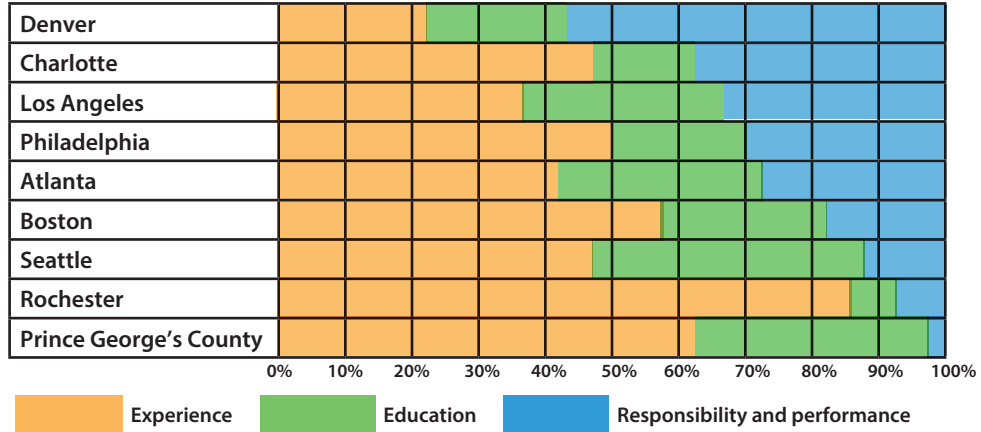
School systems that find time for growth focus on expanding noninstructional time and then ensuring that this time is carefully managed and used. School leaders in Columbia, Missouri, and Holt, Michigan, for example, created weekly collaborative learning time through careful scheduling that has students leaving school earlier or starting later on some days (von Frank, 2008).

As a charter management organization, Achievement First has significant control over the amount and use of time during the school year, with 45% more annual hours with which to work than most public school systems. This translates into nearly twice the noninstructional hours. In fact, half of these hours occur outside of the instructional day and year and do not compete with instructional time. This leaves 117 annual hours for collaborative planning time during the instructional day.

Making a portion of these professional growth hours available in traditional school systems is possible but usually requires changing teacher contracts and finding funds by restructuring the teacher compensation structure, as illustrated in the previous section, and capitalizing on the intrinsic appeal of collaboration and personal growth in the entire human capital value proposition for teachers (Shields & Lewis, 2012).

The 2010 report *Advancing High-Quality Professional Learning Through Collective Bargaining and State Policy* (NSDC, NEA, AFT, & CCSSO, 2010) details possibilities and includes examples for examining and adjusting bargaining policies in

BREAKDOWN OF SALARY INCREASE FOR A TEACHER WITH 30 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE



Source: www.nctq.org/customReport.do#criteria. Denver data represent teachers not on ProComp teacher compensation system.

context. Reworking the schedule to consolidate student noninstructional time — before and after school, around lunch and specials, reducing passing time with block scheduling, or offering elective blocks at the end of the school year — can increase time for teacher planning and collaboration. In addition, using inexpensive and part-time staff to cover lunch and noncore electives can free teacher time for professional growth and support (Shields & Miles, 2008).

Leverage and coordinate the growing investments in teacher support through curriculum, assessment, evaluation, and technology to raise organizational and individual effectiveness.

When combined, teacher support functions account for 10% to 15% of professional growth and support spending in Education Resource Strategies' partner school systems. Rather than manage curriculum development, student assessment, teacher evaluation, and professional development as separate silos with competing demands (see Miles, 2002), systems can forge connections between the departments to ensure that each support area complements and strengthens the others in the following ways:

- Standards-based learning goals and aligned curriculum materials provide the agenda for professional growth.
- Formative student assessment data, aligned to new standards, help target teacher learning needs. Frequent assessment results allow teacher teams to adjust instruction in real time.
- Evaluation rubrics capture the level of teacher performance across the range of skills and knowledge. Observation and evaluation data measure teacher growth and gaps, informing next steps for individual, school-level, and systemwide professional growth strategies (Education Resource Strategies, 2013a).

The figure at right highlights the optimal connections between curriculum, assessment, evaluation, and professional growth in a continuous cycle of teaching and learning standards; content, materials, and supports; and performance data, feedback, and adjustment.

Such integration allows school systems to take advantage of economies of scale and capture best practices to give students continuity of instruction and experience. Integration, however, is not without its challenges, especially when the diversity of school and student needs is large, instructional models vary, and professional growth and support is fragmented, controlled, and paid for by a variety of departments and cost centers.

Achievement First, with similar staff and student needs across the network and flexibility of resource use, has built a highly integrated system, one that more fully connects the specific components of an integrated professional growth system.

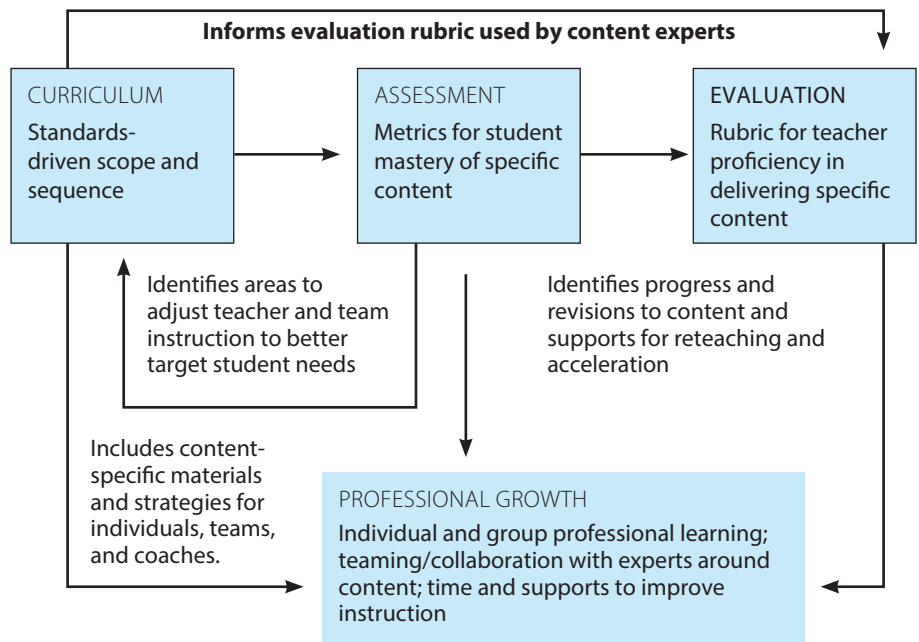
Most of the Common Core–based scope and sequence is delivered by “lead planners.” Curricula is aligned with assessments, via Athena, a new web-based platform that provides data by school, subject, teacher, and student for use by instructional coaches during team-based data days and one-on-one individual teacher sessions.

An online lesson platform allows teachers across the network to access guided curricula and share improvements. A teacher excellence framework guides frequent, informal meetings with evaluation coaches. Professional growth occurs from a mix of online material and support, weekly departmental meetings, data days, and team-based collaboration with content experts and adjusts to meet the evolving and identified needs of teachers and students.

These types of investments depend on adequate internal expertise and noninstructional time to analyze data and coach teachers to adjust instruction. School systems that lack the internal capacity or expertise can outsource materials, information, and support for better integration of professional growth and support.

Instructional guidance systems from outside vendors such as Agile Mind provide comprehensive systems for math and science when districts are unable to afford them (Education Resource Strategies, 2013c). Systems can purchase curricula and support in targeted learning areas that include daily content, formative

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND SUPPORT INTEGRATION



Source: Education Resource Strategies analysis.

assessments, student outcomes reporting, embedded professional development with coaching, and access to support materials.

A nonprofit organization, Achievement Network, provides integrated services to help schools leverage assessment data by providing data leaders, coaches, and tools organized by student and learning standard (Education Resource Strategies, 2013a).

A detailed annual calendar shows these activities as weekly and continual or at carefully designated intervals throughout the year. This ensures that information from one area informs others in a timely, useful fashion.

For instance, student assessment data feed into the evaluation system’s teacher effectiveness framework in time for formal and informal evaluations and is available during data days, when teams of teachers adjust instruction to fill gaps and keep pace with curriculum standards.

This deliberate orchestration of different functional areas ensures that goal setting, training, instruction, data gathering, analysis, feedback, and revision are coordinated as complementary streams of activity. The overlapping structure allows different decision makers to be aware of simultaneous efforts and reinforce and share a common vision.

Another significant challenge to school systems as they increase spending in Common Core curriculum, detailed assessments, and improved evaluation tools will be in providing adequate expertise to take full advantage of these investments:

- Implementing new curriculum requires training and coaching by content experts.
- Acting on assessment data requires analysis by data coaches.

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Take a whole new look at how to use resources

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- Leveraging evaluation information requires one-on-one debriefing time with coaches.

Even if a school system can find ways to shift resources to support these efforts, it may not have the necessary expertise to do so. This is why systems are turning to outside providers of teacher leadership, coaching, and analysis. It also puts a premium on using technology to lower the cost of mentoring, collaboration, and support.

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