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Alignment Of School Improvement Plans With District Professional Learning Plan: A Policy Advocacy Document

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ALIGNMENT OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANS
WITH DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN:
A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Scott R. Carlson
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
In the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

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Document Origination Statement for Digital Commons @ NLU

This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006). For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PRACTICES
USING THE STANDARDS ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

A CHANGE PLAN FOR DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
AND TEACHER COLLABORATION IN THE AREA OF
ELEMENTARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION

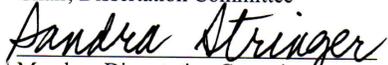
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DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

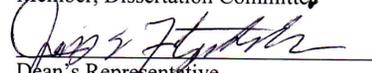
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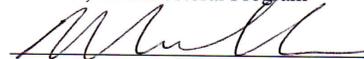
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ABSTRACT

This paper advocates for a local policy connecting a standards-based district professional learning plan to individual school improvement plans for the purpose of improving targeted instructional behaviors and student learning outcomes. Currently, my district's school improvement plans follow a general template focused on student subgroup deficits and standardized test scores with little emphasis on professional learning aligned to educator and student outcomes. A local policy that aligns school improvement plans with a district professional learning plan would be consistent with recommendations from the Illinois P-20 Council (2017) and help the local school board understand how a district professional learning plan advances their strategic objectives. It could produce local administrative procedures and practices ahead of future state policy mandates. Most importantly, it would provide a clear and specific vision of why particular professional learning activities are chosen and a more thoughtful evaluation process. A sample professional learning plan template incorporates the essential elements as described by Killion (2013). Evaluation steps include Guskey's (2000) levels of impact. Finally, the alignment model is inspired by Mooney and Mausbach's (2008) blueprint for school improvement.

PREFACE

As a building principal and a long-standing member of the district staff development committee, I have an appreciation for the complexity of the teacher's role. Teachers are developing trusting relationships with students and families, guiding student academic and social-emotional development, and striving to meet the objectives set forth in our curriculum. In the case of the elementary classroom teacher, they are asked to be an expert in several content areas. All the while, district and state mandates add additional professional responsibilities to their plate. Ongoing professional learning that follows a cycle of continuous improvement is required to achieve excellent outcomes for all students.

In order for a school or district to become a learning system, we must provide staff with clarity and focus. This is a challenging endeavor that requires a thoughtful structure – something I have not seen in any of the four different school districts I served. I have come to appreciate how important it is for educational leaders to align the district strategic plan, professional learning plan, and individual school improvement plans. If the priorities, timeline or data from any one of these plans falls out of alignment, it can negatively impact culture and moral. Ultimately, it interferes with our ability to maximize the growth of each student under our care.

The findings from my program evaluation (Carlson, 2018a) and change plan (Carlson, 2018b) suggest our teaching staff would benefit from a professional learning plan closely connected to school improvement goals. It would also give the building principals the leverage needed to focus their teacher appraisal process. In order for our talented teaching to experience transformative learning, we must empower them to take

control of their learning and build their collective capacity to move our organization forward.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the sacrifices my family made in pursuit of this doctoral degree, specifically my wife. She is my coach, mentor, and biggest fan. I love you. There were many nights and weekends spent at the public library or secluded in the guest room. I could never have achieved my goal without support and encouragement from Tammy, Kyle, and Luke.

Thank you to Dr. Brian Wegley and the support of our administrative team. Thank you for investing in my professional development. It is a privilege to work for a school district that is committed to the continuous improvement of staff and the success of all children.

Thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. Harrington Gibson, for all the meetings, virtual conferences, and thoughtful feedback. You made me a stronger writer and helped me to become a more critical thinker. I would also like to thank Dr. Sandra Stringer for her insights and perspectives.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the support and encouragement I received from my classmates. In particular, I am grateful for my friendship with Andy and Lauren. I've got your back!

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my boys,

Kyle Richard

and Luke Scott.

I am proud of you and I look forward to seeing you grow into
curious, passionate, life-long learners.

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SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

This policy advocacy document is the third paper in a three-part dissertation. I have chosen to continue my examination of effective professional learning for educators and advocate for local policy that directs a more sophisticated school improvement planning process within my school district. Specifically, I am advocating for each school to submit an annual school improvement plan that is aligned to a comprehensive district professional learning plan based on the professional learning standards (Learning Forward, 2011). The local board of education would approve both plans each October.

For my first paper (Carlson, 2018a), I surveyed all certified district staff on their perceptions of professional learning using Learning Forward's Standards Assessment Inventory. Focus group interview data collected at each of the three school buildings complimented the survey results. My program evaluation used Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (2011) as a framework for effective professional development. While our district teachers perceived strong administrative support and adequate resources for professional learning, they asked for greater input on the design and planning. Teachers expressed an interest in more differentiated opportunities and a clear preference for job-embedded forms of learning. There was also a great deal of confusion with the content of their learning activities and how it related to school and district improvement efforts. Teachers viewed the sequence and selection of professional learning as haphazard at times.

In my second paper (Carlson, 2018b), I articulated a change process to improve the planning, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning for English Language Arts instruction at the elementary buildings. I suggested that we use our

existing staff development committee structure to engage, educate, and distribute leadership to our district teaching staff. I explored a backward mapping process (Killion & Kennedy, 2012) that could connect areas of teacher growth to specific student learning outcomes. Finally, recommendations were made to strengthen job-embedded forms of professional learning. This included lab or demonstration classrooms, instructional coaching, and professional learning communities.

I became aware of this policy issue over the course of writing the first two papers within the professional practice dissertation and my leadership of a school improvement plan committee. My review of the relevant literature identified consistent themes around the areas of school improvement planning, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning. The teachers I interviewed for my program evaluation pointed to misalignment between our district's professional learning activities, the curriculum review cycle, and school improvement plans. As a participant on the staff development committee, I often view the planning of district professional development days as "random acts of improvement." Finally, our teacher association raised concerns with professional learning during the current Interest Based Bargaining process. They have asked for more significant voice in the planning and evaluation, as well as more scheduled time for professional collaboration.

As Illinois transitions from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there will likely be changes to the school improvement planning and reporting requirements. Currently, the Illinois State Board of Education only requires school districts to submit a school improvement plan if placed on academic early warning or academic watch status (105 ILCS 5/2-3.25d). My district chooses to submit school

improvement plans via the Interactive Report Card website each fall as a matter of practice. The school improvement plans follow a general template focused on student subgroup deficits and standardized test scores with little emphasis on professional learning aligned to educator and student outcomes.

The Illinois P-20 Council (2017) recently produced a set of ESSA recommendations for the Illinois State Board of Education that advocate for school-based leadership teams focused on the “design, delivery, and continuous improvement of professional learning focused on improvements to school and student outcomes” (Appendix D, p. 3). A local policy that aligns school improvement plans with a district professional learning plan would be consistent with recommendations from this influential stakeholder group. It could produce local administrative procedures and practices ahead of future state policy mandates.

The state of Illinois, along with 39 other states (Crow, 2016), have adopted Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning (2011) as a framework for continuous learning. These rigorous standards provide direction for planning the professional learning of educators and criteria for monitoring and evaluating the impact. These standards are in the State Board of Education's guidance and regulatory documents. For example, the Illinois state professional development provider requirements were recently updated (Illinois State Board of Education, 2017). Among other responsibilities, state-approved providers must now show evidence that their learning activities are aligned specifically to these standards (23 IAC 25.855). Providers must also submit an annual report (ISBE 73-59) that includes a summary of each learning activity and the intended impact (23 IAC 25.860). Impact areas include educator and

student growth; educator and student social-emotional growth; or alignment to district or school improvement plans.

Learning Forward has participated in various statewide policy projects and local school district partnerships to transform professional learning and develop practices that lead to effective teachers, leaders, and learning experiences for all students. Two examples are the Transforming Professional Learning in Kentucky Project (Berry, Daughtrey, Darling-Hammond, & Cook, 2012) and the State of Washington's Transforming Professional Learning Project (2018). Both of these projects demonstrate policies and procedures for both state and district-wide efforts to use professional learning as a school improvement strategy.

We will continue to face a wide variety of initiatives from the Illinois State Board of Education, ongoing changes to our instructional practices due to a cycle of curriculum review, advancements with instructional technology, and issues of importance to our local community. If we have a process for continuous improvement (Hirsh, Psencik, & Brown, 2014), aligned to effective professional learning practices, my teaching staff will have the capacity to respond proactively and efficiently. A district plan could provide staff developers with clear priorities and supports to extend adult learning.

As a building principal, I am continuously evaluating if our financial resources are being used to achieve the mission of educating all students. The school district is currently facing controlled deficit-spending. With limited financial resources and limited time in our school schedules, we need more effective planning and a process that allows the staff development committee to evaluate the impact of our learning activities. Administration may need to prioritize or even justify the expense of our wide variety of

learning activities to the local school board. Our school board has stated that the non-attendance days (i.e., half-day school improvement) are one of the community's top concerns.

Most importantly, our teaching staff yearns for greater input on the planning of their professional learning experiences. My local school board policy (see Appendix A) directs "the Superintendent to organize a Staff Development Committee whose purpose shall be to plan, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive in-service program which includes professional development activities related to Board and District goals." This board policy could be expanded to include the development of an annual standards-based professional learning plan. This plan would be finalized each spring, leading to the production of school improvement plans in the fall. There is another potential benefit of aligning these two plans with the supervision or appraisal system of teaching staff, similar to Mooney and Mausbach's (2008) blueprint process for school improvement.

SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

As explained in my Program Evaluation and Change Plan papers (Carlson, 2018a; 2017b), the administration and teaching staff of my school district are highly committed to continuous learning and applying that learning in the service of students. Teaching staff have high expectations for themselves and demonstrate motivation to refine their craft. What the district lacks is an infrastructure or process for planning and evaluating professional learning.

My survey and focus group data indicate that teaching staff is asking for a stronger vision or a clear agenda for their learning (Carlson, 2018a). They want to see how their professional learning activities align with the district's strategic plan, curriculum review cycles, and school improvement plans. District leaders do not need to abdicate responsibility for setting the vision for adult and student learning. They can offer vehicles for gaining teacher input and provide regular feedback on the progress of the organization. This requires a theory of change and infrastructure. It also requires setting goals for student outcomes and connecting these outcomes to shifts in teacher behavior.

While my findings offer recommendations to school and district leaders around vision and planning, teachers have also asked for a way to provide more input into the content and design of their learning. Our current staff development committee, as defined by board policy, consists of a talented and representative group of educators. However, this committee is not currently focused on monitoring the adult learning in the district. Their time is primarily devoted to planning the upcoming staff institute day. The committee pays little attention to integrating our different professional learning activities (e.g., book clubs, peer observation, lesson study, expert presentations, instructional

coaching) or addressing the differentiated learning needs of our teaching staff. By developing the capacity of this committee, we have the potential of providing more authentic staff participation in the planning and evaluation of their learning.

We know the business of teaching and learning is extraordinarily complex. At times, educators may feel like the needs of their students are a moving target. It can be easy to take on too many initiatives, or in the case of elementary teachers, take on too many curricular objectives at one time. Sometimes, external pressures from state and district mandates can shift our energy and focus. It is the role of leadership to narrow the focus of professional learning. We must prioritize our goals for students and then look backward at the learning design needed for teachers. By setting short-term measurable goals, we can build the capacity for sustainable change. Teacher teams need to see how intermediate accomplishments contribute to long-term gains. Our time for professional learning is finite and precious. It is important that we remain focused on advancing district priorities and monitor the impact on student learning.

Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (1998) offer a few different reasons for celebrating progress. Celebrations can build momentum and sustain excitement for the implementation of new learning. They can shine a spotlight on what the school district feels is most important or valuable. Most importantly, the staff may feel appreciated or recognized for their hard work. First, there needs to be clear learning goals and objectives.

The Shermerville School Board has an active policy (Northbrook/Glenview School District 30, 1991) that directs the superintendent to “organize a Staff Development Committee whose purpose shall be to plan, implement, and evaluate a

comprehensive in-service program which includes professional development activities related to Board and District goals." I am advocating to expand this policy to include the development of an annual standards-based professional learning plan.

This section analyzes the local policy from five distinctly different discipline areas to gain a more sophisticated understanding of how school improvement planning and a district learning agenda (i.e., professional learning plan) might work together. The discipline areas or perspectives include educational, economic, social, political, and moral/ethical. Taken together, this mosaic of perspectives explains why my school district (and others) should expand their local policy to include the planning of standards-based professional learning.

Educational Analysis

There are three purposes for professional learning: the individual development of teaching staff, team or school improvement, and program implementation. A comprehensive learning system possesses a structure or process for addressing all three (Hirsh et al., 2014). Individual teachers need opportunities to seek growth in specific areas identified through the appraisal process or from self-examination (Von Frank, 2013a; 2013b). These opportunities may involve learning designs such as action research, book study, online courses, or peer observation. The next level of learning involves groups of teachers working in a particular school improvement area. Curriculum coaches, curriculum directors, or principals may identify these improvement areas. Learning designs could include lesson study, analysis of common assessments, or curriculum writing. Often times, the district office or building leaders assume responsibility for program implementation. Learning designs may include all of the above, plus methods of

evaluation and monitoring, such as classroom walkthroughs and the analysis of student performance data. Support and learning designs may be differentiated based upon the needs of a particular building or grade-level team. It is the responsibility of district leaders to set high expectations, build trust, and encourage innovation.

My school district already has a board goal of "providing coordinate professional development" with a strategic objective of "continuous job-embedded professional staff development and continuous improvement." This vision statement directs professional learning toward the ultimate goal of improving student learning (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). It begins with standards-based professional learning that leads to changes in educator knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Of course, changes in educator practices should lead to changes in student results. As Garet and his colleagues argue (2016), it is the teaching knowledge or skills needed to support student learning that is the focus of professional learning content.

In order for the professional learning of our teaching staff to impact student learning, we must have an action plan based on a common set of beliefs and assumptions around adult learning. Examinations of professional development policy and collective bargaining have led experts in the field to recommend districts adopt professional learning standards (NSDC, 2010). The conversation begins with the district's staff development committee and can be guided by Learning Forward's Standards of Professional Learning (2011). The seven standards are intended to work together to achieve the stated goals of the organization (see Moral and Ethical Analysis below). The standards include professional learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning designs, implementation, and outcomes. They are described in greater detail in my

program evaluation (Carlson, 2018a). Each standard comes with exemplars and descriptors (Killion, Hord, Roy, Kennedy, & Hirsch, 2012). Collectively, these standards can be operationalized to build a comprehensive learning system.

A comprehensive learning system establishes clear goals for adult learning and student learning. It includes a plan for monitoring the implementation of learning, including formative and summative measures. Although most school teams analyze standardized assessment data from state or district measures, most teachers find formative assessment data to be of greater use to their instruction (Chappuis, 2014; 2015). Classroom walkthroughs (Moss & Brookhart, 2015), quality feedback (Clark & Duggins, 2015) and information gained from the teacher appraisal process can be other valuable sources of data (Marshall, 2005). A balance or triangulation of data sources may be the best approach for setting student goals. Once district leaders or school improvement teams agree on the data trends, they can develop SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, and time-bound).

Thomas Guskey (2000, 2002) has introduced five levels of evidence that leaders should consider when evaluating professional learning. They include teachers' reactions to the learning activities, teachers' learning of new knowledge and skills, organizational support and change, teachers' use of new knowledge and skills, and student learning outcomes. With SMART goals in place, leaders are able to take a backward planning approach to design professional learning by reversing the order (Guskey, 2001; Hirsh, 2012). This approach was described in greater detail in my change process paper (Carlson, 2018b).

Economic Analysis

Like most school districts, we strive to maintain a financially stable position by implementing strong planning, building capacity to support emerging programs, and ensuring the ability to respond to changes in school funding. Therefore, we should monitor the effectiveness of our professional learning investments and discontinue practices or initiatives that do not yield the desired results. School reform and finance adequacy expert, Allen Odden (2011, 2012), has argued the cost of ongoing professional development should be a priority for school districts. However, calculating the real cost of professional learning and connecting it to student learning can be challenging. Odden and his colleagues (2002) developed a useful framework for capturing the cost of professional learning. Their framework consists of six elements of cost: Teacher time, training and coaching, administration of professional learning, materials/equipment/facilities, travel, and tuition or conference fees.

Teacher time may be the most straightforward cost element. It refers to the contractually bargained time when students are not present, such as teacher institute days or early release days. It can also include time outside of the contractual day when teachers are paid via stipend or extra duty rates. The professional learning hours are multiplied by the teachers' hourly salary to calculate the cost. Stipends and the cost of substitute teachers are included in this cost category as well. In the case of my school district, substitute pay is a significant cost factor for certain forms of job-embedded professional learning.

Training or coaching is the next cost element. It includes the salaries of consultants or professional developers hired outside of the contract. The cost of

instructional coaches and curriculum coordinators who are delivering training to staff should be included here as well. The sum of consultant fees and the salaries of internal personnel are calculated to determine this cost. Contracts with outside consultants are often established six months or more in advance. Therefore, careful planning and coordination with the curriculum review cycle are necessary to adjust costs or reallocate consultant dollars ahead of the budget development cycle. Teacher-led professional development is a possible cost-savings option here. Existing teacher leaders and professional development structures could be used in place of outside consultants. This type of leadership would require building up the human capital or capacity within the organization.

The third cost element is administration. In some larger school districts, there may be district or building level administrators whose job description consists exclusively of coordinating and leading professional learning. In smaller districts like mine, this responsibility is shared by multiple administrators. The salaries of these individuals can be multiplied by the proportion of time they devote to administering the professional learning plan.

Materials, equipment and facility costs needed for professional learning activities within the district make up the fourth element. Travel and transportation costs for district members to attend off-site learning opportunities make up the fifth element. The final cost element includes tuition and conference fees. Strong procedures and paperwork can capture this figure. For example, our district requires all staff to submit pre-approval and post-activity paperwork along with receipts before receiving district reimbursement. This paperwork ensures accuracy with the fund reporting. In the future, approval could be

granted only to those activities that align with the district's professional learning plan or strategic priority areas.

At this time, our school district can support professional development spending levels above the adequacy targets suggested by Odden (2012). However, we should consider some of his recommendations. Odden and Picus (2008) believe teacher contracts should include ten student-free days of intensive professional learning. These days include teacher institute days throughout the school year and summer work. We currently have nine total days dedicated to professional learning. Stipends pay for summer learning and curriculum work. The next recommendation comes in form of instructional coaching or job-embedded professional development. Odden offers a formula of 1 coach for every 200 students. That would yield a total of six full-time positions in our district. We currently have five individuals who are partially responsible for leading professional learning in-house. As I argued in my change plan (Carlson, 2018b), we could benefit from at least one literacy coach to support ongoing work on reading and writing instruction at the elementary level. The final recommendation is cost-neutral. It involves a close examination of the master schedule to find common time for teachers to engage in collaborative analysis around student work.

In summary, the economic analysis of professional learning requires an accounting of the true costs and an analysis of the return on investment. With predetermined cost structure and clearly defined adult and student outcomes, we would be in a position to calculate the effectiveness of our spending. The next step is to schedule this financial analysis within the larger cycle of planning and evaluation. If the district strategic plan calls for an environmental scan in January and budgetary staffing

projections in March, we could account for professional learning costs in April or May. Around the same time, the board of education adopts the following year's strategic plan. The district strategic plan and board goals would inform the professional learning plan written in support of the building school improvement plans that are adopted in September.

Social Analysis

Teaching is an incredibly complex endeavor. As students and curriculum change, educators must evolve and adapt their practice. Just as Wagner (2008) argued, “students are simply not learning the skills that matter most for the twenty-first century” (p. 9). Educators are responsible for evolving the curriculum to better match the needs and skills found in the workplace. However, teachers cannot refine their craft in isolation. Therefore, we must pay attention to the social landscape within our school buildings. Change and growth is accomplished best within social settings or within professional relationships. Jim Knight (2011) refers to this as “helping relationships.” His study of teachers and instructional coaches identify several success factors, including giving teachers a strong voice in their learning and opportunities for reflection. This may come in the form of needs assessments, feedback surveys, and teacher study groups. Certainly, our district’s staff development committee is a powerful vehicle for teacher input and oversight.

Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (2012) are another set of thought leaders who have introduced the concept of professional capital to explain the conditions needed for teacher effectiveness. Their framework includes three types of capital: Decisional, human, and social. Human capital refers to the skills and experiences of the teaching

staff. Skills may include technical skills and knowledge gained from their teacher preparation program, professional reading, and continued professional development activities, etc. Social capital refers to the relationships or networks in school buildings. Even teachers with lower levels of human capital can thrive in a school building or district with high levels of social capital. Hargreaves and Fullan refer to this as using the group to change the group.

Teacher relationships and collaborative structures are critical to the success of our professional learning plans. It is important to attend to the routines and resources within our professional learning communities. Researchers have studied how team dynamics and district policy shape the nature of teacher networks (Coburn, 2001; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Coburn, Russell, Kaufman, & Stein, 2012; Horn & Little, 2010). This work should lead school leaders to ask if their teacher teams share a common language and understanding of their curriculum. Do our teacher teams have common forms of leadership and approaches to discussing problems of practice? We need to strengthen the connections between teachers by attending to factors such as trust, the frequency of interactions, access to expertise (i.e., coaches, content specialists), and norms for professional collaboration.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) present a theory of adaptive leadership that requires the existence of shared purpose within an organization. Every organization has to make certain sacrifices when investing in a new initiative or a change process, and there will always be staff with personal interests or passions rejected in favor of others. This is where the social aspect must be considered. For example, the staff development committee may be planning an institute day focused on a specific topic within reading

comprehension (connected to a Board goal), and a few individual teachers wish to argue for time to address a social-emotional learning topic of personal interest. How does the larger committee respond? How do we adapt?

As Heifetz et al. (2009) has argued, "adaptive challenges are typically grounded in the complexity of values, beliefs, and loyalties rather than technical complexity and stir up intense emotions rather dispassionate analysis." I have found this to be particularly true when it comes to teachers discussing the priorities for their professional learning. Without a shared purpose and a structure for planning and evaluating professional learning, our district staff development committee will continue to face challenges like the example provided above.

Political Analysis

Educational policy is intended to create rules for governance and to assign values to certain groups through a democratic process. Administrative bodies such as the Federal Department of Education, the Illinois State Board of Education, and local school boards develop policies with input from different stakeholder groups. Some policies are largely symbolic in nature and other policies are instrumental. Some policies fail to achieve their intended results due to a lack of funding or monitoring. Unfortunately, there are often hidden forces at play resulting in unintended policy consequences or the perception of winners and losers. Policy makers often use this process for their advantage. Murray Edelman (1988) has described this as "political spectacle" with the metaphor of theater. The public watches, or is entertained, by the action on stage. Meanwhile, the transfer of power or values occurs backstage. There are many examples of how the process of creating educational policy has shaped discourse around public education at the national

and local level. The current debates around the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) certainly include the professional learning of teachers.

Proposed cuts to the 2019 federal education spending plan include the elimination of Title II, Part A. This is a program used by many schools to help pay for the cost of teacher professional development. At the same time, the current Department of Education is planning to increase money for school choice (Ujifusa, 2018). There are symbolic and instrumental consequences of these decisions. Some school districts have come to rely on this federal funding source for professional development and instructional coaching programs. Symbolically, it sends the message that the current administration is shrinking the role of the federal government and shifting resources and decision-making from government institutions to families. It may also send the message that the ongoing professional development of teachers is not a responsibility or a priority of the Department of Education.

Educational historian and policy expert, Diane Ravitch (2010), analyzed the San Diego reforms of 1998 to 2005 in her book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (ch. 4). In this case study, district leaders took an aggressive top-down approach to reform. They used symbolic language such as "moral imperative" and "defenders of children" to justify their model or methods for school improvement (a cardinal trait found in Edelman's political spectacle theory). Substantial investments in professional development were made to implement new curriculum and radically different pedagogical practices. Principals and instructional coaches were mobilized to aggressively push implementation with little to no input from the teaching force. While researchers found some positive increases in test scores, they also noted damage to the

culture of the organization. The lesson from San Diego is that coercion through professional development may not be worth the learning gains.

The answer to the problems found in the San Diego reform case study is not to abandon investments in professional development or to avoid advocating for professional learning to promote organizational change. The answer is to engage all stakeholders in the process of planning and evaluating professional learning. We can navigate the political landscape if there is trust, respect, and shared purpose (see Social Analysis).

At the local policy level, school boards play a critical role in supporting professional learning. They articulate a strong vision of student and staff success by setting goals. School boards have the ability to set policy and encourage practices that advance the professional development of leaders and teachers within the organization. They approve budgets that direct funds to professional learning and help to advocate the importance of allocating time and resources for professional learning when communicating with the taxpayers. Finally, local school boards may wish to formally adopt Learning Forward's Standards (2011) as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of professional learning in their district. The policy advocated in this paper would help school boards understand how a district professional learning plan would advance their strategic objectives.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

The Wallace Foundation (Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) commissioned a large-scale report on how leadership influences student learning. Researchers from the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto found a few basic principles of successful leadership. They included setting directions, developing

people, and redesigning the organization. School staff is motivated by goals they find personally compelling. Often, these goals can be seen through the lens of moral or ethical purpose (Fullan, 2003). Professional learning experiences are then designed to encourage the practices and beliefs set out by the leaders. Finally, structures within the organization are strengthened to encourage collaboration, shared inquiry, and a cycle of continuous improvement. This requires educational leaders to become proficient in large-scale strategic planning processes.

I analyze my proposed policy of aligning school improvement plans with a district professional learning plan with a lens of moral and ethical leadership. I draw connections to Jim Collins Level 5 Leaders (2001a; 2001b) and Drago-Severson's Pillar Practices (2008; 2009). In Collins' research of highly successful business organizations, he found the highest performing leaders possessed a mixture of both personal humility and professional will. They were modest, attributing success to the work of others in the organization and accepting personal responsibility for any failures. At the same time, these leaders remained committed to the long-term success of the organization and their employees. They modeled tireless commitment to the moral purpose of the organization.

Drago-Severson (2004), an educational researcher and adult learning expert, advocates for transformational learning that leads to "increases in our cognitive, affective, interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities that enable us to manage better the complex demands of teaching, learning, leadership, and life." She (2008; 2009) offers a framework of four pillar practices that school districts can use to support teacher growth. They include teaming, providing leadership roles, and mentoring. These different practices will appeal differently to staff, but each offer opportunities for individuals to take charge of

their growth and make meaning of their professional learning. These practices can also serve as vehicles for the transmission of shared values and purpose of the work.

Michael Fullan (2003) has identified four levels of moral purpose in school leadership. He begins with the moral imperative at the school level. This includes making a difference for individuals (level 1) and the school as a whole (level 2). A professional learning plan aligned with school improvement and district strategic goals can serve to empower individuals or teams of teachers. It can provide a roadmap for achieving the goals of the organization. A leader begins by courageously identifying the areas for change. This may start with student data analysis and an assessment of staff concerns or readiness with the change process, as described in my change plan (Carlson, 2018b). Moral leadership also addresses issues of equity within the school building. Do all children have access to high-quality instruction? Are there high standards set for all student groups and all teacher groups in the building? Do all teachers know the expectations and have the necessary resources to achieve the desired results?

The third and fourth levels of moral imperative include making a difference beyond the school. Fullan (2003) refers to "deep change" (p. 51) as district-wide reform that results in changes in culture. When there is trust between administration and school teams, successful and innovative practices can be shared. Professional learning in one school can inform or contribute to the professional learning in another school – a cross-pollination of successful practice. With a fully aligned district professional learning plan, all schools can grow together under the direction of the district's staff development committee (level 3). Ultimately, moral leaders consider how their school districts exist within the larger society (level 4). Through professional organizations, regional groups,

social media, and other networks, leaders contribute to the success of others in the field. Public education is a team sport. Moral leaders accept the responsibility of sharing best practice and shaping educational policy for the benefit of all students.

SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

The purpose of professional learning is to build the capacity of educators to meet the needs of all students. School improvement efforts are tied directly back to the attitudes, skills, and dispositions of the organization's teaching force. As I presented in my program evaluation (Carlson, 2018a), Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (2011) offer a common set of guidelines to assist educators with improving their practice and accelerating the growth of the students they serve. The implementation of these standards can also offer a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of professional learning efforts. This section outlines the advocated policy goals and objectives. Stakeholder needs, values, preferences, and benefits are also considered.

Goals and Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to expand local board policy 520.03 to include an annual cycle that aligns the individual school improvement plans with a district professional learning plan. The district's staff development committee is currently tasked with planning professional learning and supporting a model of continuous improvement for the district (see Figure 1). The work of this district committee and the building school improvement teams should complement one another, not operate in isolation. As various district and building-level data teams determine student and educator learning goals, the staff development committee can select the appropriate learning designs and direct job-embedded forms of professional learning to support the implementation or transfer of learning to the classroom level. This support could include instructional coaching, lab or

demonstration classrooms, and professional learning communities focused on the collaborative analysis of common/benchmark assessment data.

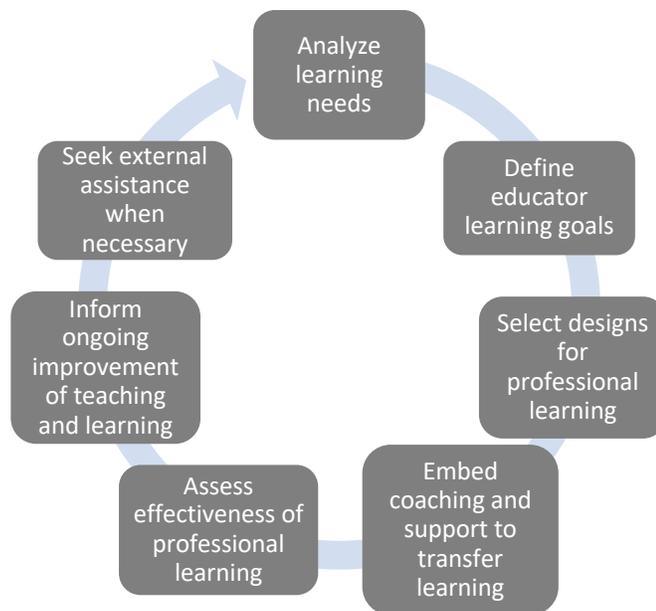


Figure 1. The cycle of continuous improvement (Hirsh, Psencik, & Brown, 2014)

One objective is to educate the staff development committee on the Standards for Professional Learning (2011). Since membership on the committee comes with a stipend, as dictated by the collective bargaining agreement with our teachers' association, teacher membership can vary from year to year. There is a clear need for a common framework or lens to discuss, plan, monitor, and evaluate professional learning in the district. The standards include Learning Communities, Leadership, Resources, Data, Learning Designs, Implementation, and Outcomes. Since their inception, much of the professional literature (i.e., theory, research, case studies) organized around these seven categories. With each new strategic priority, our district may wish to focus on one or more of them at a time. For example, the staff development committee may want to focus on the Learning Communities and Data standards ahead of launching professional learning communities.

If we are establishing systems for evaluating the impact of our professional learning efforts, the committee may wish to draw upon best practices associated with the Outcomes standard. Finally, innovation configuration maps (Killion et al., 2012) have been developed to guide district teams in how they can operationalize these standards.

A second objective is to employ a backward mapping process for planning standards-based professional learning activities (Killion & Kennedy, 2012). Effective plans connect student learning goals, educator performance standards, and learning content. The staff development committee would benefit from a clear process and procedure. The result would be a robust professional learning plan that could be easily digested by all stakeholders. This clarity and focus was something that my program evaluation found was missing in our organization (Carlson, 2018a). I provide a sample timeline for implementation in Section Five of this paper.

A third objective is for the district staff development committee to establish a more sophisticated practice of evaluating the effectiveness of professional learning. Guskey (2000, 2002, 2005) offers a model with five levels of evaluation, moving from simple to complex. Historically, our district has relied solely on teachers' reactions or opinions (level 1) of the half-day school improvement days planned by the staff development committee. This data is gathered through anonymous surveys and is often focused only on the design or delivery of professional development. Level 2 evaluation consists of teacher attainment of new skills or knowledge. This type of data is obtained from teaching demonstrations, oral/written reflections, and portfolios. Level 3 evaluation addresses the school district's efforts to support and recognize change. Level 4 evaluation includes evidence of teachers effectively applying their learning in the classroom. This

data could come from informal observations or classroom walk-throughs. Ultimately, Level 5 examines student learning outcomes. How did the application of educator learning impact student performance or well-being?

Stakeholder Needs, Values, Preferences, and Benefits

The primary stakeholders of this local board policy include the teaching staff, district administration, and students. The needs, values, and preferences of these groups receive consideration in this section. Eleanor Drago-Severson and Jessica Blum-DeStefano (2018) have written convincing arguments for how a focus on strong professional learning can build capacity in schools. They identify five specific drivers or elements that enhance adult collaboration and growth: Theory, culture, pillar practices, feedback, and sustainability. I mention these drivers at the conclusion of my change plan (Carlson, 2018b). I also use their drivers here to help illustrate how my policy goal and objectives are appropriate for increasing the effectiveness of our district's instructional program.

My program evaluation's review of professional literature (Carlson, 2018a) includes a description of the constructive-developmental theory of adult learning (Kegan, 1994, 2000). The theory asserts that adult learning or "ways of knowing" can be classified in different developmental stages. Adults make meaning of their world and receive new information or feedback in different ways. Therefore, it is necessary for administrators or teacher leaders (i.e., staff development committee) to consider how their learning designs and the larger system of professional learning can be differentiated to meet the needs of all educators in the organization. A shared vision or a common language for adult learning can facilitate planning and evaluation. Also, the Standards of

Professional Learning (2011) can provide a common framework or benchmark to judge the effectiveness of professional learning plans.

The teaching staff likely has specific values or preferences for their learning that have built up over time. They may involve particular preferences or styles for how they take in new content information or practice new instructional approaches. For example, some staff may wish to read professional literature and discuss this with their colleague before a new learning initiative. Other teachers may prefer to observe an instructional approach in action with students at their grade level or in their school. Some teachers may need time to reflect or receive feedback from a content expert. The expert can collect prior knowledge, assumptions, beliefs, and concerns of the teaching staff and incorporate this into the planning of professional learning. This collection could be done through a survey using the KASAB framework – Teacher knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors – around a particular change effort (Killion, 2008). This brings us back to asking who are the decision-makers? Who has the power and control of planning the content professional learning and the delivery methods? Who sets the priorities and how are decisions made?

A culture of collaboration (Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013) and a mindset of growth (Dweck, 2006) are necessary for effective professional learning. I believe our teaching staff must have significant input on their professional learning plans and a strong voice in the evaluation process. Indeed, I have found they are asking for this in my district (Carlson, 2018a). This does not mean district administration must abdicate responsibility for setting the priorities or direction of the organization. I believe it is a shared responsibility or a shared interest. Keith Leithwood's (2011) research on

high-performing school districts found "leadership affects student learning when it is targeted at working relationships, improving instruction and indirectly student achievement" (p. 234). With a clear understanding of the cycle of continuous improvement (Hirsh et al., 2014) and a backmapping model of planning standards-based professional learning (Killion & Roy, 2009; Killion & Kennedy, 2012), our teachers and administrators can enjoy an equal voice. Furthermore, the teaching staff can enjoy a clear understanding of how their collaborative learning promotes the strategic priorities of the district.

Drago-Severson's pillar practices for effective professional collaboration (2008, 2009, 2012) offer another framework for addressing the needs, values, and preferences of the teacher and administrator stakeholder groups. These practices include teaming, mentoring, providing teachers with leadership roles, and collegial inquiry. A school improvement plan that is closely aligned with the district professional learning plan could include support and resources in the form of these four pillars. With all the time demands on building leaders (Many & Sparks-Many, 2015), it is unreasonable for administration to control or direct teacher collaboration. For collaborative professional learning to be effective, educators need to know the purpose of their work. They need clear expectations or norms for how their professional learning communities, teaming, and collegial inquiry should operate. Administrators can then monitor the outcomes of teacher collaboration through clearly defined work products and artifacts listed in the school improvement plan.

We can address the needs of the teacher and administrator stakeholder groups through the last two drivers of capacity-building: Feedback and sustainability. Valerie

Shute's (2008) comprehensive review of the formative feedback literature is often cited for her research-based guidelines that maximize the power of feedback. Reducing uncertainty between performance and goals are among several strategies for using feedback to enhance learning. Teachers benefit from objective, real-time observations on how their instruction matches the objective and how it is leading to the goal of attainment. This may come in the form of peer observations, formal observations with a supervisor, and walk-through protocols. Supervisors may also want to consider the developmental stage of the adult learning by matching their feedback with the teacher's "ways of knowing" (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). Another feedback strategy is to promote a learning goal orientation. I connect this back to the work of Carol Dweck (2006) and the language found in a growth mindset. Teachers can benefit from receiving feedback that emphasizes effort and frames mistakes as an important part of the learning process. This mindset offers sustainability or renewal within individuals and brings us back to the cycle of continuous improvement (Hirsh et al., 2014).

The final stakeholder that deserves consideration is students. After all, they are the ultimate benefactor of effective professional learning. A school improvement plan that is focused on specific high-leverage strategies and closely aligned to a district professional learning plan will result in a cohesive instructional program for students. Students are more likely to experience consistent academic content, instructional pacing, and assessment practices across classrooms and among teachers. Effective professional learning communities may result in more cross-pollination of successful teaching practices and higher rates of student growth.

SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

I have argued strongly in favor of a local policy expanding the role of the staff development committee. In this section, I present a counterargument with a few reasons to resist aligning school improvement plans to a district professional learning plan. While there are valid concerns with my policy expansion, the supportive arguments are stronger on balance.

Counterargument to the Policy

The strongest counterarguments to a local policy aligning school improvement plans to a standards-based professional learning plan are time and autonomy. Time is the most precious resource for educators. Studies have shown that principals manage a wide variety of tasks and responsibilities. They tend to spend more time on administrative tasks than any other activity (Lavigne, Shakman, Zweig, & Greller, 2016; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Some may be resistant to asking building leaders and teacher committees to allocate more time to building professional learning plans, collecting staff surveys or student outcome data, and the monitoring of school improvement plans. These activities will undoubtedly require more committee time and may pull some teachers away from their classrooms. The development of a district professional learning plan could also take time away from other district efforts, lengthen the agenda of administrative council meetings in the busy spring and fall seasons, and cut into faculty meetings.

A reduction in teacher autonomy or collective teacher efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000) is another counterargument to my proposed policy. Hoy and Sweetland (2000, 2001; Hoy, 2003) have introduced a continuum of school structures,

ranging from enabling to hindering. At the negative extreme, efforts to formalize behaviors or routines can alienate or reduce teacher feelings of teacher efficacy. In these school organizations, the administration may emphasize compliance with rules and regulations. Administration may impose narrow or highly prescriptive instructional practices and protocols for teacher collaboration. Likewise, efforts to centralize or impose a more top-down approach to decision-making can lead to teacher dissatisfaction or even hostility.

Heifetz et al. (2009) suggest "resistance to change stems from a fear of losing something important" (p. 96). An aspect of teacher identity or autonomy may feel threatened by the advocated professional learning policy. Some staff may view the proposed policy goal as too rigid or an effort to institutionalize a process of planning professional learning activities that demands consensus. The change could uncover a lack of trust between administration and teaching staff, or between colleagues. This gets to the heart of power and trust, control and independence within the school. In his model for systemic change, Wagner et al. (2006) addresses this type of resistance. He believes the success of school improvement efforts depend upon the "quality of the conversations among individuals and groups" (p. 149). By imposing a plan or process without clear expectations and open dialogue, the teaching staff could view this as just one more time-consuming mandate from the administration.

Finally, some administrators may resist giving up control over the planning of professional learning. These educational leaders may hold the opinion that they understand the needs of the organization better than the teachers in the buildings. The district office certainly has access to student performance assessments and longitudinal

data trends that teaching staff may not have seen nor the capacity to analyze. Some administrators may not trust the teaching staff to share in the design of their own professional learning. For example, a teacher request for more time to collaborate may be seen as time wasted on superficial conversations or just "work of the day." These same administrators may not see value building the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary for collaborative professional learning.

Pros of the Policy

I assert the additional time and energy required to align annual school improvement plans to a standards-based district professional learning plan is worthwhile. Our local school board policies drive administrative practice. The policies are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure they promote the mission and objectives of the school district. Two of our current school board objectives are to "create rich learning experiences and dynamic environments that promote student growth..." and to "provide coordinated professional development by creating specific and continuous job-embedded staff development." The policy expansion I advocate would significantly enhance the professional learning in our district and lead to targeted student growth. It would bring clarity to the organization and allow the school board to understand how well our planning, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning measure up to the critical elements found within the Standards (Learning Forward, 2011).

A professional learning plan that closely aligns with the district's strategic plan and individual school improvement plans can promote practices that support adult collaboration and reflective practice. The specificity of these plans would provide clear expectations and vehicles to enhance adult growth and development. Drago-Severson

(2004, 2008) has offered 4 "pillar practices" that learning-oriented organizations employ – Teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. I describe them in greater detail within my program evaluation (Carlson, 2018a) and change plan (Carlson, 2018b). These pillar practices allow differentiated learning opportunities and experiences for teaching staff to make sense of their growth. I argue that a professional learning plan built around these practices would build patterns of communication, enhance trust within the system, and defuse feelings of resistance to change.

The costs of professional development can be significant for any school district. School finance expert, Allan Odden (2012), has estimated the typical cost of professional development to be an extra 20% over a teacher's salary and benefits package. Given our district is currently undergoing a controlled four-year budget reduction effort, it would be wise to establish a professional learning plan that allows for the evaluation of its impact on student growth. There may come a time when we need to justify the expense of our professional learning efforts and the associated supports. This analysis of expenditure could include the teacher work calendar, length of the school/work day, summer curriculum stipends, cost of outside consultants, support personnel (e.g., instructional coaches, content experts), etc.

Turning back to Hoy and Sweetland's (2000, 2001; Hoy, 2003) continuum of school structures, I believe this proposed policy will serve as an enabling force rather than hindering force. A clear process of planning and evaluating professional learning can foster greater communication and trust between the teaching staff and administration. It would certainly offer an important venue for problem solving and collaboration. The iterative nature of the backmapping model (Killion & Roy, 2009; Killion & Kennedy,

2012) will lead to closer approximations of the educator and student outcomes that we have defined as an organization. It can also provide the freedom for teachers to innovate and reflect. Most significantly, the current school improvement and district strategic plans operate in isolation and appear disconnected from the professional learning conducted within the district. A professional learning plan aligned to school improvement goals would offer our organization the momentum and collective commitment that comes from the acknowledgement of "short-term wins" (Fullan, 2001; Schmoker, 2004).

I conclude this section with a dilemma posed by Michael Fullan in his 2003 book, *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*. The reaction to academic freedom or teacher individualism does not have to be prescribed practices, rigid expectations, or coercive accountability measures. Instead, we should ask what conditions or context is needed to foster informed professional judgment in the teaching staff? However, as Fullan points out, it "takes capacity to build capacity" (p. 7). Later in his book, Fullan answers this question of informed professional judgment. He concludes that informed professional judgment can only be developed with "relationship trust and a culture of discipline" (p. 44). I believe the proposed expansion of local policy to connect school improvement plans with a standards-based district professional learning plan is needed to foster a culture of disciplined inquiry and informed judgment for all members of the organization.

SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

In this section, I present implementation design for a local policy that connects the district's professional learning plan to individual school improvement plans and the broader strategic planning process of the school district. This implementation design is particularly important, as it provides a visual representation of what a cycle of continuous improvement (see Figure 1) might look like in the Shermerville School District. As I previously argued, we currently have a gap between how our school district plans professional learning activities and how teacher leadership teams develop their school improvement plans. The realization of change from this advocated policy will come from a detailed timeline for planning professional learning in connection with district strategic planning, school improvement plans, and the district budget review cycle. Educational needs and professional development for successful implementation are considered, including a model for collaborative analysis of student learning. I also present a sample program budget and methods for monitoring the progress of this implementation plan.

Educational Needs and Implications

As a school reform expert, Michael Fullan (2015) has written extensively on policy implementation. He argues stakeholder groups must first understand the urgency for change and the justification for proposed policy. Teaching staff, administration, and school board members represent the three stakeholder groups most closely impacted by this expansion of local policy. Therefore, these individuals need to be educated on the purpose of aligning our school improvement plans with a district professional learning plan. These stakeholder groups must also understand what their responsibility within a cycle of continuous improvement.

Currently, our school improvement plans are focused on closing achievement gaps between student subgroups, increase overall rates of students meeting their reading and math growth targets, and reflect the curriculum review cycle presented by the assistant superintendent. They conspicuously lack a connection to our district professional learning activities or clearly defined outcomes for teachers and students. Furthermore, there is a lack of coordination between our school improvement plan timeline, district strategic plan timeline, and the planning of professional learning activities. As such, these school improvement plans are typically written in the fall and may not be referenced again by teaching staff until late spring when the principals reflect on their student growth data. As I mentioned in section one of this paper, the Illinois P-20 Council (2017) has recommended school-based leadership teams specifically focus on improvements to student outcomes. The implementation of this policy would inform all stakeholders on which specific student outcomes our district deems important – What is the intended result of our coordinated professional learning and school improvement efforts?

As I referenced in section one of this paper, we have an active board policy that directs the superintendent to organize a staff development committee whose purpose shall be to plan, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive in-service program which includes professional development activities related to board and district goals (see Appendix A). If we expand the work of our staff development committee, our stakeholder groups will better understand their roles in facilitating professional learning and building collective capacity to achieve stated learning goals. The Standards of Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) offer a framework that can be used to establish important

facets of effective adult learning. Following the school leadership team rubrics found within Learning Forward's Innovation Configuration Maps (2012), I am recommending an expanded policy that develops the knowledge and skills necessary to employ the seven steps of the cycle of continuous improvement (see Figure 1). These steps will also ensure that professional learning is aligned with school improvement plans and the district's strategic plan. Most importantly, our staff will see a clear link between student learning outcomes and their professional learning activities. I include a suggested revision of the current board policy in Appendix B.

The staff development committee may wish to examine case studies or reports of how other educational agencies and local school districts have improved their planning and evaluation of professional learning, such as The Transforming Professional Learning in Kentucky Project (Berry et al., 2012) or Scottsdale Arizona's Salt River School District's Professional Learning Plan (2017). The Kentucky project report includes a specific recommendation that would require local school boards to establish an approval process for school improvement plans aligned to PD standards. The Salt River School District's plan includes professional learning goals based upon evidence for student growth, teacher learning, and aligned with the district's strategic goals. It defined the various phases of professional development planning and implementation, along with specific roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders within the school district.

The state of Delaware's application for the Race to the Top award in 2010 included systemic procedures to provide teachers with "collaborative planning time in which teachers analyze student data, develop plans to differentiate instruction in response to data, and review the effectiveness of prior actions" (Delaware Department of

Education, 2010, p. C-27). This collaborative planning time (i.e., professional learning communities) serves as the jet fuel for the professional learning plan. I touched on this concept more in my change plan recommendations (Carlson, 2018b). These examples of successful planning efforts can inform our district process and provide staff with the ongoing supports and resources needed to maximize their professional learning time.

Finally, Killion (2013) authored a detailed workbook for districts to use in developing their professional learning plans. The workbook describes the core elements of a professional learning plan. They include a needs analysis, goals, objectives, strategic actions, and a timeline. Similar to the Salt River School District's Plan (2017) referenced above, it may include belief statements or a specific change model. I have created a sample template of a professional learning plan for the Shermerville School District in Appendix C.

Professional Development for Successful Implementation

The staff development committee will need to develop their knowledge and skills related to the leadership of professional learning. It may be useful for this representative group of teachers and administrators to unpack the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011). The seven standards include Learning Communities, Leadership, Resources, Data, Learning Designs, Implementation, and Outcomes. It begins with understanding the key attributes found within each of these standards, how they connect to the larger research body, and how they apply to our school district's professional learning program. Learning Forward's Innovation Configuration Maps (2012) are the perfect tool to guide this type of work. While the standards are not organized in a linear fashion, the Implementation Standard could be an entry point. This

standard includes the identification of learning outcomes – teacher outcomes connected to teacher performance standards and student outcomes connected to content or student performance standards (e.g., Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards).

The Learning Design Standard is another useful resource for the staff development committee to consider. With an appreciation for leading theories or models of adult learning, this representative group of educators can become stronger advocates for learning designs that will engage their colleagues and help to transform their practice. For example, Drago-Severson's pillar practices (2004, 2008, 2009, 2012) provide a practical framework for accomplishing the goals of the school improvement plan and the district's strategic plan. Her pillar practices to support adult growth entail opportunities for teaming (professional collaboration), teacher leadership, collegial inquiry (talk about practice), and mentoring. She espouses a theory of adult learning (2009) that considers different development stages of receiving information. These development stages, or "ways of knowing," suggest that adults have different purposes for their learning. They may also prefer different types of feedback (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStafon, 2016) and require different kinds of support to sustain their learning, apply new knowledge or skill to the classroom.

The collaborative analysis of student learning (CASL) is a specific professional learning design our district may wish to invest in for the successful implementation of a districtwide professional learning plan (Colton, Langer, & Goff, 2016). CASL follows a cycle of continuous improvement and provides structured inquiry or intentional collaboration between teachers. This form of job-embedded professional learning follows

many of the important aspects of effective professional learning discussed in my review of the literature (Carlson, 2018a, 2018b). For example, CASL focuses on student outcomes. It promotes the cross-pollination of effective practice and sustains professional learning over time. The structured inquiry found in CASL follows five phases lasting approximately 3-5 months or about one semester. Each phase has a specific purpose and a set of protocols for the group members to follow. In support of my advocated policy, this professional learning design can provide an important vehicle for feedback to the staff development committee responsible for evaluating and revising the district's professional learning plan.

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Phase I: Establishing a focus for inquiry | What area of the curriculum is most challenging for our students? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define target learning area • Design initial whole-class assessment |
| Phase II: Define teacher professional learning goal(s) | Which students would be most fruitful to study over time? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze initial assessment results • Establish professional learning goal(s) • Select focus student |
| Phase III: Inquiry into teacher learning (3-5 months) | Which approaches are most responsive to our students' specific strengths and needs? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze each focus student's work sample (every 2-4 weeks) |
| Phase IV: Assess learning progress | What progress have our students made? Who needs further assistance? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze whole-class final assessment results • Plan for students not reaching proficient performance |
| Phase V: Integrate learning into professional practice | What have we learned about ourselves and our teaching and what might we need to learn more about? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on teacher and student learning • Set professional learning goal(s) • Celebrate accomplishments |

Figure 2. The Five CASL Phases (Colton, Langer, & Goff, 2016)

Timeline for Implementation

The timeline for implementation may be the most critical aspect of my advocated policy aligning a professional learning plan with the district strategic plan and individual school improvement plans. It shows the connections and how data from each plan informs the other. The timeline follows the school calendar and the backmapping model of planning professional learning (Killion & Roy, 2009; Killion & Kennedy, 2012). I have also taken ideas from Mooney and Mausbach's (2008) blueprint for school improvement. Figure 3 illustrates how these seven steps can guide our staff development committee on the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of our professional learning efforts. I have placed a graphic in support of this timeline in Appendix C.

| Month | Professional Learning Plan Steps | School Improvement Timeline |
|-------------------|---|--|
| May | 1. Analyze student learning needs. 2. Identify characteristics of community, district, and school. | Board of Education adopts a district strategic plan. |
| June | 3. Develop improvement goals and specific student outcomes. 4. Identify educator learning needs. | Adopt a district professional learning plan and begin the budgeting process. |
| July to October | 5. Study the research for specific professional learning programs, strategies, or interventions. 6. Plan intervention, implementation, and evaluation. | Adopt individual school improvement plans. |
| November to April | 7. Implement, sustain, and evaluate the professional development intervention. | Integrate differentiated supervision. |

Figure 3. Professional learning and school improvement plan timeline

The timeline begins with the staff development committee drafting a professional learning plan in May. The analysis of student learning needs identifies what knowledge or skills our students are missing (e.g., gaps in their learning)? This comes from data trends found within standardized assessments, common/benchmark assessments, and the

collaborative analysis of student learning at each grade level team. We may also consider community, district, and school characteristics as possible factors that can positively or negatively influence the success of our school improvement efforts. This data may come from parent and/or staff surveys of school climate and learning conditions, such as the Illinois 5Essentials Survey. Around this same time, the school board adopts a strategic plan for the next school year with advice from district administration. The priorities set by the board of education should filter through the professional learning plan and school improvement plans that follow.

In June, the staff development committee is responsible for identifying improvement goals for students, educators, and the school district. These student outcomes will inform what knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors our teaching staff need to develop to meet the improvement goals. A professional learning plan is written and taken to the school board for approval. Budgeting for professional learning expenses can also begin at this time.

From July to October, the staff development committee has time to study the research on specific professional learning programs, strategies, or interventions. The assistant superintendent may confer with her colleagues in the township or consult with outside experts around the identified goals of the district's professional learning plan. This is also a time to adjust the curriculum review cycle and schedule professional learning activities over the course of the year. Responsibilities can be assigned and timelines developed for the roll-out. The staff development committee may plan each of the school improvement half-days. Job-embedded professional learning vehicles such as lab classrooms or instructional coaches can prepare to support the plan. Most importantly,

the administration can present the professional learning plan alongside the district strategic plan at the opening staff institute day in August.

The individual school improvement teams develop their plans in the month of September. They are approved by the school board in October and posted on the district website. Alignment between school improvement goals and the district professional learning plan is now emphasized. Much of the data analysis, focus, and urgency are generated in the spring. As a result, the school improvement plans can include portions of the professional learning plan. It is likely these documents will share the same indicators of success.

From November to April, the staff development committee is monitoring the implementation of the professional plan. They may also supervise the collection of data in regards to the indicators of success. This could be a shared responsibility with the individual school improvement teams. While I place the first 4 steps of the backmapping model in the spring, the reality is planning for professional learning is a year-round endeavor. It is cyclical in nature. The evaluation of professional learning efforts informs the plans for the subsequent year. The evaluation of the professional learning plan can begin in April and must conclude by the end of May.

Program Budget

It should be noted, the program budget for this policy is cost-neutral. It does not add additional expense to the district. Professional learning has always had budget implications. However, determining the true cost is challenging. As presented in Section Two, Odden and his colleagues (2002) offer a framework for capturing the true cost of professional learning. Their framework consists of six elements of cost: Teacher time,

training and coaching, administration of professional learning, materials/equipment/facilities, travel, and tuition or conference fees. With a professional learning plan approved in May, our chief financial officer can budget for many of the anticipated expenses. Furthermore, each of the budget supervisors can better understand how they will spend their money allocated to the professional learning and school improvement efforts of the district.

Teacher time is primarily accounted for by multiplying the per diem by the number of school improvement or institute days (non-student attendance). Given the amount of job-embedded professional learning that requires substitute teacher coverage, we may wish to add a code to our absence management system. Training and coaching refer to contracts with outside experts or professional learning consultants. These contracts are reviewed on an annual basis and completed in coordination with the development of the professional learning plan and budget approval cycle. Material fees will most likely come in the form of professional book orders. Equipment and facility fees are insignificant given all district-led professional learning occurs within the school buildings.

The district professional growth committee addresses the categories of travel, tuition, and conferences. The board of education approves a designated amount of money each year to encourage teachers to participate in activities that will enhance their professional development. These activities are meant to occur outside the district-led professional learning program. They may include professional memberships or journals, workshops, and conferences. These funds may also be used for graduate studies. There is an approval process that each staff member must follow to access these funds. The

district may consider aligning this approval process with the goals and objectives within the district professional learning plan and individual school improvement plans.

Progress Monitoring

The administrative council has the primary responsibility for monitoring the implementation of this local policy. With a standing meeting agenda item, the council will ensure that important deadlines on the implementation timeline are met. Before bringing them to the school board for approval, district administration will review the professional learning plan and school improvement plans for alignment and connection to student achievement. The administration can address calendars, meeting structures, and other schoolwide conditions necessary for the successful implementation of professional learning. Finally, it is important for district administration to build the capacity of principals and school teams to analyze student data.

The staff development committee holds responsibility for the design and implementation of the professional learning plan. Once the sources of data (i.e., measures of success) are identified, this committee can monitor data collection. Regularly reviewing progress toward short-term objectives is another strategy for monitoring the professional plan. By early spring, the staff development committee is evaluating the plan to determine if the goals and objectives were met. I expand upon this aspect of progress monitoring in the next section.

The building principals are responsible for monitoring their school improvements. They ensure their school leadership teams use the district professional learning plan to inform the development of a school improvement plan. The principals echo the goals of the district and school, explaining how the systems are connected. It may also be

important for the building leader to articulate the link between professional learning and student learning to the parent community.

An additional benefit from aligning a district professional learning plan with school improvement plans is the ability of evaluators to integrate differentiated supervision practices. Like many districts, our appraisal system uses the Danielson (2011) framework as a lens to view professional practice. With clearly articulated goals for educators and explicit indicators of success, all evaluators in the district can bring greater focus to their supervisory walk-throughs. Teaching staff will know the priorities of the school district and what needs to be applied to classroom instruction. Ahead of the summative evaluation conference, teachers organize artifacts and student growth plans in relation to school improvement goals and the professional learning plan.

SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

The policy assessment plan mirrors the implementation timeline described in section five. The staff development committee has primary responsibility for designing, monitoring, and evaluating the effectiveness of the professional learning plan each spring. They can determine success by reviewing the indicators and measures of success detailed in the professional learning plan. Meanwhile, building principals are responsible for monitoring their school improvement plans are driven by student data, identify adult learning needs, and reflect the professional learning objectives found within the district plan.

Following the adoption of a district strategic plan in May, this policy requires the presentation of the district professional learning plan to the board of education in June. The presentation serves as evidence that the district administration has operationalized the goals of the district and has a plan for continuous improvement. School improvements plans must also be presented to the board of education in October. This practice is another accountability measure to ensure alignment between district systems and school systems. Finally, the backmapping model of planning (Killion & Roy, 2009; Killion & Kennedy, 2012) used by the staff development committee includes specific methods for evaluation. At any time in the school year, our superintendent and board of education can ask about the strategies or actions taken toward the plan's stated objectives. A cycle of continuous improvement is visible to all members of the organization and community. This transparency can serve to motivate and hold all stakeholders accountable for their role in professional learning.

Innovation configuration maps (Learning Forward, 2012) are another tool that our staff development committee could leverage to analyze how closely the district's professional learning program adheres to the Standards of Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011). This resource allows groups of educators to reflect and strengthen practices in the areas of learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning designs, implementation, and outcomes. The maps are written from the perspective of teachers, instructional coaches, school leadership teams, and principal. The school district can assess where it is in relation to the attributes of professional learning and identifying next steps for improvement.

To date, our evaluation of professional learning activities has been insufficient. It is episodic and limited to teacher satisfaction surveys collected in the waning minutes of school improvement half-days. The professional learning plan template found in Appendix C includes a clear description of the educator and student learning outcomes for professional learning. More sophisticated data collection methods related to indicators of success can serve to answer the question – How effective are our professional learning efforts? Figure 4 details Guskey's Five Critical Levels of Professional Development Evaluation (2000). This is a useful framework for the staff development committee to consider in planning their assessment of the professional learning plan.

| Evaluation Level | Questions Addressed | Information Gathering | What is measured? |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1. Participants' Reactions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did participants like it? • Was time well spent? • Did the material make sense? • Will it be useful? • Was the presenter knowledgeable? • Did the physical conditions of the activity support learning? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires administered at the end of a session. • Focus groups. • Interviews • Personal learning log. | Initial satisfaction with the experience. |
| 2. Participants' Learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did participants acquire the intended knowledge or skill? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper and pencil tests • Simulations or demonstrations • Participant reflections • Participant portfolios • Case study analysis | New knowledge and/or skills of participants. |
| 3. Organization support and change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the impact on the organization? • Did it affect organizational climate or procedures? • Was implementation advocated, facilitated, and supported? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District and school records • Minutes from meetings • Questionnaires • Focus groups • Structured interviews • Participant portfolios | The district/school's advocacy, support, accommodations, facilitation, and recognition. |
| 4. Participants' use of new knowledge or skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did participants effectively apply the new knowledge and skills? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires • Structured interviews • Participant reflections • Participant portfolios • Direct observations • Concerns-based adoption model survey | Degree and quality of information |
| 5. Student learning outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the impact on students? • Did it affect student performance or achievement? • Did it influence students' emotional well-being? • Are students more confident as learners? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student records • School records • Questionnaires • Structured interviews with students, teachers, parents, and/or principals • Participant portfolios | Student learning outcomes: Achievement, attitudes, skills, and behaviors |

Figure 4. Guskey's (2000) Five Critical Levels of Professional Development Evaluation

As mentioned above, our existing data collection methods are limited to level 1 – participants’ reactions to district-led professional learning activities. The professional learning plan advocated in this policy will allow our staff development committee to plan for more sophisticated data collection in the pursuit of improving professional learning in the district. By collecting feedback relative to participant’s learning (level 2), we will be able to improve upon the content, format, and organization of both our school improvement days and our job-embedded forms of professional learning. Evaluation of organization support and change (level 3) can provide documentation of systemic change and inform future change efforts. Levels 4 and 5 bring us to the true impact of professional learning. How are our teaching staff applying new knowledge and skills? This type of data can serve to document or improve the implementation of professional learning content. It may also reveal what ongoing supports and resources are needed to transfer new learning to the classroom. Of course, student learning outcomes represent the ultimate form of assessment. This data can bring focus and improve all aspects of the professional learning design, implementation, and necessary follow-up.

SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

I am advocating for an expansion of local school board policy that directs the work of a staff development committee whose purpose “shall be to plan, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive in-service program which includes professional development activities related to Board and District goals.” This policy expansion (see Appendix B) would require each school to submit an annual school improvement plan that is aligned to a comprehensive district professional learning plan based on the Professional Learning Standards (Learning Forward, 2011). The district professional learning plan is adopted in June, following the development of the district strategic plan. School improvement plans are developed in the fall and approved by the board of education in October. Of course, revisions to the professional learning plan can be at any time throughout the school year or addressed at subsequent board presentations when principals share their school improvement plans, or curriculum committees highlight their accomplishments.

I believe this policy is appropriate to meet the needs of district teaching staff and will ultimately benefit the students of the Shermerville School District. This document is the result of my evaluation of the district's professional learning program (Carlson, 2018a) and lessons learned from my change plan document (Carlson, 2018b). My research identified a need for greater clarity and coherence between our district and our school improvement efforts. Teachers are asking for greater focus and coherence to their professional learning efforts. Furthermore, I believe our staff development committee can be empowered to plan, implement, and evaluate professional learning activities for the benefit of all staff and students.

This document includes a clear process for planning and evaluating professional learning in the district. I have drafted a template for writing a district professional learning plan that includes essential components found in the research (Killion, 2013), including clear methods for evaluating the program's impact on educator behaviors and student learning outcomes (Guskey, 2000). With some education on the Professional Learning Standards (Learning Forward, 2011), adult learning theory, and effective learning design, our staff development committee will have the capacity to guide a cycle of continuous improvement in the Shermerville School District.

My concluding thought is in regards to celebrating success and acknowledging student achievement. Teaching is a difficult and complex endeavor. There are many demands placed on our teachers and principals. Therefore, it is important to celebrate what DuFour and his colleagues (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006) have termed "short-term wins." We need to recognize that we are getting better at our craft through planning and hard work. The systems and processes advocated in this policy create the conditions to point to improvements in educator practice and student outcomes explicitly. With clear indicators of success, principals and other district leaders can point to specific evidence of student growth and improvement – both individual accomplishments and collective accomplishments. This practice is also a hallmark of adaptive organizations. Heifetz et al. (2009) notes in his description of adaptive organizations, "People view the latest strategic plan as today's best guess rather than a sacred text. And they expect to constantly refine it as new information comes in" (p. 107). A standards-based professional learning plan closely aligned with the district strategic plan and school improvement plans is our best vehicle for adaptive change.

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APPENDIX A: CURRENT BOARD POLICY

Board Policy Manual Section 5 - Personnel

Title - PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL - Staff Development (Number 520.03)

Status: Active

Adopted: March 2010

Last Revised: February 2010

The School Board recognizes the fact that its professional staff should continue to improve their competencies throughout their years of service. To that end, the Board directs the Superintendent to organize a Staff Development Committee whose purpose shall be to plan, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive inservice program which includes professional development activities related to Board and District goals.

APPENDIX B: REVISED BOARD POLICY

Board Policy Manual Section 5 - Personnel

Title - PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL – Professional Learning (Number 520.03)

Status: Draft

Last Revised: February 2010

The School Board recognizes the fact that its professional staff should continue to improve their competencies throughout their years of service. To that end, the Board directs the Superintendent to organize a Staff Development Committee whose purpose shall be to plan, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive professional learning program that is aligned with school improvement goals and district strategic goals. The staff development committee will use the cycle of continuous improvement (Hirsch, Psencik, & Brown, 2014) and the Professional Learning Standards (Learning Forward, 2011) to guide their work. This committee will also share responsibility with district administration for communicating a clear link between student learning and professional learning. A professional learning plan will be developed by the Staff Development Committee and approved by the School Board each spring. This plan will inform school improvement plans developed each fall.

APPENDIX C: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN TEMPLATE

This template incorporates the essential elements of a professional learning plan as described by Killion (2013) and Guskey's levels of impact (2000). The alignment model is inspired by Mooney & Mausbach's (2008) blueprint for school improvement.

District Belief Statement

The Shermerville School District exists to create a community that craves learning, fosters resiliency, and cares deeply for every child. We take responsibility for all students, maintain strong relationships, and implement child-centric practices.

District Strategic Goal

This year, our strategic goal is to increase the district's capacity to systemically collaborate within grade-level teams to execute the cycle of continuous instructional improvement.

Theory of change

This graphic explains the relationship between professional learning and student results. It assumes a cycle of constant analysis and review with the ultimate goal of improving student results. The professional learning plan is updated on an annual basis and informs the decisions of the individual school improvement teams and the administrative council's work on the district strategic plan.



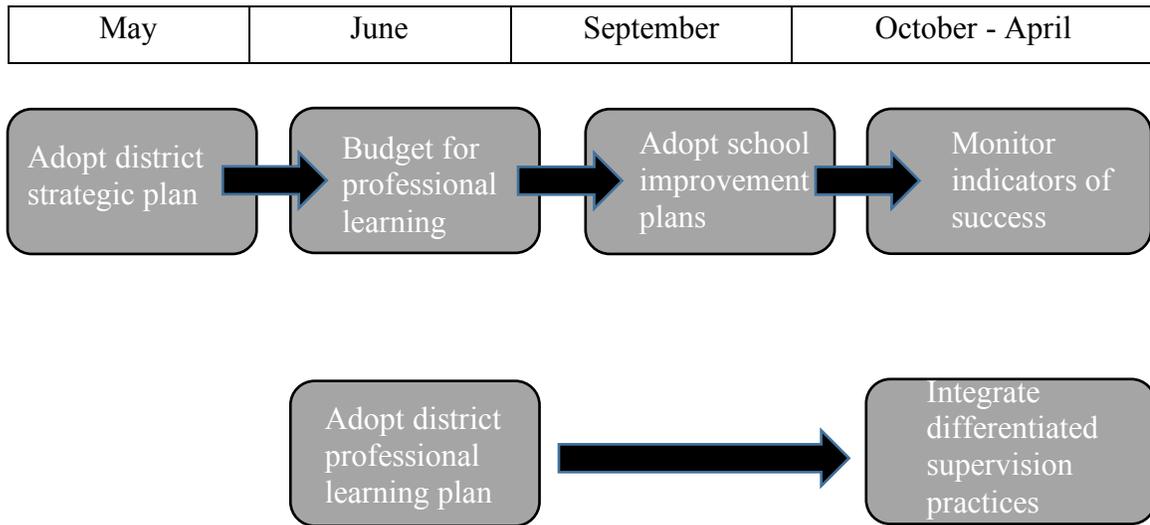
Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011)

Our professional learning will increase educator effectiveness and results for all students when it is aligned to the Standards for Professional Learning. These 7 categories can be used by the staff development committee to guide decisions, allocate resources, and assign responsibility.

- Learning Communities: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal attainment.
- Leadership: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.
- Resources: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.
- Data: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

- Learning Design: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.
- Implementation: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change
- Outcomes: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Overview of School Improvement Processes



Professional Learning Goal Template

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Goal #1:</p> <p><i>What are the student and educator outcomes of professional learning? Goals are written using a SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, results-bade, and time-bound) format. Indicators of success can be used to described completed action steps and help convey progress toward the goals.</i></p> | |
| Objective 1a: | <p>Measure of Success:</p> <p><i>What data will we collect data to demonstrate indicators of success?</i></p> |
| Objective 1b: | <p>Measure of Success:</p> |
| Timeline: | <p>Resources Needed:</p> |
| <p>Evaluation Plan:</p> <p><i>What is our level of success with this professional learning plan? Use the indicators and measures of success to determine if the goals and objectives were achieved. It may be helpful to track success at each of the 5 levels of impact. Of course, when planning future professional learning goals, the order of these levels should be reversed.</i></p> <p>Level 1 – Participant Reactions Level 2 – Participants’ Learning Level 3 – Organizational Support and Change Level 4 – Participants’ Use of New Knowledge and Skills Level 5 – Student Learning Outcomes</p> | |