PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

K12 leaders adapt PD to the demands of modern learning

Social-emotional pros
Educators lead by example when teaching soft skills

Getting ed-technical
Teachers team with students to master digital world

School change agents
How principals evolve into instruction experts
# Contents

## Introduction

### Paving New Paths in PD
Professional learning must evolve in the same ways that classroom instruction is shifting

## Features

### Growth Trends
Mentoring, microcredentials and other new approaches increase engagement and effectiveness

### Social-Emotional Pros
Educators lead by example to develop students’ soft skills

### Big Picture Key to PD
Focusing on the four essential elements of successful professional development

### Getting Ed-Technical
How to help students best use new tools to create, collaborate and gain deeper knowledge

### Embracing Social Media
Principals find ideas and support from peers in online networks

### Postsecondary Problem-Solvers
Professional development in CTE adapts to demands of modern workforce

### Agents for Change
Principals become instructional learners to drive academic success
### COLUMNS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excelling in the Art of Administration</td>
<td>Lee Watanabe Crockett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective PD for the Skills Students Need</td>
<td>Linda Darling-Hammond, Maria E. Hyler and Madelyn Gardner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovate Like a Turtle to Improve PD</td>
<td>Vicki Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q&amp;A with Gail Chapman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SPONSORED CONTENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making Professional Development An Impactful Cycle of Learning</td>
<td>Solution Tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Quality PD for Administrators, Teachers and Paraprofessionals</td>
<td>Exceptional Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lasting PD for Literacy Educators and Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>Voyager Sopris Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Transformation</td>
<td>Hoonuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating Professional Development Tracking and Teacher Evaluation</td>
<td>TeachPoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands-On Professional Development That Helps Educators Teach Math and</td>
<td>Texas Instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Best-Practice Checklist for Professional Development Experiences</td>
<td>National Inventors Hall of Fame</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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22, 40, 52, 58
Collaboration, customization, soft skills and social media—the concepts that are transforming student instruction now drive PD in a growing number of school districts. Connecting all of these threads is a push to not only advance teachers’ skills, but to support educators in developing a clearer picture of the learning goals they want to achieve.

PD also continues to become less centralized. Just as students spend less time at their desks listening to lectures, teachers have taken the initiative to design their own professional learning sessions. A leading example of this is the social media-powered #edcamp movement in which teachers gather on a Saturday and work in groups to pick the PD topics for the day.

Teachers can also earn credentials and digital badges when they complete courses that focus on specialized skills, such as critical thinking or using video. Still, leadership remains a critical part of PD. This wave of changes puts more pressure on building principals to become their schools’ instructional leaders.

This also means superintendents and central office administrators must guide their districts in setting an overall PD vision that can be communicated clearly to their staffs, to parents and to other community members.

In this special report, District Administration examines the latest research on PD, and details several facets of the changing landscape—from competency-based programs to social-emotional learning to coding and computational thinking. To enhance student instruction and advance achievement, district leaders must ensure the abilities of their educators’ progress along these productive paths. DA
Making professional development an impactful cycle of learning

Well-planned professional development fosters a solution-seeking mindset for teachers and administrators

Timothy D. Kanold, Ph.D.
Author and consultant

How closely is professional development linked to student achievement?
Professionalism expects learning to be in the collective. We should think of our own learning and growth as part of a mutually beneficial ongoing professional development process. A big part of that idea is that we share and become more transparent in our practice as educators.

The best type of professional development exists within a constant cycle of learning around the essential learning standards and units of study we teach throughout the school year. Going to a conference can be really valuable, but only if we come back and apply that new knowledge in every cycle of student learning. I often ask teachers and administrators, “What impact did your work have this unit, this week, this month, this semester?” or “How did you know your work effort has had an impact on student learning?” If those types of collective teacher team discussions are happening, then the professional development process definitely impacts student learning.

What does effective professional development look like?
Effective professional development includes several components. It’s well-planned and ongoing. Teachers and administrators know in advance the details of the professional development plan for the school year. That plan also has to align with evidence of the current reality for teacher knowledge and growth as well as evidence—or lack of current evidence—for student learning. High-quality professional development provides space and time for teachers to reflect on current practices and then take action together to see whether their effort made a difference in actual student learning.

Another important aspect of effective professional development is the professional learning community process, an umbrella that

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Well-planned professional development fosters a solution-seeking mindset for teachers and administrators.

Well-planned professional development fosters a solution-seeking mindset for teachers and administrators.

helps teachers and teacher teams examine the impact of their professional development. An effective professional development program will also illustrate or highlight the part of the school’s vision for instruction and assessment and intervention that is being honored. Professional development cannot be random and unfocused. There needs to be coherence to the effort. If all professional development activities are connected to the vision for the professional work of the school, then coherence in the teacher growth process can be served.

**How do school and district leaders impact professional development?**

A positive impact occurs when they help orchestrate, organize, provide the time and actually teach part of the professional development. I’m a big fan of school district and school site professional development being led by people who are in central office or school site leadership positions. Leadership credibility is enhanced when school leaders help train and provide insight to team leaders and instructional coaches. Essentially, good administrators never stop teaching.

**Talk about professional development through the prism of happiness, engagement, alliances, risk-taking and thought, which is from your book, *HEART!: Fully Forming Your Professional Life as a Teacher and Leader.*

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When I wrote the book, I really wanted to get at the cultural elements of happiness in the workplace and becoming fully engaged in our professional work and life. I wanted each letter of the word “HEART” to stand for a different element of our work.

- “Happiness” is about passion, purpose and a positive impact in education.
- “Engagement” explores the research for overcoming the lack of being fully engaged in our daily work life. Only about one-third of all teachers and leaders fall into that category.
- “Alliances” asks readers to be open to forming alliances with their fellow educators so they can collaborate effectively, as an essential element of their professional development.
- “Risk-taking” demonstrates why teachers should engage in vision-focused risk-taking to create sustainable change in their schools.
- Finally, “Thought” focuses on the knowledge capacity educators should have to fulfill the heart of the teaching profession.

There are educational thought leaders as well as other organizational voices in the book. I have also included spaces in the book to reflect and write your own story. Many schools are currently using it as a way to engage in meaningful discussions about their workplace culture as well as to reconnect their staff to the meaning and the purpose of our work as K12 educators.

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Allowing the most talented teachers to mentor their colleagues leads the trends that districts are embracing to advance their PD programs.

For example, when the New Teacher Center, a nonprofit PD provider, comes into a district, it identifies mentors and then teams them with 15 new teachers. Each mentor spends 60 to 90 minutes per week in a first-timer’s classroom, observing and giving feedback so the new teacher can adjust practice, says Ellen Moir, founder and CEO of the New Teacher Center.

Milissa McClaire Gary, a former teacher at Chicago Public Schools, worked with the center as a mentor. She taught new teachers how to better determine which students were meeting objectives and where learning gaps had to be filled before moving on to the next concept, Gary says. “The support is so essential for teachers to identify what’s working,”

SPECIALTY SKILLS—Teachers can earn badges and microcredentials for “Student Choice and Voice” and other concepts through the nonprofit PD provider Digital Promise.

New PD approaches to increase engagement and effectiveness

By DA Staff Writers
Gary says. “It’s having a thought partner and an extra brain in troubleshooting what’s happening in the classroom.”

**Microcredentials**

As learning becomes more personalized for students, PD is also being differentiated for teachers through microcredentials and digital badges, the performance-based assessments that allow educators to develop specific skills.

A microcredential course can take days or weeks to complete, with the end goal of receiving a badge proving new expertise in a particular area.

Digital Promise, an organization focused on using technology to close learning gaps, offers a “Student Voice and Choice” badge to teachers who develop methods of giving their classes a choice in what they study.

This practice allows students to solve challenges they are passionate about, says Karen Cator, CEO and president of Digital Promise.

Administrators should give educators time to earn microcredentials and offer a variety of incentives. The intrinsic motivation to learn is one thing, but microcredentials can also play a role in license renewal and promotion, Cator says.

Approximately 90 percent of the teachers in the Kettle Moraine School District in Wisconsin have participated in at least one microcredential program, Superintendent Patricia Deklotz says.

**DIRECT DEVELOPMENT**—Rachel Jackson, a fourth-grade teacher at Courtenay Language Arts Center in Chicago Public Schools, worked with a mentor from the nonprofit New Teacher Center.

Teachers can add $200 to $600 to their annual base pay when they earn microcredentials.

Badges also help teachers close learning gaps, Deklotz says. At the high school level, for example, most science teachers have never had formal instruction in teaching students with learning disabilities how to read technical material. So Kettle Moraine offers a microcredential in teaching those specific reading techniques, Deklotz says.
Now, students in those classes are more prepared to do the work, she says.

**Competency-based PD**

Another new wave of PD programs assesses teachers on mastery of skills rather than simply giving them credit for completing a certain number of hours in a training course.

The Tennessee Department of Education started a competency-based PD program in 2016. It pairs groups of teachers with mentors to focus on topics such as research skills and asking effective questions.

The state’s teachers are now required to earn a certain number of PD points, including micro-credentials, to maintain licensure or achieve advancement.

The Cumberland County School District in North Carolina relies on its own teachers to develop competency-based PD programs in English, math, social studies and other subjects. In the Alamance-Burlington School System in the same state, curriculum specialists who serve as peer coaches play a key role in competency-based PD. The coaches observe teachers in the classroom and provide feedback on specific skills, says Robin Finberg, executive director of the district's curriculum and professional development department.

“It really puts the teacher in the driver’s seat, and the teacher really determines to what degree they need the coaching support,” Finberg says. “The format builds upon previous skills and competencies to gradually support teachers moving along the continuum from novice to experienced to master.” DA
High-quality PD for administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals

The Exceptional Child Online Professional Development System delivers special education-related training to all staff

Two years ago, Elizabeth Rincon was seeking to end the last-minute scramble to cull professional development for approximately 125 special education paraprofessionals on days when teachers had preplanned PD.

“Principals had to either swiftly get something together for paraprofessionals in terms of PD or they would email me and I would have to quickly plan a PD module,” says Rincon, director of special education for Timberlane Regional School District in southern New Hampshire.

Rincon came across the Exceptional Child Online Professional Development System, which provides online, on-demand access to targeted special education professional development courses for administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals.

With Exceptional Child, administrative staff spend less time organizing training and searching for affordable, effective PD.

The system also provides administrators with training on special education laws and important safety topics, such as restraint and seclusion.

General education teachers access video-based courses on topics such as autism or how to collaborate with the special education team. Exceptional Child also supports professional growth with custom PD plans for individual educators.

Paraprofessionals gain knowledge and skills to better support special education students and to learn behavior management strategies to address a wide range of student needs. Rincon adds that the ability to assign courses to new and longtime paraprofessionals addresses important training and PD needs.

“It’s a web-based system, so I sign up paraprofessionals when I

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High-quality PD for administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals

The Exceptional Child Online Professional Development System delivers special education-related training to all staff

Hire them,” Rincon says. “The system sends new hires an invitation, they click on it and they get into the system.”

Positive feedback
Rincon says Timberlane rolled out Exceptional Child two years ago, in the middle of the school year, and it was a smooth process due to good two-way communication and feedback. Rincon adds that Exceptional Child wanted input from Timberlane and made improvements based on the district’s feedback. For instance, at first Rincon could not easily pull rosters of paraprofessionals to see who was using the site, but Exceptional Child resolved that and added new search and reporting capabilities.

Exceptional Child proved to be an effective solution for the district’s “Blizzard Bag Days” that require staff to work four hours from home on selected snow days. Rincon says paraprofessionals can login from home, pick a course, take an assessment and print a completion certificate for proof that they actually worked that day. “This is a valuable feature for our district,” Rincon says.

Personalized PD
Rincon says one word that comes to mind about Exceptional Child is “personalized.” She says that Exceptional Child’s wide array of available content allows for personalization to cover all the special education PD needs in her district.

“The personalization of Exceptional Child was a huge benefit. Paraprofessionals pick different modules every day. I love the range of professional development that’s on there.”

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BETH RINCON
Director of Special Education
Timberlane Regional School District, NH
Social-emotional instruction in life’s soft skills—communication, problem-solving, stress reduction—holds as much promise for the adults in a school as it does for the students. That’s why SEL, as it’s often called, continues to become a more integral part of professional development in districts across the country.

Administrations at Bellevue School District in Washington compare SEL training to flight attendants telling adults to put their own oxygen masks on before helping their children. “Teachers who are emotionally regulated and well-rested and who have strategies for stress reduction are more effective in class and typically have stronger relationships with students,” says Liz Ritz, Bellevue’s director of curriculum and instruction.

GREAT EIGHT—PD in social-emotional learning at Humble ISD in Houston encourages teachers to focus on the “Great 8” skills, including optimistic thinking, self-awareness and goal-directed behavior.
PD should cover stand-alone lessons on emotional regulation and critical thinking, and should also guide teachers in embedding social-emotional skills into everyday academic activities. Below, educators and experts break down four components of effective SEL professional development.

**Mulling moral dilemmas**
Districts have developed several strategies for building SEL skills into general instruction. Elementary schools in the Anchorage School District in Alaska have a full- or part-time coach to help teachers integrate SEL and behavioral interventions, says Jennifer Knutson, the district’s senior director of professional learning. The coaches also follow up to ensure teachers use new skills. “We’d been seeing a disconnect between PD and what was happening—or not happening—at the classroom level with students,” Knutson says.

In the Bellevue School District and many other school systems, teachers learn to organize classes into small groups that require students to develop skills such as collaboration, communication and conflict resolution.

To integrate SEL into core subjects, an English teacher, for example, may ask students how a character in a book solves problems or tries to regulate emotions. “Students can apply these ideas to the characters before applying them to themselves,” says Randi Peterson, Bellevue’s social-emotional learning curriculum developer.

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**ENERGIZING EDUCATORS**—Social-emotional learning builds a growth mindset in adults in Metro Nashville Public Schools. Administrators and teachers are expected to create active classrooms where there is open-ended discussion and lots of movement.

Teachers can also lead students to exercise soft skills through “moral dilemma discussions,” says Jonathan Cohen, president of the National School Climate Center, which helps schools integrate SEL into instruction.

“Take a real dilemma—from a novel, history or current
“Educators and parents are always social-emotional teachers—whether they know it or not, whether it’s helpful or not, whether it’s systematic or not. Our behavior is always communicating lessons about what matters social-emotionally, civically and academically.”

—Jonathan Cohen, president of the National School Climate Center

news—that doesn’t have a simple black-and-white, right-or-wrong answer,” Cohen says. “When we repeatedly give kids that opportunity to struggle in the best sense of the word, it seems to be one of the most powerful ways to help students develop a moral compass.”

**Forming social contracts**

Teachers in Anchorage create social contracts with their classrooms at the beginning of each year. Teachers and students—in elementary and higher grades—discuss how they each want to be treated. Those rules are displayed on a classroom poster so everyone can be held accountable, says Knutson, the PD director.

“We’re also using social contracts in school staff meet-

ings with principals,” Knutson says. “The superintendent (Deena Bishop) does the same thing with her cabinet, and the school board has a social contract about how to work with one another.”

Many districts focus on building classroom communities by having teachers hold morning meetings with their students. In the Bellevue schools, many PD sessions begin and end with a talking circle where participants share their goals for the day.

These meetings also are a key component of the SEL pro-
professional development initiative launched three years ago at Humble ISD in Texas, which comprises more than 40 schools in the Houston area.

Humble’s program covers what Lesa Pritchard, the district’s director of counseling and behavioral services, calls the “Great 8” skills: optimistic thinking, self-management, relationship skills, goal-directed behavior, decision-making, personal responsibility, self-awareness and social-awareness.

The trainings are spread out, skill by skill, over two years. But the process starts with class meetings—and teachers are encouraged to hold at least two per week, Pritchard says.

“Through class meetings, teachers are having conversations with kids that may not have occurred before,” she says. “Teachers are seeing kids in different light—they’re seeing more of a whole child rather than just a kid who is struggling with geometry.”

Since then, one middle school cut failing grades by 40 percent, and the number of Humble ISD students sent to the office for behavioral problems dropped by 50 percent.

Pivoting away from punishment

Discipline, of course, represents another critical component of classroom management, and SEL principles are guiding educators away from suspensions, detentions and other more severe punishments of the past.

Metro Nashville Public Schools expects all principals to undergo training in the restorative justice practices that encourage students to repair damage—rather than suffer punishment—when they break the rules. The district has brought in specialized trainers to lead educators through the “restorative circles,” in which a student who’s in trouble discusses their behavior with teachers and classmates, who, in turn, get to talk about the harm they have suffered.

One challenge in implementing these practices has been
convincing educators that alternatives exist to the harsher disciplinary methods they may have experienced when they were students, says Kyla Krengel, Nashville’s director of social and emotional learning.

“It’s really about having hard, honest conversations about the practices some of us grew up with,” Krengel says. “Teachers have had to change their ideas.” DA

Matt Zalaznick is senior associate editor.

VISIONING PROCESS—Participants discuss their goals for the day at the beginning of each Humble ISD PD session. Teachers are encouraged to begin their classes with a similar meeting.

Stemming teacher stress

PD also directs teachers to focus on their own emotional well-being. Teachers in Metro Nashville Public Schools learn mindfulness techniques—such as deep breathing exercises—to settle their emotions before and during the school day, says Kyla Krengel, Nashville’s director of social and emotional learning.

To spread the impact, PD should extend beyond the classroom, says Melissa Schlinger, vice president of programs and practice at the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), an organization that guides schools in integrating SEL.

“Engage security guards, cafeteria workers and front office staff to make SEL part of the entire school community’s work,” Schlinger says.

In Bellevue School District in Washington, administrators are already seeing positive results from helping educators manage stress, says Randi Peterson, Bellevue’s social-emotional learning curriculum developer.

“The message I’m getting from teachers is that SEL has impacted their personal lives and their relationships with students,” she says. “They understand where their students are coming from, and they’re able to teach so much more content.”
When it comes to professional development, Regina Teat believes building the instructional capacity of every instructor and classroom teacher is the most effective use of time and money of any program, especially using grant funding. “When the money goes away, the capacity and knowledge through good professional development for the teacher remains,” says Teat, Director of Elementary Education and Title I & II for Dorchester County Public Schools, a rural district located on Maryland’s eastern shore.

When Teat was principal at Hurlock Elementary, a school in Dorchester County, back in 2004, she used funds from a federal Reading First grant to bring LETRS® from Voyager Sopris Learning as the course of study for literacy instructors and classroom teachers.

Teat explains that LETRS provides comprehensive professional development and support for educators who teach reading. It’s professional development for both new and veteran teachers—anyone who teaches literacy but may not have learned the science behind how students learn to read.

“LETRS also builds and deepens educator knowledge, including the ‘what,’ ‘why,’ and ‘how’ of literacy instruction,” Teat says. “It also
Lasting PD for literacy educators and classroom teachers

LETRS® from Voyager Sopris Learning focuses on raising literacy achievement for all students

helps develop a road map for meeting state standards. It’s not program-specific, it’s the foundation of good reading instruction.”

Positive results
Teat shared how LETRS co-author Carol Tolman (along with Louisa Moats) conducted summer training modules for the teachers at Hurlock. During the school year Tolman would observe classrooms, give teachers one-on-one feedback, and discuss data on student progress. This exposure and training helped sharpen the educators’ ability to diagnose students who were struggling with reading and to understand how to provide intervention that leads to literacy success.

“This helped each of my teachers,” Teat says. “My goal was for each teacher to become a reading specialist in knowledge and capacity, and that’s what LETRS training allowed us to do at Hurlock.”

Students were direct beneficiaries of their teachers’ increased literacy instruction. For example, the fifth-grade students’ reading proficiency, according to state assessments, was 36 percent in 2004 and improved to just under 80 percent by 2008. By 2011, those students were at a solid 80 percent.

Fast-forward
When Teat left Hurlock five years ago to become Supervisor of Elementary Education and Title I for the district, she decided to replicate the Hurlock success formula she experienced with LETRS at Choptank Elementary, another Title I school in the district. Teat worked with Tolman to lead the summer modules and school-year training at Choptank, and Teat says there was 100 percent buy-in from teachers. Once again, there was a rise in state assessment scores during the first two years with LETRS at Choptank.

“The bottom line is that if instructors work through the modules and apply that instructional capacity and knowledge, they will have a better understanding of how reading instruction works,” Teat says. “Students benefit from that.”
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PD focuses on teachers, for the most part. They spend most of their time dealing directly with students and have the greatest impact.

But doesn’t it stand to reason that better equipping administrators to do their day-to-day jobs would translate to better equipped teachers? After all, teachers love working for an administration that, with a clear vision, supports and inspires them.

PD for administrators exists, but research into its effectiveness is inconclusive. Most of it is still based on teacher-centered PD. Moreover, studies are geared toward PD that is offered by administrators to teachers, such as online development through Twitter and other social media outlets.

Surely, as an administrator, you have your own set of frustrations and your own setbacks.

You want tools to equip you to be better at what you do. This article seeks to provide PD ideas and, hopefully, a springboard to developing other opportunities for growth.

A glowing example
Paula M. Evans and Nancy Mohr offer PD for administrators through the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University (DAmag.me/ai). They begin with these questions:
Can PD for principals truly improve practice?

Can we encourage new behaviors that allow principals to make a genuine difference in their schools?

Can we support principals as they strive to be grounded and focused, bold and unafraid?

What they developed was a PD program that not only inspired administrators during the event, but fostered continued growth long after attendees left the workshop.

Principals from across the country commit to a year of development. They gather four times per year in groups no larger than 35, with regular communication between meetings. Participants get to know one another and are able to form solid networks of supportive professionals.

What’s the secret? The premise of the program is that administrators are learners. Also, the PD is powered by “Seven Core Beliefs”:

1. **Principals’ learning is personal, and yet takes place most effectively in groups.** Principals join one of many small groups that meet regularly for discussions and seminars. Additionally, participants become close colleagues, communicating regularly throughout the year via email or phone.

2. **Principals foster more powerful faculty and student learning by focusing on their own learning.** The focus of these sessions is always to better the principal. The improvement will trickle down to the teachers and ultimately the students. By becoming better leaders, principals will become role models. Surprisingly, this is accomplished by allowing principals to examine students’ work.

By becoming better leaders, principals will become role models. This is accomplished by examining students’ work. Making a connection via the work of students can profoundly influence who principals are and who they want to be.
Making a connection via the work of students can profoundly influence who principals are and who they want to be.

While we honor principals’ thinking and voices, we want to push principals to move beyond their assumptions. Too often, principals fall into patterns that are unhealthy for their team. By getting them to study and discuss texts that challenge their thinking, principals begin to see different viewpoints.

Focused reflection takes time away from “doing the work” — but it’s essential. Time for reflection is what many of us, principals included, neglect. Yet it is so important for digesting new insights and other viewpoints. Principals are encouraged to talk to their groups about dilemmas they had not handled well. This encourages them to reflect on how they could have handled those differently.

It takes strong leadership to have truly democratic learning. By listening carefully and then taking the group’s needs in mind, principals find solutions that are good for the whole. Intellectual debate and planning for success are all keys to democratic learning and they are components of strong leadership.

New learning depends on “protected dissonance.” Protected dissonance means that principals are encouraged to be themselves and have their voice. During PD, a climate of respect is established right away to ensure a feeling of safety, but it also stirs excitement in the dialogue. All leaders take risks and all leaders are willing to learn. DA

Lee Watanabe Crockett works with educators and corporations in several countries to develop skills and mindsets that learners need to flourish. He is co-author of a number of books, including Literacy Is NOT Enough: 21st Century Fluencies for the Digital Age.
Jeff Watson, Ph.D.
Vice President of Education Research & Consulting, Hoonuit

School districts know that “sit-and-get” professional development isn’t working and can have extreme consequences, such as high teacher turnover and poor student performance. To combat this, across the country there is an ongoing, rapid evolution of professional development to be more personalized. While change in education is often slow, this long-overdue advancement is quickly taking shape.

Decision-making regarding professional development is complex. Districts are taking a variety of approaches to personalize professional development. Educator evaluation (and the underlying observation framework), educator input, leadership priorities and student achievement are all used to determine areas for improvement. A number of states are switching from requiring professional development hours for re-licensure to requiring individual PD plans allowing teachers to take greater ownership in the process. Research has uncovered that the most effective PD boils down to a few key characteristics:

1. It focuses on content knowledge.
2. It actively engages teachers.
3. It is embedded within teachers’ work.
4. It’s of sufficient duration and is sustained over time.
5. It involves a majority of staff.

These key ingredients drive positive changes in teaching practice and improvements in quality instruction.

So what does effective professional development look like? Effective professional development is a collaborative, personalized process of continuous improvement. At Hoonuit, we believe this...
Professional development transformation

Improving quality instruction through personalized PD

starts with quality content that can be delivered online, face-to-face or in a blended environment with the ability to leverage assessments and a PD creation toolkit to tailor content to individual or district needs. Once an educator begins learning we move them through an active framework to apply, share and prove the concepts to ensure that learning outcomes are achieved and can be implemented into practice.

Just as effective teaching doesn’t conform to a one-size-fits-all model, meaningful professional development programs can take a variety of different forms. For districts to ensure that the learning opportunities they provide for their teachers and staff are positively impacting instruction, district leaders must understand the important role they play and dive deeper to challenge the quality and delivery of PD. To shed light on the ability to challenge, Hoonuit offers insight for district leaders to quickly see behavior trends, in order to make decisions about utilization, individual performance and initiative adjustments.

“So what does effective professional development look like? Effective professional development is a collaborative, personalized process of continuous improvement.”

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Empowering educators with knowledge and insights to improve student outcomes.
The BIG PICTURE key to PD

By Kurt Eisele-Dyrli

How to focus on the four essential elements of successful professional development
Suzanne M. Wilson has researched teacher knowledge, curriculum reform, education policy, measures of teaching effectiveness and professional development. As the Neag Endowed Professor of Teacher Education and head of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Connecticut’s Neag School of Education, Wilson has found PD to be most impactful and engaging when instruction connects to a district’s curriculum, assessments and leadership policies.

What has the research found about effective PD?
Research over the last 30 years has identified four main requirements for any successful PD program:
1. Teachers need sufficient time to learn and apply what they have learned.
2. PD must align with the district’s other systems, such as the curriculum, teacher evaluations and student assessments.
3. Teachers need to be actively involved and engaged with the content.
4. PD must be grounded in the context of the teacher’s specific subject area.

PD needs to be aligned to the district’s policies, leadership and overall environment. When PD isn’t effective, it’s often because it has just been inserted into a context without taking this holistic view.

What challenges do administrators face?
One challenge is that PD often comes in on the tail end of something else, such as a new textbook or curriculum, or a grant or university program, and it’s hard to coordinate all of these efforts. Sometimes there is no one with a big picture view of PD in the district and how it meets teachers’ learning needs.

What’s a solution to that?
Take an inventory of all PD in the district, and then look at how it aligns with the district’s workforce needs.

Some districts might have a wave of new, young teachers. Their PD needs are much different than older, more experienced teachers. Or, if the district has adopted a new science curriculum, it should look at how effectively the PD supports that adoption.

Get a big picture view, then map that view onto your learning needs and identify areas of strength or weakness. Then think about the internal capacity you have—if you don’t have a “deep bench” of science teachers, for example, you could partner with a local science museum to support PD. There is an array of partnerships that districts can take advantage of. Cultural institutions, colleges and universities, and industry all have important roles to play.
How are colleges and universities changing their approach?
Colleges and universities provide more options for PD beyond the traditional master’s degrees and summer institutes. They are expanding to be more collaborative because there’s a growing understanding that these institutions shouldn’t be dictating to K12 educators. They should collaborate.

If an administrator is in need of PD expertise, would you recommend they reach out to higher ed?
Without a doubt. I don’t know of any institutions that wouldn’t be interested. In fact, I think most colleges and universities are hungry for partnerships with school districts.

First, I would advise identifying a specific need. That will help the institution connect you with the school of education, educational psychology or other departments. Partnerships like this can also help districts and universities win grant funding.

This is often something that grant providers are interested in fostering.

Do you get a sense of where PD is headed?
A lot of people believe technology and social media are going to transform PD. You wouldn’t believe how many teachers today are getting lessons from Instagram.

But a word of caution: We know that lessons need to be part of a coherent curriculum. So again, taking a big picture view is important. If you’re piecing together lessons from sources like that, quality control is a concern, as is coherence with the curriculum.

This generation has a different way of accessing information, communicating and relating to one another. If we can figure out a way to tap into that with the next generation of PD, that could be very powerful.

Policywise, it can be very difficult to implement changes nationwide because of the scale—we have around 4 million teachers in this country. Even in one state, the scale can be overwhelming. But that’s why local districts are so important. I think superintendents and administrators are in a fabulous position to make significant change and to have a positive impact. DA

Kurt Eisele-Dyrli is web seminar editor.
Integrating professional development tracking and teacher evaluation

TeachPoint is a versatile tool for administrators and teachers to manage the PD and evaluation processes

When Mark MacLean became superintendent of the Merrimack Valley and Andover School Districts in New Hampshire four years ago, he wanted to find an online solution for teacher evaluation that could also link to professional development.

After some research with his leadership team, MacLean found TeachPoint, which offers a Professional Development Tracking Solution that also enables districts to link ongoing professional development with its Educator Evaluation Solution. MacLean decided to use the Evaluation Solution on its own for one year before adding the PD Tracking Solution.

“The best thing about TeachPoint solutions is the fact that we can customize them,” MacLean says. “The team behind TeachPoint has a great entrepreneurial spirit, and its focus on continual product development ensured that it met the needs of our districts.”

Before engaging with TeachPoint, MacLean says the methods to track and analyze PD and evaluations were analog, paper-based processes.

“We used a combination of spreadsheets, and some forms that come in triplicate and have carbon-copy sheets in the middle of them,” MacLean says. “It was a paper shuffle, but with TeachPoint, we can be much more efficient. TeachPoint enables us to do away with that paper shuffle.”

Ease of use

“One of the great things about TeachPoint is that the user
Integrating professional development tracking and teacher evaluation

TeachPoint is a versatile tool for administrators and teachers to manage the PD and evaluation processes

interface is very intuitive,” MacLean says. “Teachers can sign up for district-sponsored PD events inside the TeachPoint platform and it automatically enrolls them in the PD session. There is also an automatic sign-in process when teachers attend a professional development event.”

The Individualized Professional Development Plan (IPDP) for all district teachers is done directly in TeachPoint, where teachers create their goals that become embedded tags.

MacLean says the tagging system allows PD experiences to be categorized, analyzed and revisited over the course of a teacher’s IPDP, which lasts three years and links to their state recertification.

“TeachPoint has been a great platform for teachers and administrators to collaborate and rally around professional development,” MacLean says.

**Bottom-line benefits**
MacLean says the TeachPoint PD Tracking Solution removes cumbersome paperwork and makes information about professional development opportunities more accessible to educators across the district.

“It has significantly reduced opportunity costs because we have people spending less time tending to analog procedures,” MacLean says. “Staff can focus on professional development. It’s a more streamlined and efficient way.”

MacLean says that implementing TeachPoint has changed professional development and teacher evaluation conversations, which now focus less on process and more on results, pedagogy, teacher improvement and setting up success. Teachers and administrators work together on assessment, communication and instruction using both TeachPoint solutions.

“Now there is a relationship between supervision, evaluation and professional development,” MacLean says. “We use the tagging system from a teacher’s Individualized Professional Development Plan, and use the rubrics that we set up for supervision and evaluation, to look at results and use them to inform future goals.”

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Learning the ins and outs of edtech helps district administrators support classroom instruction

Now that technology is a fixed component of K12 classrooms, educators have been learning innovative ways to help students best use these tools to create, collaborate and gain deeper knowledge.

Gone are the days of simply handing students tablets or laptops to use as souped-up textbooks. “Right now, what schools need is for the administrator to be the best teacher on campus,” says Jon Corippo, chief innovation officer of CUE, a nonprofit education organization dedicated to edtech PD. “We need administrators who...
can roll into a classroom and say to teachers, ‘Here are a few ways we can take what you’re doing and make it more engaging for kids, and create more opportunities for creativity.’”

Superintendents and CIOs first need to develop a comprehensive technology vision for a district. That includes setting a strategy of execution where early adopters then lead the way, followed by a wave of secondary users who help lead the training of remaining personnel.

By having practical experience with edtech, an administrator becomes a more credible partner in innovation with classroom teachers.

Starting at the top
The Riverside County Office of Education in Southern California oversees multiple districts.

To provide edtech PD for administrators, the office has partnered with Leading Edge Certification, a national, vendor-neutral certification program created by an alliance of nonprofit education organizations.

As a result of this training, Hemet USD (21,000 students) has created “a tech cadre” in which an administrator from each K12 building develops a customized PD program for their school, and then will be on call to support teachers as it is implemented.

Teachers on special assignment—who are not assigned to a specific class and who support instruction as needed—receive PD first and then pass it along to classroom teachers.

The county PD takes place online, in eight modules over eight weeks, and is aligned to ISTE standards. Each module takes six to 10 hours to complete, and features online coursework such as videos, reading materials and writing assignments that are reviewed by peers. PD topics include leading digital instruction, fostering digital citizenship and structuring blended learning environments.

“These courses are very rigorous—it’s like taking graduate-level classes,” says Dennis Large, Riverside County’s director of educational technology.

The program costs $749 per administrator, although group rates can be arranged. It is funded through Local Control and
Accountability Plans, a state program that supports initiatives aimed at improving student outcomes. Multiple district administrators participate in the program at the same time, which allows them to work together.

Hemet first began providing the county's PD program in 2014. “We started with a two-pronged approach, teaching teachers while simultaneously training principals,” says Natalie Ruddell, Hemet’s coordinator of digital learning.

The principals—in order to provide more effective PD—gained edtech confidence and insight into what teachers needed to accomplish, Ruddell says.

So far, more than half of Hemet’s 60 administrators have been trained.

**Building support**

Basing PD on the goals administrators hope to achieve with new technology can motivate participants and, ultimately, improve instruction.

Sweetwater Union High School District (44,000 students, 1,400 teachers) in Chula Vista, California, follows this approach. PD focuses on a particular edtech platform and the specific reasons why it should be adopted—such as how it can improve student engagement, says Georgina Meza, program manager for educational technology.

The district, which has gone 1-to-1 in middle school and gives every high school student a laptop, provides initial PD to a “site tech” at each building.

The site tech and a blended learning specialist (who is also a full-time teacher) then develop a tech implementation plan for their school.

They then move into the classroom to model specific edtech tools for teachers. This allows them to provide hands-on support and to deal with any technical glitches without disrupting instruction.

Participants also learn how to move around the classroom while using edtech. Such agility is shown to increase engagement, promote student collaboration and help in controlling disruptive students.

Some of the tech specialists develop on-site teams to reinforce PD and to better assist their colleagues through each edtech adoption.

**An ongoing process**

When it comes to PD, “You have to continually show and model new approaches while integrating any education technology,” says Ruddell, of Hemet USD.

By understanding what edtech integration looks like in the classroom, an administrator can better support the teachers with whom they work.

“Administrators are smart people,” says Corippo, of CUE. “What they need are skills to get out in front of things.”

Ray Bendici is special projects editor.
Timothy Collier has been teaching high school mathematics for more than 30 years, most of them at McAlester High School in southeast Oklahoma, where he is the department chair. State budget cuts have affected McAlester High School and the district’s eight other schools, especially in the area of professional development for teachers, who were facing shifting state standards in math and science.

In 2011, McAlester became one of the school districts involved with the federal grant program GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) at Eastern Oklahoma State University, which focuses on increasing the number of low-income students who enter postsecondary education.

Through GEAR UP, the district purchased TI-Nspire handhelds, which connect wirelessly to a teacher’s computer using the TI-Nspire Navigator system.

“This technology, and the teaching methods that surround it, have changed my career,” Collier says. “There is no teaching methodology that compares to this system, which allows students to investigate mathematics for themselves and interact with complex ideas in a very accessible format. I get excited each time I learn a new creative application of this technology.”

**Connecting the dots**
Students use TI-Nspire handhelds in math and science classes. Teachers can do on-the-spot assessments by sending quick polls.
or questions directly to the students’ handhelds. To learn to use the tools effectively, teachers attended workshops, and instructional coaches from Texas Instruments came to their classrooms for PD on using the tools for formative assessment and deeper student engagement.

“I can’t overstate the value of that coaching piece,” Collier says. “It has changed the way my department communicates about pedagogy and handles formative assessment.”

Select teachers also participated in a Teacher Leader Cadre, in collaboration with other teachers across Oklahoma, to get further trained on the technology and pedagogy. The result of that program is that participating teachers became experts in their schools and can share best practices with other teachers.

“This is the most impactful professional development I have been in,” Collier says. “Nothing has made a greater impact on day-to-day math instruction in the classroom with students.”

**Bottom-line benefits**

Collier says math pedagogy better aligns to McAlester’s curriculum thanks to the TI-Nspire handhelds and TI-Nspire Navigator system, along with ongoing support from Texas Instruments coaches.

“Thanks to the software, equipment and coaching, this has changed the way we communicate with each other, and the way teachers deliver instruction to students,” Collier says.
Great teachers make great students

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Educators and policymakers look increasingly to professional learning as an important strategy for supporting the complex skills students need for further education and work.

For students to master problem-solving, communication, collaboration and self-direction, teachers must employ more sophisticated forms of instruction. Effective PD is key to teachers learning and refining the pedagogies required.

But what constitutes effective PD? We reviewed 35 methodologically rigorous studies that have demonstrated a positive link between PD, teaching practices and student outcomes. Key features of effective efforts can inform education leaders and policymakers seeking to leverage PD to improve student learning.

**Key components**

Effective PD is structured learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student achievement. We found that effective programs incorporate most, if not all, of the following elements:

- Content-focused teaching strategies associated with specific curriculum content support learning within classroom contexts. This includes an intentional focus on discipline-specific curriculum development and pedagogies in areas such as mathematics, science or literacy.
- Active learning engages teachers

“Inadequate resourcing for PD—including insufficient curriculum materials—frequently exacerbates inequities and hinders school-improvement efforts”
directly in designing and trying out strategies in the same style of learning they are designing for students. Such PD uses authentic artifacts, interactive activities and other strategies to provide deeply embedded, highly contextualized professional learning.

- **Collaboration:** Make space for teachers to share ideas in job-embedded contexts. Teachers can develop communities that create positive change in the culture and instruction of their entire grade level, department, school and district.
- **Models of effective curriculum and instruction** give teachers a clear vision of what best practices look like. Teachers may view models of lesson plans, unit plans, student work and observations.
- **Coaching and expert support** involves sharing expertise about content and evidence-based practices, focused on teachers’ individual needs.
- **Feedback and reflection:** Provide time for teachers to think about, receive input on and make changes to their practice. This helps teachers move thoughtfully toward the expert visions of practice.
- **Sustained duration:** Give teachers adequate time to learn, practice, implement and reflect upon new strategies that improve practice.

Professional learning communities incorporate several of these effective elements and support student learning gains. This collaborative and job-embedded PD can be a source of efficacy and confidence for teachers, and can result in widespread improvement within and beyond the school level.

**Create ideal conditions**

The education system within which PD occurs has implications for its effectiveness. Specifically, conditions for teaching and learning both within schools and at the system level can inhibit the effectiveness of PD.

For example, inadequate resourcing for PD—including insufficient curriculum materials—frequently exacerbates inequities and hinders school-improvement efforts.

Failure to align policies toward a coherent set of practices is also a major impediment, as is a dysfunctional school culture.

**Support and incentivize PD**

Examples of PD that have been successful in raising student
achievement can help policymakers and practitioners better understand what quality professional learning looks like. Below are recommended actions for policymakers to support and incentivize the kind of evidence-based PD described here.

- Adopt standards to guide the design, evaluation and funding of PD.
- Arrange school schedules to increase teachers’ opportunities for PD and collaboration, including participation in PLCs, peer coaching, classroom observations and collaborative planning.
- Conduct staff surveys to identify areas of PD most needed and desired. Data from these sources can ensure that PD supports the areas of knowledge educators want to develop.
- Identify and develop expert teachers as mentors and coaches to support learning in their areas of expertise.
- Integrate professional development into Every Student Succeeds Act school improvement initiatives. These include new learning standards, using student data to inform instruction, improving literacy and increasing access to advanced coursework.
- Use funding available under Titles II and IV of ESSA to provide technology-facilitated PD and coaching in rural districts. This can also expand opportunities for intradistrict and intra-school collaboration.
- Offer flexible funding so teachers can continuously engage in collaboration, mentoring and coaching, and also attend institutes, workshops and seminars.

Well-designed and implemented PD should be an essential component of a comprehensive system of instruction that enables students to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies they need to thrive.

To ensure a coherent system that supports teachers across the entire professional continuum, PD should link to their experiences in preparation and induction, as well as to teaching standards and evaluation. It should also create a bridge to leadership opportunities to support teachers’ growth and development.

“PD should create a bridge to leadership opportunities to support teachers’ growth and development.”

Linda Darling-Hammond is president and CEO, Maria Hyler is deputy director and senior researcher, and Madelyn Gardner is a research and policy associate, all with the Learning Policy Institute.
A best-practice checklist for professional development experiences

Authenticity, contextual learning, creative climate, and reflection and transference are essential to high-quality PD

Jayme Cellitioci
Creativity and Innovation Strategist
National Inventors Hall of Fame

While innovations typically involve a high degree of novelty and a paradigm shift, tried-and-true best practices often serve as their launch pad and rocket fuel.

In designing and selecting professional development opportunities that harness and reflect best practices in education, there are four key elements for a high-quality experience: authenticity, contextual learning, a creative climate, and reflection and transference.

These insights have been validated through conversations with National Inventors Hall of Fame inductees—some of the country’s greatest innovators—over the last quarter of a century.

Authenticity
What are the stories that constitute the experience, whose stories are they, and do they feel like credible inspiration for your growth and development?

We asked many of our inductees to speak directly to educators and administrators across the nation. We captured their messages as personalized videos that we share in our professional development workshops.

Many of the inductees’ messages highlight specific teachers who gave them inspiration, illuminating the power of the personal impacts of educators.

Contextual learning
Is the learning of the material engaging, does the content help you view subjects in a transdisciplinary manner and make meaningful connections, and are you learning by doing?

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A best-practice checklist for professional development experiences

Authenticity, contextual learning, creative climate, and reflection and transference are essential to high-quality PD

transformed the classroom practices of thousands of teachers across the country—making them more comfortable with and excited about teaching STEAM in an immersive, hands-on manner that follows the lead of the children.

A creative climate
Is the learning environment supportive, will you feel safe to set and work on stretch goals, and is novel thinking and risk-taking encouraged?

All of our programs focus on cultivating a climate for creativity and innovation. One of the most powerful ways this can be accomplished is by applying a key rule of classic brainstorming: deferring judgment. This rule can often be easier to employ in relation to others’ ideas than it is for our own. Strategies for overcoming this challenge and others are integrated within our programs, along with dynamic tools, techniques and processes from the creativity and innovation fields. In addition, we focus on building other 21st century skills, such as team-building, collaboration and communication.

Reflection and transference
Will you have the opportunity to assimilate your learning from the experience and self-assess, create a transference plan and reflect on benchmarks for growth and success with the material at hand?

Innovators must get their ideas out of their minds and into prototype form, so that they can test and reshape those ideas based on observation and feedback. It is just as important to consider how an individual feels about their own growth as it is to receive external feedback. Our professional development workshops empower individuals to take stock of their own progress and consider how they will positively apply that development in a way that impacts the youth with whom they work. When you bring these four key elements together, you are on track to having an exceptional professional development experience.

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A principal’s job is often a lonely one, with little access to advice, guidance or even a sympathetic ear. Networking tools can change that, says Joseph Sanfelippo, superintendent of the Fall Creek School District in Wisconsin.

In *Principal Professional Development: Leading Learning in the Digital Age* (2015, Corwin), Sanfelippo and Tony Sinanis, superintendent of Hastings-on-Hudson Union Free School District in New York, offer a well-researched yet accessible guide to how school administrators should embrace social media.

Sanfelippo spoke with DA about how principals can...
take control of their professional learning and become better equipped to handle the multitude of challenges they face daily.

**What’s different about principal PD compared to faculty PD?**
There’s usually only one principal in the building. There could be assistant principals, but at the end of the day, the decisions you make are yours alone when it comes to being the leader. It’s not unlike the superintendency, where you get placed on an island and you’re told to just get better. At the same time, there’s not a lot helping you to get better.

We always come back to the idea that we lead learning organizations, so we should lead the learning in those organizations. Principals want to learn. They’re driven people.

At the same time, they’re also very reactive to the things that are going on around them because they’re trying to take care of everybody. When they try to take care of everybody, their self-care, in terms of learning, tends to take a back seat. Professional learning should not be “one more thing that we do,” it should be part of our day.

**The principal often learns the job on the fly. How does your idea of PD make sense of that?**
Our book was written to answer a number of logistical questions principals have. How do you set time in your schedule? How can you use digital tools to continue your learning? Instead of going out and fishing for information, how do you make sure that information comes to you?

That said, it’s really important to find a way for principals to continue their learning and model it for their staff.

“People believe if principals are not actively engaging with others, they aren’t doing anything.”

**Do you think there is more value in learning networks than there is in a traditional workshop or seminar?**
Oh, without question. The traditional conference is one where you go and get a bunch of information delivered to you, but you don’t have the time or opportunity to absorb it. You have that honeymoon period where you think about all the wonderful things that you’re going to do as you’re on your ride back to your school.

Then you get to the school and there’s two bloody noses
and somebody got into an argument and you’ve got to cover a class. Before you know it, you’re back in the routine and you no longer remember all the cool things you learned.

“The best part about Twitter for me is that it’s a place where a lot of people live.”

You created your network via Twitter, right?
Right, and the vast majority of the learning is through Twitter. We follow hashtags that really speak to the PD elements we’re trying to get to. We have lists developed on our own Twitter feeds where if we’re looking for educational leaders or organizations, we can see what they’re tweeting about.

The best part about Twitter for me is that it’s a place where a lot of people live. At the same time, you can make it whatever you want. There are no rules when it comes to how you learn on that platform.

What other platforms do you rely on?
We sometimes use Google Hangouts and YouTube Live. Another big learning tool we have used for the networking component is Voxer, which is fantastic when it comes to connecting with people. It’s an asynchronous messaging app and you can create a group of 100 superintendents from across the country. You can ask those superintendents a question and within a half-hour you’ll get five or 10 responses with helpful suggestions.

What are some other best practices for principal PD?
Developing a continual, daily process is very important. Just from a brain standpoint, the time we are most alert and can do our best thinking is the beginning of the day. But that’s when we get to our desk and answer emails from the day before. We’re doing low-level clerical work when our minds could be doing the best work possible.

So, make sure the first thing you do is not to open and reply to email because it puts you in a bad mood, and it doesn’t do anything for your learning.

You also need to designate time day for learning. Many people believe that if principals are not actively engaging with others, they aren’t doing anything. Principals always have to be on call, of course, but they need to set time to read a blog post or an article, or scroll through a Twitter feed to find a couple of things that fit their needs. DA

Tim Goral is senior editor.
Postsecondary problem-solvers

PD for CTE instructors adapts to demands of modern workforce
By Jason York
Shailah Stewart knows employers want high school graduates who can solve problems and work together. Today’s companies are not simply looking for new hires who know how to work machines.

As the coordinator of high school pathway development in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Stewart has led the development of programs that instill these modern employability skills in students.

She has also helped reshape professional development, so CTE teachers—including those who have moved into the classroom from industry—can better orient instruction to workforce needs. Stewart was formerly partnership coordinator for Brockton Public Schools, where she focused on dropout prevention and career pathways.

Does Massachusetts offer the PD that industry professionals need before they can teach in a classroom?

There is high demand for industry professionals to become teachers. There is ongoing work to facilitate a training process so they can understand classroom management, instruction and development of lesson plans.

Included in that is simplifying and facilitating teacher licensure issues.

In Massachusetts, we have also had some conversations with our own internal experts in the STEM field about how to develop a better curriculum that makes the connections between ELA, math, science and industry.

**How do you train CTE instructors to connect career pathways and academics?**

Here’s my example that helps make it clear for people: A hospital is a healthcare setting and everybody knows there are hundreds of occupations within a hospital. Some of them are outside of healthcare—such as IT, billing and accounting—but those students still learn medical terminology.

CTE students are already enrolled in a program of study driven by a particular set of occupations. Massachusetts has 44 programs of study in CTE.

In all of our schools that offer CTE programs there is an expectation to connect the academic coursework and the CTE coursework. Some schools do it extremely well, and some hardly do it at all.

“So many young people who come to CTE training may well need to understand how to go into business on their own and how to run a small business.”
Postsecondary problem-solvers

It’s an area for continuing improvement.

What are the keys to modern CTE training?
The teaching of entrepreneurship.

So many young people who come to CTE training may well need to understand how to go into business on their own and how to run a small business. It isn’t so much about plumbing or electrical or carpentry. It’s about, if you have those skills, how can you run a business, sell your services and make a great living as an owner?

Another important area is employability skills: Yes, you know how to be a great carpenter and you know how to use all that equipment, but do you understand skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, initiative-taking and communication? Employers often say that’s what they care most about.

Even in modern CTE—with highly sophisticated equipment and a cluster of occupations—students need really good curriculum instruction and to learn those higher-level employability skills that are transferable.

How does PD ensure teachers instill employability skills as part of college and career readiness programs?
In Massachusetts, our initiative is called Connecting Activities. Teachers train students to have employability skills before they go into an internship experience.

We have a tool called the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan that we use to assess those skills. There are a lot of high-powered employers who say, “Don’t worry about the technical skills. Train your students to have the employability skills. We want them to come to us with that kind of preparation, and we will teach them the technical skills.”

More sophisticated, high-powered employers tend to lean in that direction because they don’t want employees who know rationally how to use machines. What employers want is creative thinkers who problem-solve.

Does PD need to change teachers’ approach to writing curriculum?
For quite a few years, we’ve talked a lot about things like project-based learning and experiential learning. There is no doubt we have to ensure students have mastery of English language arts, math and science. That’s a core function.

What’s also happening is that, increasingly, our educators and leaders recognize the power of college and career readiness, and going beyond those traditional academic areas.

There is a trajectory toward figuring out how to do the kind of creativity, the problem-solving, the initiative-taking and the collaborative kind of work that employers are looking for. We’re getting to that place now where that work is getting more embedded. DA

Jason York is custom publishing editor.
A common cry from teachers across the world is for relevant professional development.

Only 29 percent of teachers are satisfied with current PD, according to a 2014 Gates Foundation report (DAmag.me/gates).

And only 30 percent of teachers improve substantially with PD, according to a 2015 Hechinger Institute study (DAmag.me/hpd).

What we have been doing isn’t working. How can we improve?

1. **Model what is being taught.**
   I remember sitting through a class on differentiated instruction. The “teacher” had more than 200 slides. She read them to us. Some students learn by seeing. Others learn by hearing. Still others learn by doing. But no one learns one way.

   So, when you have many ways of teaching material, nearly every student learns better.

   But during this class on differentiation, the teacher didn’t differentiate. She lectured. We didn’t act it out. We didn’t do any hands-on activities. We didn’t talk about it with the person next to us. All the content on differentiation was delivered in a non-differentiated way.

   So, if differentiation works, do it. If project-based learning works, do it.

2. **Commit to personal PD.**
   In Japanese, “kaizen” means “continuous improvement.”

   Organizations following this mindset look at a system as a whole and make slow, small steps to improve.

   My strategy of kaizen is that I “innovate like a turtle.” Although I’ve been teaching in K12 for 15 years, the

   If we teachers are freed up to learn but use the time to hang out in the lounge and bash students, we aren’t innovating like a turtle—we’re becoming toxic waste.

   You can also listen to student feedback, micro-teach and attend an unconference.

   By Vicki Davis
last 11 have been transformational. Coming back from the Georgia Educational Technology Conference, I realized that I had been to the conference before but my classroom was unchanged. I had a list of 50 things, but had done none of them. So, I decided to do two things: 

**List my big 3.** I would keep a list of the next three things I wanted to learn. Just three, no more. I would learn about those things steadily until I integrated them into my classroom. Sometimes, one of the three wasn’t suitable and I’d abandon it for something else.

**Turtle time.** I take 15 minutes two or three times a week to learn something

### What does a teacher do when students aren’t learning?

This is when the greatest PD happens. There are several strategies a teacher can use, but each has limitations.

**Instructional coach**

In the business world, a life coach is not typically someone in the chain of command. The person can’t evaluate. Often a life coach doesn’t even work for the same company.

In the education world, if the instructional coach makes a beeline to the principal—“Mrs. Jones has me helping her with classroom management”—now the principal thinks Mrs. Jones has a huge problem.

In reality, every teacher on staff has problems. Mrs. Jones is just the only one asking for help, but she’s getting penalized. Coaching, therefore, needs to be confidential.

**Books, videos, courses and conferences**

If teachers ask for money for PD, they have to justify their need and may end up in the same situation they have with some instructional coaches—they have to admit the problem they are trying to solve. Another problem with some materials is that expert content creators may not have as relevant a perspective as a teacher does. Many teachers love Teachers Pay Teachers (DAmag.me/tpt).

**Microcredits and badges**

An emerging “economy” of competency-based micro-credentials offers small PD courses that, for example, focus on “checking for student understanding.”

The fascinating aspect of microcredentials is the melding of online and offline learning. But the proliferation of badges has many calling for a more rigorous process.

**Just-in-time resources**

Many teachers use YouTube to search for help. But edtech seems to dominate the videos on YouTube. It is hard to find answers for problems like classroom management.
new. By calling kaizen “turtle time,” I commit to slow, steady improvement.

3. Use microteaching practices.
In John Hattie’s ranking of the various influences on student achievement (DAmag.me/jh), microteaching is near the top.

Microteaching is a recording of a lesson that is reviewed to improve the teaching and learning experience.

Most teachers have a device that can record video. If we use our phones to record small portions of our lessons, we can use microteaching to improve.

4. Use student feedback to shape learning with just-in-time strategies.
Formative assessment is a snapshot of how knowledge is forming in a student’s mind. Instead of asking one student what they know, you can ask the whole class.

5. Attend unconferences.
The most popular type of unconference is the Edcamp (DAmag.me/ec), but many conferences are now scheduling an “unconference” day with this same format. At Edcamps across the world, teachers show up on a Saturday and self-organize by topic. If people want to learn something, they show up to the designated room.

Teachers can model and create and innovate together. Sometimes they bring gadgets or share lesson ideas. Many teachers love this environment.

However, some school systems don’t give teachers PD credit for these valuable sessions.

Understandably, some teachers hesitate to give up personal time without continuing education “credit.” Others like things to be more organized.

Where do we go from here?
Teachers don’t have much time. I have had years with too many “duties.” Those are the years I didn’t innovate. You can’t innovate like a turtle when you’re working like a dog.

First, we need to make sure teachers have plenty of time to learn. Let’s streamline paperwork. Let’s remove non-teaching duties. Let’s help teachers focus on teaching and on learning about teaching.

Second, teachers must commit to learning. If we teachers are freed up to learn but use the time to hang out in the lounge and bash students, we aren’t innovating like a turtle—we’re becoming toxic waste.

And third, we need to give teachers a major role in determining how they will learn and what they will do with their PD. We should give teachers the financial resources and the time for PD.

While teacher shortages are a problem in many places, we can’t shortchange teaching professionals by preventing them from learning how to become better teachers. DA

Vicki Davis is a veteran classroom teacher who also teaches educators how to use technology in the classroom. She operates the CoolCat Teacher blog at coolcatteacher.com.
Principals become agents for change

PD helps school leaders drive academic success

By DA Staff Writers

Principal Jason Griffin crunched the data to turn low-performing Hertford Grammar School around. Griffin, a North Carolina principal of the year, learned every detail he could about each of his students’ test scores, attendance rates and behavioral reports to nearly double English proficiency and earn his building a B under the state’s accountability program.

The transition relied heavily on PD—both for Griffin and his teachers. Below, Griffin talks about his continuing growth and how he leads his staff in improving their classroom practice in areas such as technology and personalized learning.

How is the principal’s job evolving from building administrator to chief instructional officer?

Principals are truly the instructional leaders of a school. Our role has evolved from just being in charge of the daily operations to ensuring that every student receives a personalized education. As the instructional leader, we provide personal-
ized professional development for teachers based on their instructional needs. This PD is built into our calendar and provided by teacher-leaders, along with contracted services from our state.

**What types of PD have you participated in to help with this transition?**

I completed the Distinguished Leadership Program in 2014 through the Friday Institute at North Carolina State University. These trainings were centered around the implementation of 1-to-1 technology and personalized learning. This training was very beneficial because our school had just received a technology grant to fund devices in grades 3 through 12. This PD has helped me instruct teachers on how to infuse technology into daily lessons. In addition, our district has provided training for all principals on how to analyze and interpret school performance data.

**In the PD you've participated in, what have you found to be the essentials in developing your teachers’ skills?**

The key takeaways for me during PD is being able to build on the strengths of others. After you know the strengths of the people inside your school, you can grow your own teacher-leaders.

It’s important as a principal to be able to delegate tasks to others who can get the job done and help the school to continue moving forward.
I have participated in Reading Research into Practice training and Math Foundations training, both of which allow teachers to dig deep into our practices as educators. These trainings are research-based and have been instrumental in the success of our students.

You've been holding staff meetings at Chick-fil-A?
I took over at Hertford Grammar School on May 1, 2014. My first official training to my staff was at a Chick-fil-A restaurant that had just opened. I had assessed our climate and realized that this experience of working at Chick-fil-A for one night would help to improve our school culture. Our staff worked with the employees in the restaurant and learned the true meaning of “customer service.” Many schools say they have the “Disney effect.” At Hertford, we have the “Chick-fil-A effect.” All of our staff—from the head custodian to the bus drivers, teachers and school nutrition employees—treat our students and parents with the utmost respect.

We have a positive learning environment and this has proven to help our students be successful.

Does social media play a role in professional learning at your school?
Our teachers do a great job of using Twitter for their professional learning. We have teachers participating in Twitter chats with educators across our state and the nation. This has proved to be a great way to build our professional learning network in the comfort of our own school and homes.

How have your PD initiatives trickled down to students?
The PD initiatives that I have put into place have made our school a fun and nurturing place to come and learn. Students are engaged in instructional practices that I didn’t have when I was growing up.

Our students are empowered by teachers to create their own learning paths. It is great seeing our teachers and students interact on a daily basis and share the workload of learning in the classrooms. DA

“After you know the strengths of the people inside your school, you can grow your own teacher-leaders. It's important as a principal to delegate tasks to others who can get the job done.”

Jason Griffin
How to make PD compute

The most effective professional development in computer science covers more than coding, says Gail Chapman, director of national outreach at Exploring Computer Science. The nonprofit, which is supported by the National Science Foundation, offers PD and curriculum resources in efforts to expand access to computing in California schools.

Educators should try to build students’ capacity for computational thinking—a process that involves identifying challenges and finding solutions that a machine or programmer can implement, says Chapman, a former teacher who has worked on the AP computer science program for the Educational Teaching Service and College Board.

Instructors must participate in long-term PD that provides inquiry-focused instruction, such as role-playing and simulations. “It’s important to help teachers understand that you don’t always have to learn a whole new skill set when writing a new program because computer science is always changing,” says Chapman, who previously served as director of leadership and PD at the Computer Science Teachers Association. “We get so caught up in the details, rather than taking a step back from the computer and asking ourselves, ‘What am I trying to accomplish?’”

She spoke recently with DA about current trends in computer science PD.

Q: What are the keys to PD in computer science?

A: The same keys are true for PD in any subject area: Teachers require the same kind of learning opportunities that students do in the classroom. Teachers need to participate actively. They need to collaborate with each other. They need feedback, time to reflect and coaching. And PD should be more than a day or even a week. Teachers need opportunities to come back together to share things that have worked and haven’t worked in a particular setting.

PD that teaches solely about a particular programming language or teaches how to use the latest shiny new tool isn’t sustainable.

Teachers end up getting confused about what language or tool they should be using, rather than staying focused on the underlying conceptual underpinnings of computer science and which algorithms are required to program a computer. Basically, whatever teachers are doing in PD needs to be something they can use
immediately in the classroom and be taught over an extended period of time. A perfect example is when the AP computer science exam switched from Pascal to C++. We allowed the problem to perpetuate because we hadn’t taken the time to step back and ask ourselves what we were really trying to teach. It wasn’t C++. It wasn’t Pascal. It was how to solve problems with computers.

Q: It sounds like people have a misconception about what computer science actually is.

A: That’s been a problem for a long time. For years, we’ve been trying to get folks to understand that computer science is not equal to programming. Programming is part of computer science but there is a whole lot more involved. That’s one of the big takeaways. When teachers get back into the classroom, it’s not just about putting kids in front of a computer and having them code.

Q: So it’s also about teaching computational thinking skills—where can teachers learn this mindset?

A: Various PD models work more effectively under different circumstances. If you have experienced instructors teaching computer science and your district is switching to a new format, these teachers may be able to get by with a few days of PD. But teachers who are new to computer science need ongoing PD that starts at the core: problem-solving—what inquiries look like in the classroom and how to create an environment of collaboration and equitable practice.

Q: What are some of the roadblocks?

A: Money. This is one of the biggest challenges Exploring Computer Science faces right now. There’s been a lot of budgetary support from the National Science Foundation toward both the Exploring Computer Science course and the new AP Computer Science Principles course over the last five years. But many of the NSF-funded projects are running out of money, and if the NSF hasn’t set up a plan with the district or region they’re working with, then sustainability is difficult.

Many districts that can’t afford a two-year program think it will work if they only do about one week of PD, but it doesn’t. It’s really about making computer science one of your district’s top priorities. DA

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