



**STEP TWO:**  
**IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL**  
**DEVELOPMENT**

# IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## OVERVIEW

The award-winning steps for successful professional development implementation are:

1. Stay abreast of and incorporate best practices into teaching, learning, and leadership.
2. Make sure school/district policies and practices support actual PD implementation for staff in schools.
3. Ensure that resources remain available to organize and implement PD.
4. Make PD part of everyday life at school.

## STAY ABREAST OF AND INCORPORATE BEST PRACTICES INTO TEACHING, LEARNING, AND LEADERSHIP

### *Themes From Award Winners*

Award winners not only conducted initial research, they also found ways to stay abreast of best practices and to continue trying new ideas to meet school goals. These strategies include the following:

**Assign clear responsibility.** Consistent with initial research, award winners were very clear about assigning accountability for ongoing research. Some award winners divided ongoing research responsibilities among PD committee members (e.g., teachers, other staff, parents, and so on) into areas narrow enough not to be overwhelming. Many counted on district-level PD staff to help with research.

**Use a variety of information sources.** The sources of new information were varied. Some used “action research” to formally test new ideas in their own schools and to make improvements based on findings. At either the school or district level, most award winners ensured that someone maintained contact with national organizations (e.g., National Staff Development Council, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) for quick access to new ideas. Others used local university resources to stay fresh. Whatever the source, winners were most satisfied with their ongoing research when they had an established, systematic way of gathering information.

**Create a forum for using research findings.** Award winners found that they needed a forum for reporting back and using new ideas. This forum varied,

*Implementation worked best when winners stuck to their plans and kept improving them.*





Use the Internet to visit key professional development Web sites for current information on best practices. See Appendix B for suggested sites.

depending on how ongoing PD was organized. Typically, new ideas were shared either through formal or informal presentations to the group(s) making ongoing PD decisions at the district or school level.

### *Examples From Award Winners*

- One award-winning school has a staff member who meets regularly with a professor from a local university to get fresh ideas and hear about new best practices in PD.
- One district has staff members who are very active in national organizations. They count on these staff members to keep new ideas flowing into the district.
- One principal of an award-winning school asks teachers who are skeptical about specific new ideas to conduct further research. When they come back with positive feelings about the new idea, it is much easier to get other staff to buy in. They use this process on an ongoing basis to keep a high standard for new activities.

## MAKE SURE SCHOOL/DISTRICT POLICIES AND PRACTICES SUPPORT ACTUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION FOR STAFF IN SCHOOLS

### *Themes From Award Winners*

Besides providing funding and access to expert resources, the most significant policy issue award winners cited was allocation of staff time. Finding the quantity of paid, frequent staff time needed to fully incorporate PD into daily school life was a challenge for all award winners. They addressed this challenge in various ways, depending upon the nature of their current policies and reasons for them.

### **Barrier: Not enough staff time for professional development in the regular workweek**

Some solutions used by the award winners include the following:

- Expand regular workweek hours (e.g., from 37.5 to 40) and use the extra time for PD. This solution requires funding for additional staff time.
- Allocate current class planning time to PD by changing how teachers plan. Make class planning a teacher learning activity in itself by moving to team planning, grading, and problem solving.
- Develop an outstanding, regular substitute list and provide the administrative help for teachers to schedule this assistance easily. This solution requires funding for substitute time.
- Keep substitutes as districts employees to improve the quality and availability of substitutes to schools.
- Use student teachers, interns, and parent volunteers to cover classrooms for short PD activities.
- Use staff meetings already on the school schedule for PD instead.
- Allow teachers to cover for each other for short periods of time.
- Use specialists and other school staff in the classroom so that regular teachers may focus on PD.
- Change class scheduling to include a short PD period every day.
- Incorporate PD into other daily activities. Encourage staff to reflect daily on what they have learned and to look for ways to “do it better next time.”

### **Barrier: Not enough blocks of time for longer professional development events**

Some solutions used by the award winners include the following:

- Schedule special PD activities on weekends. Make this practice more attractive by arranging group babysitting for staff children, offering



Address staff time and other policies in the planning stage to reduce frustrating barriers when you are implementing professional development.



credit toward degrees, making it voluntary but with very enticing topics, or providing food.

- Create a half-day in students' weekly schedules and use the remaining half-day for PD.
- Arrange PD after school hours on weekday afternoons on a regular schedule (e.g., 3–5 p.m. on Thursdays).
- Fit as much block PD into the summer as possible, but beware that training without immediate implementation can go stale.
- Use district contacts to organize joint PD training with other schools. Use saved funds to pay for additional staff time or substitute time for PD.
- Accumulate unused staff time from regular workweeks into special PD focus times (e.g., monthly). This solution requires clarity about expected time during the regular workweek.
- Offer course credit toward graduate degrees (in partnership with a college or university) or toward relicensure to encourage participation in weekend or after-hour activities.
- Ask staff to voluntarily lengthen the school day by a short time (one school did 10 minutes per day); consolidate the “excess” time for activities requiring large time blocks (the same school got four days per year out of the 10 extra minutes per day).

#### **Barrier: Too much low-impact, required professional development**

One possible solution: Negotiate use of paid district or state-required PD time (inservice days) to focus on your school's highest priority PD efforts. Use this time in blocks or spread it throughout the year.

#### ***Examples From Award Winners***

- In one district, it is common practice for teachers to use lunch periods for PD and planning. District PD specialists come during that time to provide expertise. The district also sponsors voluntary learning clubs on specific topic areas; these typically meet twice per month after school. In addition, teachers work in teams for teaching and planning. They typically meet daily for at least a brief time to discuss progress and solve problems together.
- In one school, staff members use grant funds to provide release time for PD every tenth day for one staff member. The school also has contracted out topics such as art and music; they block schedule this time so that teaching staff members have a weekly block of time to focus on PD. They make heavy use of interns and assistants for providing smaller chunks of time for PD.
- Another school is organized into instructional teams that do all planning and classroom delivery. This structure creates constant interaction among teachers, which encourages daily improvement and learning. The school uses block scheduling to create team work time, and individual teachers relieve each other for individual PD time.

- A district requires all new staff to sign an agreement that they will participate in extra training beyond their contract hours. This time is in addition to 11 days set aside for district-funded professional development each year.
- An award-winning high school allows staff to use local district staff development funds to attend courses (including those toward an advanced degree) at local colleges and universities. Staff members benefit from their “volunteer” time by obtaining degrees, certifications, and new skills. The school benefits from the training staff receive; it doesn’t have to use valuable time to organize special workshops.





## ENSURE THAT RESOURCES REMAIN AVAILABLE TO ORGANIZE AND IMPLEMENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### *Themes From Award Winners*

Dwindling funds, volunteer time, and other resources are common problems after an initial burst of energy for any nonprofit organization. Schools are no exception. Award winners have found a few key tactics to deal with the problem.

**Show results.** Both for maintaining current support and obtaining new resources, it is critical to show that your professional development improves student learning. Award winners repeatedly emphasized how important it is to share results with funders, teachers, students, parents, volunteers, and community supporters.

**Reprioritize continuously.** Make your financial and other resource planning a “living” process. Periodically review how your school is investing time and money in PD and make sure that you are still hitting your highest priorities first to make the most of the resources you have.

**Leverage your professional development.** Try to find ways to make the biggest PD (and student learning) impact from the resources you have. You will already have thought this through to design your PD, but your school or district will need to get continuously better at using what you have. For example, use teachers trained in a particular area last year to train new staff rather than paying for new teacher training by outsiders. Find more ways to integrate classroom planning and teaching with PD and to get staff working in teams. This strategy creates a natural “lab” for teachers to push each other toward excellence and to learn from each other. You’ll find this is one of the highest-impact, lowest-cost PD investments you can make.

### *Examples From Award Winners*

- One award-winning school found that funds for keeping PD fresh were dwindling. It found various ways to get fresh ideas without much expense. The school makes temporary staff trades with another school so that teachers are exposed to new ideas. It also shares training with others schools. And it changed how it teaches some subject areas, such as using field trips instead of employees for fine arts. Also, teachers train other teachers in a variety of areas, based either on existing expertise or recent external training.
- One district found that the more it shows outstanding student academic results from PD efforts, the easier it was to keep resources flowing its way. Even in tight budget years, it is politically and practically hard to cut PD funds when PD is clearly improving student learning. This district specifically tracks the impact of increased PD spending on student results. It publicizes results heavily in the community to build support.



Improving the flow and use of funds for professional development will be one critical factor in how long you sustain excellence.



Evaluation results are important for improving and “selling” your professional development efforts.



Continue to seek ways for technology to improve the efficiency of professional development.



## MAKE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE AT SCHOOL

### *Themes From Award Winners*

Most award winners took one or more of the following three critical paths toward making PD part of everyday life at school. The goal in most award-winning organizations was to keep staff members' minds on professional development so they could seize immediately on opportunities for improvement.

**Set aside time daily or weekly to focus exclusively on professional development.** Some award winners carved time out of the regular school day, every day or most days, for planning time that could be used for PD. Most winners at least carved out weekly time for staff to focus individually or in teams on PD.

**Integrate professional development into other activities.** Some winners made classroom planning and teaching a PD event in itself by moving to team planning, teaching, and student evaluation. These organizations consider the exchange of ideas among teachers and the opportunity for staff to “push” each other toward excellence as a PD effort that has a high impact on student results. Asking staff to team teach was not enough, though; winners made sure that the teams had time as a group to plan, work, evaluate, and improve.

In addition, many winners included staff on school or district planning and management teams to develop staff leadership and to help ensure that schoolwide decisions had the intended classroom impact. This activity also was seen as a PD effort that was integrated into the regular work of the school or district.

**Create cultural change.** In most cases, school or district leadership created cultural change, making PD discussions among staff an expected part of the day, informally as well as formally. The cultural changes were typically emphasized by symbols such as a short, clear, ever-present mission statement and big annual events to celebrate. The culture change was reinforced by key management (e.g., principal, superintendent) behaviors such as encouraging debate and discussion among staff and rewarding staff (often with even more PD opportunities) who contributed to PD efforts.

Whether they used the popular term “learning community,” the award winners stretched themselves to include all staff and other critical members of the school community in the quest for improving student learning. In most cases, all staff members were included in PD (although the learning goals and activities differed according to the staff role). Many winners included parents in PD opportunities or established special parent/family learning events.

### *Examples From Award Winners*

- In one award-winning high school, teachers are divided into six cross-grade, interdisciplinary instructional teams. Each team plans and executes its own PD with its own PD budget. Professional improvement is expected to be a daily event and school leadership is vocal about this expectation. There is a great deal of informal as well as structured time



The more professional development is embedded in core school activities, the easier it will be to sustain changes.

for discussing challenges and brainstorming ways to address student needs. Parents also are offered courses that the school sees as critical to supporting learning efforts for this student population.

- At another school, continuous innovation itself is seen as critical for staff so that they will understand the challenge that students face in learning new things and trying new ideas. Although PD change efforts were led by teachers here, a series of supportive principals have been vocal supporters of staff efforts to improve PD. It was critical to cultural change when one principal stopped emphasizing that PD was “voluntary” and instead began saying that it was “expected of all staff.”
- Yet another school included “being a learning community” in its mission statement. It has found many ways to integrate learning into daily life. For example, staff members are part of school improvement teams that identify issues, conduct research, and recommend initiatives, including PD changes. Each team elects a chair; this strategy develops leadership within the school. The school also extends its philosophy to parents. It includes parents on the school improvement teams, has a parent center on campus, and provides night courses for parents (e.g., in technology). Parents with special skills act as teachers to other parents.



### *Organizers' Checklist*

#### Implement a Professional Development Process

- Stay abreast of and incorporate best practices into teaching, learning, and leadership. (Use Tools 14 and 10.)
- Make sure school/district policies and practices support actual PD implementation for staff in schools. (Use Tool 14.)
- Identify critical factors for implementation success in your school/district.
- Identify an ongoing process for ensuring successful implementation and problem solving.
- Ensure that resources remain available to organize and implement PD. (Use Tool 14.)
- Identify opportunities to make PD part of everyday school life; revisit periodically to improve. (Use Tool 14.)

# ACTION PLANNER TOOL 14— IMPLEMENTATION PLANNER

**Instructions:** Fill in the name(s) of the person(s) completing the tool and the date. Read the award-winning Implementation Success Actions below and Critical Steps for each. Use Tool 2, Action Accountability Planner, to make action plans where indicated. Add other implementation success actions you identify, and use Tool 2 to make an action plan for each. Revisit these implementation actions periodically to assess need for changes.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Implementation Success Actions	Critical Steps
<p><b>Stay abreast of and incorporate best practices into teaching, learning, and leadership.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify specific, manageable topic areas for ongoing research.</li> <li>• Make an action plan for conducting ongoing research in each area.</li> <li>• Make an action plan for reporting back and incorporating new ideas.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ensure school/district policies and practices support actual PD implementation for staff in schools.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify current and potential policy barriers to implementing the PD plan.</li> <li>• Identify potential solutions to barriers.</li> <li>• Make an action plan to research and narrow solutions.</li> <li>• Make an action plan for desired changes.</li> <li>• Include new barrier identification and problem solving as a regular agenda item.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ensure that resources remain available to organize and implement PD.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a list of all current sources of funds, expertise, facilities.</li> <li>• Make an action plan for meeting the goals and needs of current resources (funders, volunteers, etc.) to increase the chance of future assistance.</li> <li>• Identify potential new sources of funds, expertise, facilities.</li> <li>• Make an action plan for researching and obtaining assistance from new sources.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Make PD part of everyday life at school.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify opportunities to make PD part of everyday life, including regular time for PD, integrating PD into teaching and school management, and developing visible cultural symbols of support for PD.</li> <li>• Identify barriers to making PD part of everyday life.</li> <li>• Identify solutions to barriers.</li> <li>• Create an action plan for making changes to incorporate PD into everyday life.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other implementation success actions for your school or district</b></p>	



