



Research Report

Professional Development 2010 Report

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**Prepared for
The Joint Adequacy Evaluation Oversight Subcommittee of
the House and Senate Interim Committees on Education**

BUREAU OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH

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Current Professional Development in Arkansas

Professional development (PD) of teachers is a critical factor in the effort to improve student performance and ensure highly qualified teachers in the classroom. The Arkansas Accreditation Standard 10.01.3 requires that all teachers have 60 hours for professional development. The 2003 Arkansas adequacy study proposed \$50 per pupil for teacher professional development and 5 extra days to be added to teacher contracts for concentrated professional development (see Odden, Picus, and Goetz, 2006).

The current 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 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 additional courses that do not offer PD credit. According to ADE, more than 17,000 educators are registered portal users.

A November 2009 report by the Bureau of Legislative Research (BLR) noted that funding provided to AETN appears to have significantly exceeded AETN's cost of operating the portal. At the time of the report, AETN appeared to have a balance of unexpended funds in the amount of more than \$6.5 million. ADE has indicated that for 2011, the department has asked that AETN maintain the program using those fund balances.

Funding and Expenditures for Professional Development in FY2008-09

Table 1 shows some summary statistics on professional development funding and expenditures for fiscal year 2008-09. ADE sent out \$19,450,051.56 to school districts, and they spent \$17,547,335.00 during 2008-09. Districts received an average (mean) of \$80,542.63 and had an average per ADM expenditure of \$40.80 in FY 2008-09, with an average beginning balance of \$19,214.76 and an average ending balance of \$18,435.61. The differences in means and medians indicate that districts vary widely in dollar amounts.

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

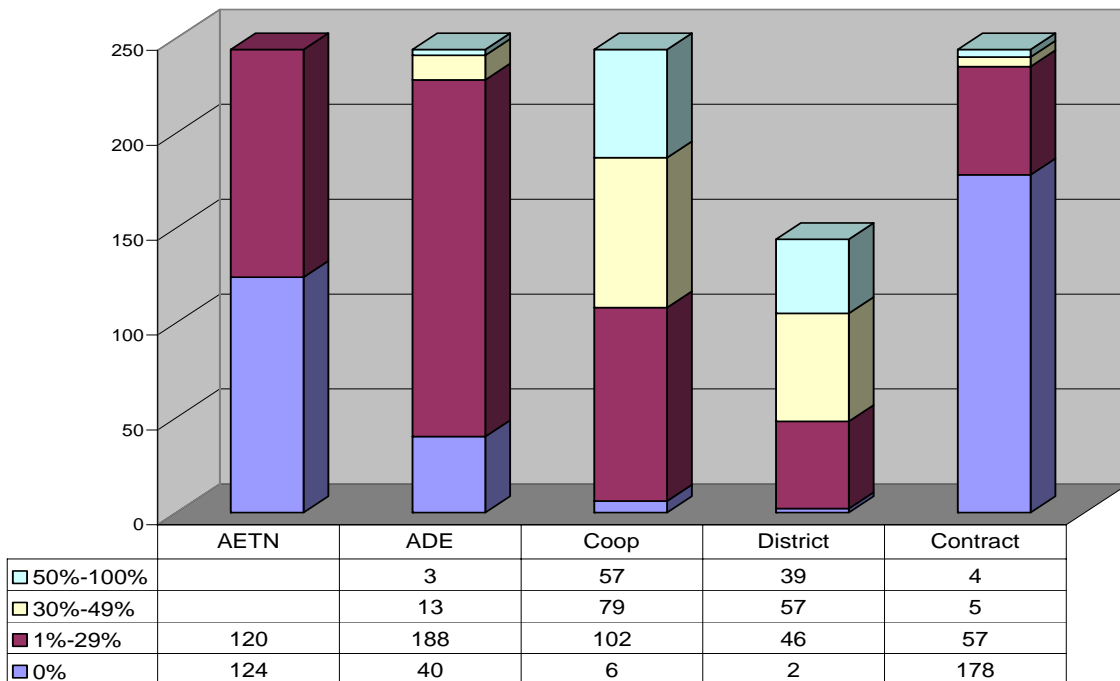
	ADE Funding	Expenditure Per ADM	Beginning Balance	Ending Balance
Mean	\$80,542.63	\$40.80	\$19,214.76	\$18,435.61
Median	\$42,378.50	\$41.17	6,202.72	\$5,897.69

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, and studies show that effective teaching is the strongest predictor of increasing student achievement (Goldhaber, 2002; Odden, Borman, & Fermanich, 2004; Saunders, 2000). Therefore, professional development is a critical link in enhancing student performance (Odden & Picus, 2008).

To examine the use of professional development for teachers in Arkansas, the BLR surveyed all 244 school districts and a sample of 74 randomly selected schools. The BLR also conducted onsite interviews with school officials at the 74 schools selected. Responses from the district survey indicate that for 120 districts AETN accounts for 1% to 29% of their PD, whereas 124 districts do not use AETN (Chart 1). 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 (coops) and districts. Contractual PD is infrequently used by school districts in Arkansas.

Chart 1. # Districts with % of PD Use



Ratings of Professional Development on BLR Surveys and in Onsite Interviews

The BLR onsite interview and the principal (or school) survey elicited responses that were aligned with data found on an online teacher survey, lending creditability to the latter survey, despite the low response rate from teachers. At the time of analyses, 152 teachers had responded to the Web-based survey. While the response rate is far from

desired, the overall responses do not suggest biases in terms teacher characteristics (e.g., experience), attitudes toward teaching or administration, or how they evaluate experiences such as professional development and school expectations. However, caution must be exercised in generalizing responses from teachers because of the very low response rate.

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 (e.g., Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009; National Center for Education Research, 2007; Yoon et al. 2007). Indeed, grade-specific and subject-specific professional development, along with selecting PD based on individual teachers' needs, are identified as preeminent strategies to improving instruction aimed at increasing student achievement.

Of commensurate importance is the instilling of knowledge and skill acquisition through follow-up modeling, observational feedback, and job-embedded mentoring by presenters or coaches (Blank & de las Alas, 2008; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009; Fogarty & Pete, 2009; Yoon et al., 2007). 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 (Odden & Picus, 2008).

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 (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009). Most teachers need to become more familiar with cultural and socio-economic differences in language, interaction patterns, learning expectations, behavior, and resources.

All BLR surveys and interviews, including some in-depth case studies by the BLR, indicate that technology training for teachers is a top priority for PD. According to onsite interviews and case studies, most districts have purchased valuable technology (e.g., Smart Boards) with stimulus funds, but many teachers need to learn how to use it. Too many teachers, for example, are using Smart Boards as "white boards." Many principals and teachers indicated that they also need technology instructors in their district. Technology training was the most frequent response on the principals' survey when they were asked to indicate the top 5 most effective PD for teachers. Another top response was training in the interpretation and use of test data for instruction. ADE reports that most of the technology PD is done by educational cooperatives. BLR surveys indicate that while teachers and principals generally believe they receive good technology training, there is a need for ongoing on-the-job training where an instructor can model and give feedback as teachers practice using technology.

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. These responses are clearly supported in the research and practice literatures on professional development (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009).

Research 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 (Blank & de las Alas, 2008; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009; Fogarty & Pete, 2009; Yoon et al., 2007). These observations were noted in BLR surveys and interviews.

Requiring teachers to attend workshops devoted to content they do not teach also was a common complaint among teachers on the BLR survey and in onsite interviews.

Evidence-based Best Practices in Professional Development

According to recent research, one of the most effective approaches to professional development for teachers is sustained or long-term, job-embedded modeling, coaching, and observational feedback on course-specific, grade-specific content and skills. Inherent in this concept of continuing to hone teaching skills are 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. They need to have coaching available to model good teaching strategies and immediately correct them as they practice these strategies (Odden & Picus, 2008).

Professional development also needs to be conceptualized as individualized, coherent plans in which teachers sequentially develop knowledge and skills specifically tailored to their teaching 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. 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 the application of what was taught, and there has been an absence of follow-up modeling and coaching to ensure continuation of skills learned. It has been assumed that teachers would figure out how to implement ideas presented in the abstract or theoretical realm. However, 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 (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009).

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 (Fogarty & Pete, 2009).

The promise of professional learning communities (PLCs) as problem-solving groups for skill-acquisition and school improvement has been well-documented, but PLCs must be given time, support, and structure to become effective (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009; Fogarty & Pete, 2009). 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. Active, engaged, interactive learning is the hallmark of effective and applicable professional development. 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 (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Odden & Picus, 2008).

Professional learning plans should be a collaborative effort between teachers, principals and coaches. Learning goals and objectives need to be clearly stated, achievable within specified periods of time, measurable, and directly linked to student achievement goals. As indicated on BLR surveys and during onsite visits, the primary target for teacher professional development is enhanced student performance. Teachers must have a depth of knowledge and highly-developed teaching skills to motivate and instruct students with diverse interests, abilities, and challenges (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Odden & Picus, 2008).

BLR case studies on selected schools are revealing a model of PD that may be beneficial to other school districts. The model relies heavily on instructional coaches attending workshops and conferences where "cutting edge" knowledge and skills are presented, and bringing the information back to their school districts. The coaches become experts in their respective areas through college courses, professional conferences and academies, and extensive reading. The coaches provide several ongoing workshops that are specifically designed to meet the needs identified by teachers, student performance indicators, and principal evaluations.

In conclusion, 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. Instead, teachers too often are discouraged by these ineffectual PD activities and can become cynical and uninspired about teaching. Effective teaching requires enthusiasm to motivate others to learn, in-depth knowledge to explain concepts in a variety of ways to accommodate different abilities and styles of learning, and comprehensive skills to reach students with diverse interests and challenges.

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