



Advisory

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) is an advisory and consultative organization composed of the CEOs of each of the 72 District School Boards in Ontario; Public, Catholic and French Language.

Professional Development that Makes a Difference

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Effective professional development programs and collaborative learning are instrumental to improving student instruction and enhancing instructional leadership.

A report completed for the Ontario Ministry of Education states: "Effective professional development strongly links teacher and student learning and is guided by data. Research highlights that effective professional development must be personalized and responsive to the complex and unique needs and context of the learner. Collaboration, shared inquiry and learning from and with peers have been identified as central to professional development." [Report to the Partnership Table on Teacher Professional Learning. (2007). p. 8.

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/pdfs/partnerReport.pdf>

Improving an individual's capacity to be more effective, more confident and motivated are key aspects of a well designed professional development program. In the past, professional development often encompassed broad topics and was presented on a single day, without follow-up activities. Now more comprehensive and complex, professional development programs encourage interaction, provide specific content, and recognize peer observations as an instructional tool. [Ingvarson, L., Meiers, M. & Beavis, A. 2005]

http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=professional_dev.

Job-embedded professional learning communities and coaching that is grounded in day-to-day practice are now recognized as necessary components of effective professional development. The learning community joins together a group of people who are motivated to support one another to achieve a common vision of improved student learning.

A professional learning community:

- represents a collective effort to enhance student learning
- promotes and sustains the learning of all professionals in the school
- builds knowledge through inquiry
- analyses and uses data for reflection and improvement. [Bolam, R. et al., quoted in The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. *Professional Learning Communities: A Model for Ontario Schools*. (2007). [full reference under "Links to Other Resources"]

"If there is anything that the research community agrees on, it is this: the right kind of continuous, structured teacher collaboration improves the quality of teaching and pays big, often immediate, dividends in student learning and professional morale in virtually any setting. Our experience with schools across the nations bears this out unequivocally." [Schmoker, M., quoted in the LNS document referenced above.]



“For teachers, collaborative inquiry involving cycles of planning, action, and reflection is exhilarating and rejuvenating. It restores our faith in the values for which we entered the profession. It makes ongoing school improvement viable, compelling, and immediate. It puts teachers and schools at the forefront of educational change. It empowers teachers by combining action to improve student achievement with self-directed, professional learning, so that we see ourselves not as passive recipients but as people empowered to make a difference.” p. 2

The Canadian Journal of Action Research. (2011). *Capacity Building In Collaborative Action Research: An Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) Initiative*. [full reference in “Links to Other Resources”]



While professional development needs and strategies will vary according to position and responsibility in the school system, the processes for engaging staff will be similar for all employees, based on the adult learning model.

What does the Ministry of Education expect?

Legislation:

Education Act

The *Education Act* sets out expectations for the board and director of education that could not be realized without providing effective professional development.

Part VI—Boards. s. 169.1 (1). “Every board shall, (a) promote student achievement and well-being; (b) ensure effective stewardship of the board’s resources; (c) deliver effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils...(f) develop a multi-year plan aimed at achieving [these] goals...”

Part XI—Supervisory Officers. s. 283.1 (1). “...the director of education shall...(c) implement and monitor the implementation of the multi-year plan developed under clause 169.1...”

Part X.0.1—New Teacher Induction. s. 268 (2). “A new teacher induction program shall contain the following elements: 1. An orientation for new teachers. 2. Mentoring for new teachers. 3. Professional development and training appropriate for new teachers. ...”

Other Legislation

Ont. Reg. 99/02—Teacher Performance Appraisal: Schedule 1—Competencies for Teachers Other Than New Teachers. paragraph (p) “engage in ongoing professional learning and apply it to improve their teaching practices”.

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 151. *Professional Activity Days Devoted to Provincial Education Priorities*. December 9, 2011. “Boards must ensure that professional activities on the two mandatory PA days are devoted to the provincial educational priorities set out in the Appendix... [and must ensure that on remaining PA days] “some of the professional activities relate to curriculum development, implementation, and review”.

The Ministry of Education recognizes and supports the importance of professional learning and capacity-building at the school, district, and regional levels. Boards have received support and funding to initiate and develop learning communities committed to improving student achievement and closing the gap. Ministry initiatives are referenced in the “Links to Other Resources” section, including supports developed and coordinated by The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch, Institute of Education Leadership, Special Education Branch, and the Leadership Development Branch.

Board expectations:

Professional development has not always been recognized as an essential support for students in the classroom. However, research clearly indicates that improving teacher capacity and board leadership has a direct impact on student learning. Therefore, a key responsibility for senior staff and the board is to incorporate within their multi-year plan provisions for professional development designed to support staff members, not only in their day-to-day work, but also in planning for future system opportunities. Engaging employee groups as key stakeholders and participants in the development of a board professional development plan is an important strategy to build commitment and ownership to effective, sustainable, and financially-responsible professional development.

Supervisory officer expectations:

Supervisory officers have a key responsibility to advocate, develop, and lead professional development for all board staff.

"The practice and research on collaborative school cultures and professional learning communities is very convincing. When teachers work together, led by an instructionally-focused principal, they are much more successful than when they work alone. ...But there is more to collective capacity than intra-school collaboration. Whole system reform depends on resolute leadership at the district level, which in turn develops collaborative capacity within and across schools by helping schools learn in clusters and networks."

Fullan, M. (Summer, 2010). "The Big Ideas Behind Whole System Reform" in *Education Canada*. Vol. 50 (3). Canadian Education Association. <http://www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada/article/big-ideas-behind-whole-system-reform>

Learning networks may include several schools, support staff, board leaders, and parents. These learning communities engage in processes of inquiry and learning focused on improving student achievement. Through classroom, school, and large-scale assessments, members identify the strengths and needs of a group of students and determine the knowledge and skills required to close the achievement gap. Professional learning communities are particularly effective in supporting job-embedded professional growth.

A number of articles indicate that job-embedded professional development can include action research, case discussions, coaching, critical friends groups, data teams, assessment development, study of student profiles, individual professional growth and learning plans, lesson study, mentoring, portfolios, professional learning communities, and study groups.

What are the important practices for effectiveness?

The following components of a professional learning community are identified by The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat in "Professional Learning Communities: A Model for Ontario Schools". [see "Links to Other Resources"]

Ensuring Learning for All Students

A commitment to learning for all students must be at the centre of professional learning, decision-making, and action. When educators take ownership of this commitment, learning (not teaching) becomes the focal point, and a positive outcome results. In order to ensure that all students learn, educators must deliver fair and equitable instruction in all classes.

Focus on Results

The professional learning community must determine whether the efforts of educators are resulting in improvement. In order to focus on learning results rather than teaching, educators must constantly monitor and review student attainment of knowledge and skills. Highly effective professional learning communities understand the critical importance of collecting and analyzing different types of assessment data.

Relationships

Members of a professional learning community are involved in sharing, having their beliefs and practices open to questioning and inquiry, fostering cultures of challenge and focus, and encouraging feedback. These actions can only occur successfully in a community that is based on strong relationships. Relationships can be strengthened by nurturing trust. Researchers such as Michael Fullan, Lorna Earl and Steven Katz have identified three types of trust: competence trust, contractual trust, and communication trust.

Collaborative Inquiry

In order to ensure that professional learning is relevant to classroom practice, data from a variety of sources need to be analysed to determine strengths and needs. Teachers are then able to identify areas for further inquiry—either in small groups or as an entire staff. Once a focus of inquiry is determined, educators can plan a professional learning strategy that will best facilitate learning.

It is essential to understand and articulate the goals of the professional development activity at the beginning. Anecdotes and testimonials are not the basis for a complete evaluation. Comparison groups, pre and post measures, and multiple measures collected before and after implementation are useful strategies to look at the success of the professional development programs. According to Thomas Guskey, effective professional development evaluations require the collection of five critical pieces of data:

1. participants' reactions
2. participants' learning
3. organization support and change
4. participants' use of new knowledge and skills
5. impact on student learning outcomes.

Guskey, T. (2000). *Evaluating Professional Development*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

"When teachers have structured opportunities to explore the nitty-gritty challenges of their practice through thoughtful exchanges with colleagues and in relation to relevant research, they rediscover the passion for learning and their own personal and professional growth that brought them into teaching in the first place."

Hargreaves, A. & Shirley, D. (2009). *The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press. p. 93

Links to Other Resources

The Canadian Journal of Action Research. (2011). Vol. 12, No. 3. *Capacity Building In Collaborative Action Research: An Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) Initiative*.
<http://cjar.nipissingu.ca/index.php/cjar/article/view/18/17>

The Institute for Education Leadership <http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca/content/home>

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. *Professional Learning Communities: A Model for Ontario Schools*. (2007). The Capacity Building Series. Special Edition # 3.
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/PLC.pdf>

LNS Resources and Publications:

- Fall 2011 Resource Package
- Paying Attention to Mathematics, K-12
- What Works? Research into Practice
- Webcasts for Educators
- Inspire: The Journal of Literacy and Numeracy for Ontario

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/publications.html>

Ontario Ministry of Education Leadership Development
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/index.html>

Ontario Ministry of Education Policy & Resource Documents and Curriculum Documents
www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/curriculum.html

Ontario Ministry of Education Special Education
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/speced.html>

Smith, C. & Gillespie, M. *Research on Professional Development and Teacher Change: Implications for Adult Basic Education*. (2007). No. 7. pp. 216-219
www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/ann_rev/smith-gillespie-07.pdf

Many strategies promote professional collaboration: team teaching, teacher moderation, and study groups. Other effective professional learning strategies include action research, case study discussions, classroom walk-throughs, mentoring, and peer coaching. Professional learning communities in turn benefit from these learning strategies as teachers share new skills, experiences, and knowledge gained.

Leadership

Leaders are required to promote supportive environments, foster reflection, encourage risk-taking, and challenge the status quo when it comes to student learning. The principal plays an important role in setting the stage for student-focused professional learning. Principals should spend their energies on supporting environments that nurture effective teaching and learning. They need to build and maintain distributive leadership models to sustain the professional learning and facilitate consistent and effective practices.

Alignment

As professional learning communities continue to investigate research, delve into data, monitor progress, and make programs transparent, an alignment of beliefs and effective practices evolves. Alignment occurs when teachers from the same grade or division collaborate to promote high levels of learning in each classroom. Networks can then form – based on the common needs and focus – to encompass various professional learning groups and schools to further build capacity and alignment.

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. *Professional Learning Communities: A Model for Ontario Schools*. (2007).

An Effective Model

In *Research on Professional Development and Teacher Change: Implications for Adult Basic Education*, Smith and Gillespie outline the design elements and conditions under which professional development can be most successful. It must be designed to:

- be of a longer duration;
- make a strong connection between what is learned in the professional development and the teacher's own work context;
- focus on subject matter knowledge;
- include a strong emphasis on analysis and reflection rather than just demonstrating techniques;
- include a variety of activities;
- encourage staff from the same workplace to participate together; and
- focus on the quality and features of the professional development rather than the format or type. [See "Links to Other Resources"]

If as a supervisory officer, I have concerns and need assistance, what should I do?

- Consult with your leadership team, principals, and local federation/union representatives regarding professional development programs to support student achievement.
- Speak with knowledgeable colleagues who have significant experience in the area of professional development.
- Review the range of web-based resources (e.g. Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario, Ontario Principals' Council, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Ontario Ministry of Education)
- Contact the Ministry of Education Regional Office, The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch and/or the Council of Ontario Directors of Education.