

## **Have You Ever Wondered What Makes an Effective Professional Development Plan?**

*by the CMC Executive Board*

In January 2002, President Bush reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, more often thought of as Title 1 Programs). This act is now known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and has generated sweeping changes in education as our country works to address the instruction of all students (NCTM, 2002). Besides its focus on accountability for all stakeholders (teachers, administrators, superintendents, parents, community members, etc.) to increase student achievement, it also deals with issues of teacher quality. This, of course, addresses the role of professional development. In the past, Eisenhower funding was set aside for professional development opportunities, primarily in mathematics and science. Eisenhower funding has now become Title II Part A: Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, which sets guidelines for all professional development. But what does that mean?

In order for states to receive funding through the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, there must be a state level Local Improvement Plan that addresses how the state will ensure that all teachers are “highly qualified.” Funds from this grant can be used to recruit, hire, certify, license, or monitor teachers. Funds can also be used for teacher preparation to increase content knowledge. This includes attendance at conferences and meetings for professional development. The caveat is that the conference or meeting must be justified in the school’s needs assessment. As educators, we know that professional development can be pivotal in creating effective teachers (Fullan, 1991). One of the benefits of joining professional organizations is the opportunity to attend conferences that allows us as educators to stay current on the new developments in our field. Looking through the NCLB lens, we need to determine how to maintain the value and integrity of professional development while at the same time jumping through the federal hoops to ensure the funding needed for California public schools.

To really understand where we need to move in the area of professional development, perhaps we need to look back on the progression of this part of our profession. According to Bellanca (1995), professional development started out as an annual inservice for teachers coming from small, isolated schools. This was a time for teachers to complete licensing requirements and network—until they met again the following year. This format evolved into staff development provided by districts. With the advent of the Sputnik crisis, there was a need to focus on building content knowledge for teachers who were interested in pursuing additional training. “The step-and-scale”

pay increases were developed by districts to encourage teachers to take advantage of these staff development opportunities, which generally occurred after school hours (Bellanca, 1995). In the 1990s, public education embarked on educational reform. To make systemic change in a school, more was needed than optional staff development days. Thus the evolution of the professional development model that we follow today.

According to Loucks-Horsley, et al. (1998), effective professional development experiences:

- are driven by a well-defined image of effective classroom learning and teaching.
- provide opportunities for teachers to build their knowledge and skills.
- use or model with teachers the strategies teachers will use with their students.
- build a learning community.
- support teachers to serve in leadership roles as supporters of teachers, agents of change, and promoters of reform.
- provide links to other parts of the education system.
- are continuously assessing themselves and making improvements to ensure positive impact on teacher effectiveness, students learning, leadership, and the school community.

Due to the intense focus on accountability in California, many of us are very familiar with this form of professional development as we design plans to meet our Academic Performance Index (API) Growth Targets. The question now becomes: How do we pursue the professional development we need using the NCLB guidelines to assure funding?

Professional development has become part of a two-pronged approach that requires plans from both the state and the site levels. Currently, schools that receive Federal funding (i.e. Title 1 Programs) are required to create annually a site plan that guides the instructional program at the school and justifies the use of federal dollars in the implementation of that plan. In writing a site plan, schools must use a needs assessment to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses so that a plan can be developed to increase the achievement of all students. After reviewing Title II guidelines, it is clear that more time must be devoted to developing the rationale for the

professional development plan and describing the long-term actions that will turn weaknesses into strengths. Specifically, time must be spent discussing follow up activities to workshop/conference attendance, developing goal statements that involve student outcomes, and integrating the use of technology in content instruction. Opportunities for monitoring and refining the plan should also be a part of the school's site plan. Creating both the professional development plan and the site plan must involve stakeholder input to ensure the successful implementation of both. Additional steps will need to be taken to clearly express the purpose of conference attendance, the justification for selecting a particular conference, and the value for students once the teacher has attended the conference. One of the section affiliates of the California Mathematics Council has experimented with the development of a form for participants to use to justify conference attendance and show future plans for implementation at the site.

The state responsibility lies in developing an understanding of the NCLB guidelines and using that to create a plan of action based on a statewide needs assessment. The Local Improvement Plan should outline what will be done to assure that every school has highly qualified teachers. In the area of mathematics, the obvious stakeholders are teachers of mathematics, parents, and community members. The information gathered by the state should be the basis for the plan that is approved by the federal government. Once the state's Local Improvement Plan has been deemed as compliant, districts have a model with which to build a district Local Improvement Plan specific to the needs of its population.

NCLB is just in its second year of implementation. Details of this major reform continue to be clarified, even as districts struggle to understand the very guidelines they are expected to implement. It is too early to predict the success of professional development under the NCLB parameters. Perhaps the best we can hope for is that professional development will finally move from ". . . a 'frill' that can be cut during difficult financial times to staff development as an indispensable process without which schools cannot hope to prepare young people for citizenship and productive employment" (Bellanca, 1995).

## References

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