

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS STUDENTS

Teaching is a complex, ever-changing profession. Public school educators must know how to meet the needs of diverse student populations, effectively use student data to guide instruction, engage parents, and become active agents in their own professional growth.

Professional development, also called professional learning or continuing education, is a major tool for improving student learning. When collective bargaining is used to address teaching and learning issues, students and educators both benefit.

Teachers want to improve their professional practice, and collective bargaining is a practical way to provide educators a genuine voice in the design and implementation of their own professional development. Through bargaining, educators can ensure that professional development is relevant and useful to the challenges they face in the classroom. Collective bargaining between teachers and their employers—involving mutual exchanges of ideas, cooperative problem solving, and written agreements—can create and establish a culture of professional learning.

Thoughtful contract language or state policy (in states without bargaining laws) can advance instructional practice to a higher level. And it is important to students that their teachers have consistent access to high-quality professional development. A Stanford University research team reported: “Research evidence supports the notion that investing in and supporting professional development that is ongoing, intensive, and connected to practice and school initiatives; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content; and builds strong working relationships among teachers makes a difference in student achievement.”¹

Improving teachers’ professional development supports student learning

Here is how education experts describe higher-level professional development:

- ✓ **Linked directly to the job.** Too often what passes for professional development is a series of brief, unconnected workshops planned without teacher input. Job-embedded professional development is intensive, grounded in day-to-day teaching practice, built right into teachers’ regular work, and continued throughout educators’ careers.



¹ Ann Jaquith, et al., *Professional Development in the United States: Case Studies of State Policies and Strategies* (Learning Forward, November 2010), 9.

- ✓ **Collaborative.** “Teachers lack time and opportunities to view each other’s classrooms, learn from mentors, and work collaboratively,” observed former North Carolina Gov. James B. Hunt Jr., a recognized education expert. “It is time for our education workforce to engage in learning the way other professionals do—continually, collaboratively, and on the job—to address common problems and crucial challenges where they work.”²
- ✓ **On a par with opportunities provided to teachers in top-achieving nations.** Analyzing 2008 federal data, the same Stanford research team discovered that the average reported number of hours of professional development in the U.S. was only about 44 hours each year—while “teachers in many high-achieving nations are provided with 100 hours of professional development time annually, on top of the 15-20 hours per week that they have for collaborative planning and learning—about five times what U.S. teachers experience.”³

Every aspect of school reform depends on highly skilled teachers, says Stanford researcher Linda Darling-Hammond. “To build a useful policy system that encourages excellent instruction and strong student learning, it is important to consider both teacher quality—so that the system recruits the right people and prepares them effectively—and teaching quality, so that the most effective practices are encouraged and the most supportive conditions are provided.”⁴

How collective bargaining can make a difference

A task force of four leading U.S. education organizations agreed that “student academic success is enhanced when teachers experience powerful professional development.” In a 2010 report, the

2 From the foreword to Linda Darling-Hammond, et al., *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad* (National Staff Development Council, February 2009), 2.

3 Ruth Chung Wei, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Frank Adamson, *Professional Development in the United States: Trends and Challenges, Phase III of a Three Phase Study* (National Staff Development Council, August 2010), 2.

4 Linda Darling-Hammond, *Recognizing and Developing Effective Teaching: What Policy Makers Should Know and Do, Policy Brief* (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, May 2010), 2.

task force recommended a dozen policy pathways to high-quality teacher learning that could be established through collective bargaining language or state and local policies (the only option available to educators in non-bargaining states).⁵ Among these pathways are items that belong on every school district bargaining table, like:

- ✓ **Real time for professional development,** not just for isolated workshops scheduled on designated days. Learning should “occur continually within a school [schedule] as teachers work together to plan, implement, and reflect on their instruction and student progress.”
- ✓ **Formal mentoring/induction programs** to build teacher capacity and to reverse the alarming turnover rate among new teachers. Through such programs, every new teacher receives teaching advice and classroom management guidance—over a sustained period—from an experienced educator who is carefully selected and trained.
- ✓ **Support for certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (www.nbpts.org).** A growing number of teacher contracts allocate extra pay for this advanced credential and/or tuition reimbursement for those seeking the credential. National Board-Certified Teachers (NBCTs) meet high standards based on “what teachers should know and be able to do”—as demonstrated by 10 assessments, including portfolio entries of teaching practice, demonstration of content knowledge, and self-reflection.

Research confirms that teaching quality is influenced by the nature and quality of professional development available to teachers throughout their careers. Collective bargaining ensures that professional development opportunities for educators are developed collaboratively between educators and school districts. This ensures real results for students.

5 American Federation of Teachers, Council of Chief State School Officers, National Education Association, and National Staff Development Council, *Advancing High-Quality Professional Development through Collective Bargaining and State Policy: An Initial Review and Recommendations to Support Student Learning* (National Staff Development Council, 2010).

