A Great Teacher in Every Classroom:
Building Effective Professional Development Culture

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Teacher quality has consistently been found to be the most important school-based factor in determining student achievement. When teachers are supported through ongoing, high-quality professional development (PD) that is aligned with best practices, schools see corresponding gains in climate, teacher satisfaction, and student success.

At the Philadelphia Education Fund (Ed Fund), our mission is to drive exceptional outcomes for all students by developing great teachers and building paths to college and career success. In order to help great teachers develop, it is essential that a consistent and effective professional development structure exists that supports a culture of collaboration and learning.

Even as Philadelphia suffers from budget cuts and reduced resources, examples of successful PD inside and outside of schools continue across the region. However, the frequency and quality of PD offerings still vary greatly from school to school and difficulties persist in providing, evaluating, and improving PD.

With these challenges in mind, the Ed Fund has laid out what constitutes excellent professional development based on the most current best practices in research as well as experience with schools, teachers, and teacher networks across Philadelphia. We believe that an effective and impactful professional development structure must be:

1. **Collaborative**- encouraging a culture of peer collaboration and development that is teacher-led and teacher-created
2. **Responsive**- reflective of the individual needs of teachers and students as well as the priorities of schools, districts and school operators, and the state
3. **Ongoing**- part of a larger cycle of reflection and development that is embedded into the work environment

When all three of these characteristics are met, a culture that empowers teachers to take ownership of their own growth and better enable the success of their students is created. Specific strategies for how to meet these characteristics are listed below.

Collaborative - encouraging a culture of peer collaboration and development that is teacher-led and teacher-created

Effective strategies include:

- PD that is teacher-led, teacher-created, and/or provides teachers with consistent opportunities for leadership
- Regularly scheduled time during the school day for teachers to plan and work collaboratively in order to build school social capital
- Consistent public spaces available for teachers to meet and collaborate
- Resources available for all teachers that directly apply to the content or skills being learned
- Facilitation that employs effective structures and group norms
- A shared school mission, vision, and set of values that teachers and staff feel ownership towards and which is reflected in PD offerings

Responsive - reflective of the individual needs of teachers and students as well as the priorities of schools, districts and school operators, and the state

Effective strategies include:

- PD that is reflective of school, district, and/or state priorities and initiatives
- Differentiation based on staff and student need, with offerings related to content, grade-level, and other situational needs (e.g., ELL, Special Education, behavioral support, etc.)
- Incorporation of adult learning theory strategies in PD (e.g., small group discussion, modeling, role-play, etc.) to enable every educator to engage deeply in their own learning process
- Consistent collection of educator and staff feedback after PD to proactively adjust PD offerings to better align with teacher and student needs

Ongoing - part of a larger cycle of reflection and development that is embedded into the work environment

Effective strategies include:

- Individual offerings tied to a larger cycle of professional development that is year-round
- Connecting all PD to educators' daily practice through modeling, follow-up, and/or suggestions for implementation
- Inclusion of concrete content, resources, or skills that teachers can apply to their work, as well as steps to apply these new learnings
- Self-reflection as part of all PD offerings, as well as guidance on the independent use of self-reflection strategies to continue individual growth
- Informal feedback processes both inside and outside of formal PD structures (e.g., PLCs, mentoring, peer observation) that provide teachers with ongoing input
- A formal feedback structure that is consistent and conducted with fidelity, and aligns with individual growth areas as well as the skills and content built through PD

Central Characteristics of a Successful Professional Development Structure

The Philadelphia Education Fund is committed to working with the region's school systems and professional development providers in order to ensure an effective and impactful professional development structure exists for all of Philadelphia's teachers. In order to reach our shared vision of student success, it is critical that pathways to support teacher development are aligned with best practices and made available for all of our educators. At the Ed Fund, we are energized to collaborate with the education community towards the achievement of these goals.

Get Involved:

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