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Bureau of Legislative Research

Policy Analysis & Research Section



2010

Teacher Professional Development

Teacher Professional Development

Coaching



Modeling

Practice

Job-embedded

Introduction

- Professional development of teachers is a critical factor in the effort to improve student performance and ensuring highly qualified teachers in the classroom (Odden & Picus, 2008).
- ****High quality instruction requires continued exposure to innovations in content and teaching skills.**
- ****The Arkansas Accreditation Standard 10.01.3 requires that all teachers have 60 hours for professional development and in-service training.**
- ****The 2003 Arkansas adequacy study proposed \$50 per pupil for teacher professional development and 5 extra days to be added to teacher contracts for professional development. Act 59 of 2003 provided resources to fund this proposal.**

- ****The funding level for professional development remains at \$50 per student. In FY 2008-09, districts received \$41.33 per student with the balance of the funding going to the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) for professional development purposes. A portion of the funding received by ADE was provided to the Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN) for professional development programs.**
- ****The state spends up to \$4 million annually on a statewide online professional development program. The program offers online PD courses through a web-based portal maintained by the AETN. The portal offers more than 1,000 courses for which teachers can receive PD credit, as well as many non-credit courses.**
- ****Table 1 shows some summary statistics on professional development funding and expenditures for fiscal year 2008-09. The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) sent out \$19,450,051.56 to school districts, and they spent \$17,547,335.00 during 2008-09.**

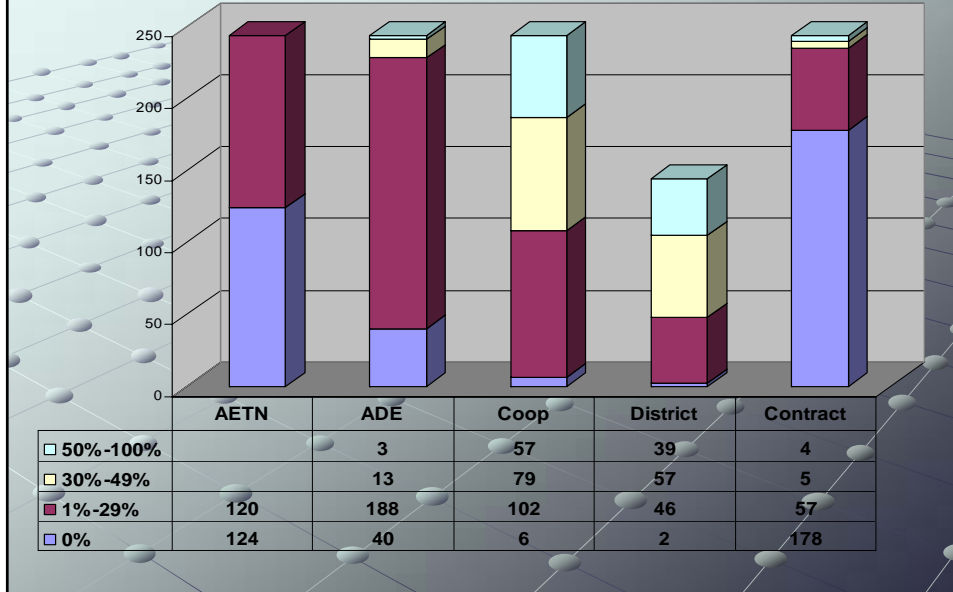
Table 1. Summary Statistics on Professional Development for FY 2008-09

	ADE Funding	Expenditure per ADM	Beginning Balance	Ending Balance
Mean	\$80,542.63	\$40.80	\$19,214.76	\$18,435.61
Median	\$42,378.50	\$41.17	\$6,202.72	\$5,897.69

Adequacy Study of Teacher Professional Development

- ****In terms of providing an adequate education to all students in Arkansas, continued professional development of teachers is essential to effective instruction. Studies clearly show that quality of teaching is the strongest predictor of student achievement.**
- ****Questions on current professional development (PD) were asked on the district, school, and teacher surveys, and in the onsite interviews with principals and superintendents from 74 randomly selected schools in the Adequacy Study conducted by the Bureau of Legislative Research (BLR).**
- **The district survey of superintendents indicates that for 120 districts AETN accounts for 1% to 29% of their PD, whereas 124 districts do not use AETN (Chart 1).**

Chart 1: Number of Districts with % of PD Use



- ADE provides 1% to 29% of the PD for 188 districts, 30% to 49% for 13 districts, 50% to 100% for 3 districts, and no PD for 40 districts. The higher percentages of PD are provided by educational cooperatives (coop) and districts. Contractual PD is infrequently used by school districts in Arkansas.

Ratings of Professional Development on BLR Surveys & Interviews

- **The BLR onsite interview and the principal (or school) survey elicited responses that were aligned with data found on the teacher survey, lending credibility to the latter survey, despite the low response rate of 152 teachers to the Web survey.
- **Teachers were asked to discuss which of their PD experiences during 2008-09 would they recommend for improving instruction aimed at increasing student achievement. Their ratings are in accord with responses from principals and onsite interviews, as well as findings reported in research and practice literature.

- ****Grade-specific and subject-specific professional development, along with selecting PD based on individual needs, are identified as preeminent strategies to improving instruction aimed at increasing student achievement.**
- ****Of commensurate importance is the instilling of knowledge and skills through follow-up modeling, observational feedback, and job-embedded mentoring by presenters or coaches. Teachers need time and coaching to apply strategies taught in PD exercises to fully acquire operational skills and knowledge.**
- ****They need opportunities to practice skills, receive feedback, modify approaches, and observe other teachers and coaches. Comprehensive professional development also involves teachers having opportunities to observe one another and discuss teaching strategies and content.**
- ****Researchers and teachers report that professional development needs to be designed to address specific student needs (e.g., STEM courses), individualized instruction based on test scores, and personal characteristics of students.**

- ****Most teachers need to become more familiar with cultural and socio-economic differences in language, interaction patterns, learning expectations, behavior, and resources.****
- ****The National Math Advisory Panel finds that elementary math teachers need math seminars and workshops because most do not have college majors or concentrations in math.****
- ****Of special note, one of the most frequent teacher recommendations for PD is technology training, a response also noted in the professional literature and in the principal survey and during onsite interviews.**
- ****BLR surveys, interviews and case studies indicate that districts have purchased valuable technology (e.g., smart-boards) with “stimulus funds,” but many teachers need to learn how to use it.**
- ****ADE reports that most technology PD is done by educational cooperatives, and BLR surveys indicate good ratings for this PD. What is needed in addition is on-the-job training or application of the technology. Many principals indicate they need technology instructors.**

- ****Teachers and principals also were asked which PD experiences in the past year would they rate as unproductive in terms of professional enhancement. Universally required workshops and conferences that do not meet teachers' needs or interests were rated as unproductive by teachers and many principals.**
- ****Respondents also reported that one-time workshops or conferences, with no follow-up opportunities to practice skills taught, have little practical utility. Workshops conducted by persons who have not taught, or have not taught for many years, were identified as unproductive. These responses are clearly supported in the research and practice literatures on professional development (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009).**
- ****Research also shows that all-day workshops, especially with single speakers, exceed the limits of people's attention and comprehension span, and are often too disjointed to impart a clearly delineated set of skills, or a distinct body of knowledge, that teachers can apply in the classroom.**
- ****Requiring teachers to attend workshops devoted to content they do not teach also was a common complaint among teachers and in onsite interviews.**

Evidence-based Best Practices in PD

- ****According to recent research, one of the most effective approaches to professional development for teachers is sustained or long-term, job-embedded modeling, coaching, observational feedback on course-specific, grade-specific content and skills.**
- ****Inherent in this concept of sustained PD is the presence of regularly scheduled meetings with teachers and multiple options that enable all staff to participate. This includes varied time options (e.g., summer, after-school) as well as alternative formats (e.g., classroom observation, modeling, collaboration).**
- ****Teachers need to observe and practice skills being taught, and receive immediate feedback and instruction on their performance over a sustained period of time.**

- ****Professional development also needs to be conceptualized as individualized coherent plans in which there is a clear developmental sequence of knowledge and skills specifically tailored to teachers' responsibilities and needs.**
- ****For far too long, professional development has been delivered as theoretical lectures in abbreviated, piecemeal formats, such as serial all-day workshops or conferences, with no long-term purpose or planning, and no follow-up coaching, practice, and observational feedback.**
- ****Too often workshops and conferences have functioned as isolated forums for sharing information, with limited concern about continuity, relevance, application, or follow-through for teachers who are required to attend.**
- ****Little or no time has been given to application of what was taught, and there has been an absence of follow-up modeling and coaching to ensure continuation of skills learned.**

- ****Recent research has shown that these formats and methods of professional development do not lead to accumulating knowledge and skills associated with increasing student performance.**
- ****Developing a set of skills and a comprehensive knowledge base to more effectively teach particular courses requires time, work, and consultation with seasoned instructors or coaches, who can provide on-the-job training and monitoring.**
- ****Knowledge and skill acquisitions require explanation, observation, time, and practice to effectively acquire and develop them.**
- **The promise of professional learning communities as problem-solving groups for skill-acquisition and school improvement has been well-documented, but they must be given time, support, and structure to become effective.**

- **This means protocols for functioning as a team, goals for directing the work, and leadership for accomplishing the aims are necessary tools for success.**
- **Faculty must be committed and dedicated to promoting high expectations for learning, and not just be going through the motions to satisfy some state regulations.**
- **When teachers become actively involved in learning by doing, immersed in collaborative efforts, and exposed to continual and guided practice, they demonstrate deeper understanding and more skillful teaching than with other PD approaches.**

Conclusions

- ****Professional learning plans should be a collaborative effort between teachers, principals and coaches. Teachers often have an understanding of their needs, but outside observers can provide a more comprehensive assessment.**
- ****No longer can the teaching profession rely on fragmented and disjointed, brief "sit and get" lectures that have no overall continuity or cumulative effect, and do not offer teachers any opportunities for practice application and feedback.**
- **Requiring teachers to attend workshops and conferences that have little or no relevance for their teaching has not resulted in more effective classroom instruction.**
- ****Teachers need well-conceived, sequentially-planned, PD in their teaching area, with follow-up practice opportunities, coaching, and classroom observational feedback over an extended period of time.**

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