

Building the Next Generation of Teacher Training

The traditional in-person, one-size-fits-all model of professional development is no longer effective, so many schools are reimagining their professional learning approach.

What's needed is an inquiry process for learning communities that encourages and supports educators as they engage in—and reflect on—the impact of their development, as evidenced by improved student learning.

The professional development cycle should simultaneously focus on teachers serving students, instructional coaches serving teachers, and mentors serving new educators: with everyone taking charge of their own development. Educators in a healthy professional learning community collectively inquire about school-wide challenges and seek solutions through thoughtful selection of professional learning, data analysis, and reflection.

A successful professional development program measures the effectiveness of professional learning on both teacher growth and student learning. It is also fully integrated into existing programs and initiatives, and aligns with professional teaching standards and teacher evaluation processes. Through a cycle of professional inquiry, teachers reflect on these essential questions:

- Based on student needs, what do educators need to know—and do—to support learning progress?
- What can educators do to help students learn best?
- What can educators, as colleagues committed to student success, do together?

The majority of professional learning time is often best spent in common planning sessions with teachers. During these common planning times, participants can deep-dive into data and work on regrouping students based on that data or perform observations in each other's classrooms, with a session afterwards for feedback. Lesson planning can be a significant part of these meetings as well.

When modifying curriculum (or implementing a new one), teachers should make a list of pros and cons and possible pitfalls in the curriculum together. Whether it is something as simple as peer observation or as complex as conferences or seminars with team members, new learnings should be taken back into the classroom to see how they affect the curriculum and then be modified accordingly.

Most every classroom observation should be based on understanding how a teacher takes their curriculum and turns it into an engaging lesson for students. Professional learning is more powerful when it's connected with and embedded within a teacher's everyday work, such as understanding the curriculum and planning lessons that engage students.

Teachers must always be asking tough questions:

- Was there a classroom that did well in a particular area that the others did not?
- What did that teacher do differently that could be tried in other classrooms?

Also, every time students have a summative unit test or a formative test, that data should be examined. Questions to consider include:

- What are students saying?
- What are teachers seeing when they're giving their lessons?
- What were some of the common trends seen in the classroom?

It all comes down to collaboration and the opportunity to observe colleagues. Teachers seldom get to see what is happening beyond their classrooms. Because they often use common lessons, educators will be fascinated to see the same exact lessons being interpreted in a different way right next door.