

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: LEARNING FROM THE BEST

A TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS BASED ON THE NATIONAL AWARDS PROGRAM FOR MODEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL MODEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD WINNERS, 1997–1999

1996-97

Lawrence Public Schools, Lawrence, Kansas
Samuel W. Mason Elementary School, Roxbury, Massachusetts
San Francisco Unified School District, San Francisco, California
Wilton Public Schools, Wilton, Connecticut
Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, Manhattan, Kansas

1997-98

Ganado Intermediate School, Patagonia, Arizona
Geneva City Schools, Geneva, New York
H.D. Hilley Elementary School, El Paso, Texas
Hungerford School, Staten Island, New York
The International High School at LaGuardia Community College, Long Island, NY
Lewisville Independent School District, Lewisville, Texas
Montview Elementary School, Aurora, Colorado
Shallowford Falls Elementary School, Marietta, Georgia

1998-99

Carroll Independent School District, Southlake, Texas
Edmonds School District No. 15, Lynnwood, Washington
Norman Public Schools, Norman, Oklahoma
Olathe District Schools, Olathe, Kansas
Sprayberry High School, Marietta, Georgia
Spring Woods Senior High School, Houston, Texas
Wherry Elementary School, Albuquerque, New Mexico





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Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How professional development supports the school/district long-term plan (page 15) • Professional development goals (page 25)
Needs Assessment (i.e., What kind of professional development do you need?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The professional development needs assessment process (page 19)
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development content, process, and activities and how each supports the goals (page 31)
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research that supports chosen content/process for professional development (page 37) • Staying abreast and incorporating best practices in teaching, learning, and leadership (page 53) • What the research says about professional development that works (page 93)
Money (and Other Resources)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources available to support professional development (page 41) • Ensuring that resources remain available to organize and implement professional development (page 59)
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sure school/district policies and practices support actual professional development implementation for staff in schools (page 55) • Making professional development part of everyday life at school (page 61)
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Available Online

This toolkit, materials used by award winners, and other useful professional development resources are available on NCREL's Web site at www.ncrel.org/pd/. To request additional print copies of this toolkit, call NCREL's Order Department at 800-356-2735 or visit our online catalog at www.ncrel.org/catalog/.

INTRODUCTION

“I know that professional development is essential to improving student learning. But changing professional development so that we really make a difference in student learning is a huge and uncertain endeavor.”

If your thoughts are like these, and you are working either within a school or at the district level, this toolkit was written for you. The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) is pleased to present *Professional Development: Learning From the Best*, a step-by-step guide to help you implement strong, sustainable professional development that drives achievement of your student learning goals. The toolkit is based on the experiences of national professional development award winners. It is designed to help you use their ideas and lessons to tailor your professional development to the unique vision, goals, students, and teachers of your school or district.

Model Professional Development Awards

In 1996, the U.S. Department of Education established the National Awards Program for Model Professional Development to recognize schools and districts leading the nation in professional development. In the first three years (1997-1999), 20 winners have been selected throughout the United States.

The criteria for selection focus on the content of professional development (PD), the process used to create and implement PD, and the staff and student learning results achieved. As the lessons of winning schools and districts show, *content and process are inextricably linked in determining the level of impact professional development has on student learning.* (The toolkit presents the criteria in a step-by-step format; see Appendix A for full award criteria.)

Winners have gone far beyond ensuring good professional development workshops. They have made professional development a critical contributor to school performance and, thus, inextricably linked and aligned the two. Award winners have clarified school educational goals, increased teacher accountability for linking classroom activity to student results, and significantly improved the process for selecting the professional development that teachers need to get results. As important, these schools have used best practices in organization and team design.

The Award Winners Are Just Like Your School or District

The award winners represented in this toolkit (from years 1996-97, 1997-98, and 1998-99) span the range of public elementary and secondary education in the United States. Represented are urban, rural, and suburban schools; traditional and innovative curricula; special needs schools, highly diverse schools, and highly similar population schools; schools with tremendous resources to focus on PD and schools with very little “extra”; and schools from across the racial and socioeconomic spectrums. (See Appendix C for brief profiles of winners.) *Whatever the makeup of your school or district, chances are very good that one or more of the award winners is similar to you in many respects.*

Professional development is the process of improving staff skills and competencies needed to produce outstanding educational results for students.





The most common thread (aside from outstanding PD) is this: most of these winners underwent *significant change* in the 1990s, focusing either on whole-school reform or, in some cases, major professional development changes. Thus their lessons include wisdom about high-impact professional development and the change process it took to get there. In this way, their experiences are instructive for any institution considering changes in professional development.

How This Guide Was Developed

This guide is based on the extensive award applications submitted by winners, reports by site visitors who helped select the award winners, interviews with PD organizers in award-winning schools and districts (1996-97 and 1997-98 winners), and review of PD organizing tools used by winners. The author analyzed these sources for common themes and good ideas applicable to other schools and districts.

Rather than present the findings school-by-school or district-by-district, this toolkit pulls out the key lessons *across* the schools and districts and organizes them into a step-by-step process you can use to meet the U.S. Department of Education award criteria. (See Appendix B for other helpful PD resources.)

OVERVIEW

This toolkit takes the best practices of award-winning schools and organizes them into a step-by-step planner for designing and implementing professional development. It digs beneath the award criteria and tells us how award winners did it. For example, we know that getting teachers involved in professional development design is one award criterion. This guide tells you specifically how award winners got teachers involved. It also will help you follow these important strategies:

- **Put Your Ideas Into Action.** The goal of this guide is to help schools and districts move from *thinking* about change to *doing* it. The guide provides tools to lead professional development change in your own school or district. Specifically, an Organizers' Checklist and series of Action Planning Tools help you identify key decisions you need to make.
- **Prepare to Work Hard—and Together.** Leading important change is always challenging. Overcoming obstacles takes a craving for excellence, creative effort, attention to details, high levels of persuasion, and just the right balance between patience and determination. Few individuals can do all of these all the time. That is one good reason why the award winners presented here drew on the skills and talents of several people to lead change. The award winners caution that even by sharing the challenge, they had to work hard.
- **Recognize That You Do Not Need to Be an “Expert.”** Most change leaders in winning organizations were not professional development “experts.” Typically, they were teachers, principals, and other staff concerned about student learning. Most learned about professional development by conducting research and tapping the knowledge of experts. You, too, can build your knowledge of professional development to improve results in your school or district. If you and your colleagues need to develop basic knowledge of professional development, explore the resources in Appendix B, and plan to spend more time in the research phase of professional development design.
- **Use Our Resources.** This guide provides other resources to support your professional development. Appendices include the full award criteria matched with the action steps presented in this guide (Appendix A); resources for staying current in professional development (primarily Web sites) (Appendix B); brief profiles of award-winning organizations (Appendix C); and a literature review showing why the award criteria have led to great results in schools (Appendix D).

A Step-By-Step Professional Development Planner

This toolkit walks you through the steps for designing and implementing professional development. It begins with an Organizers' Checklist that summarizes the major decisions and actions from design through evaluation and improvement. Then it is organized into four sections: Designing Professional Development, Implementing Professional Development, Evaluating and Improving Professional Development, and Sharing Professional Development Learning. These sections follow the steps in the professional development cycle (see Figure 1).

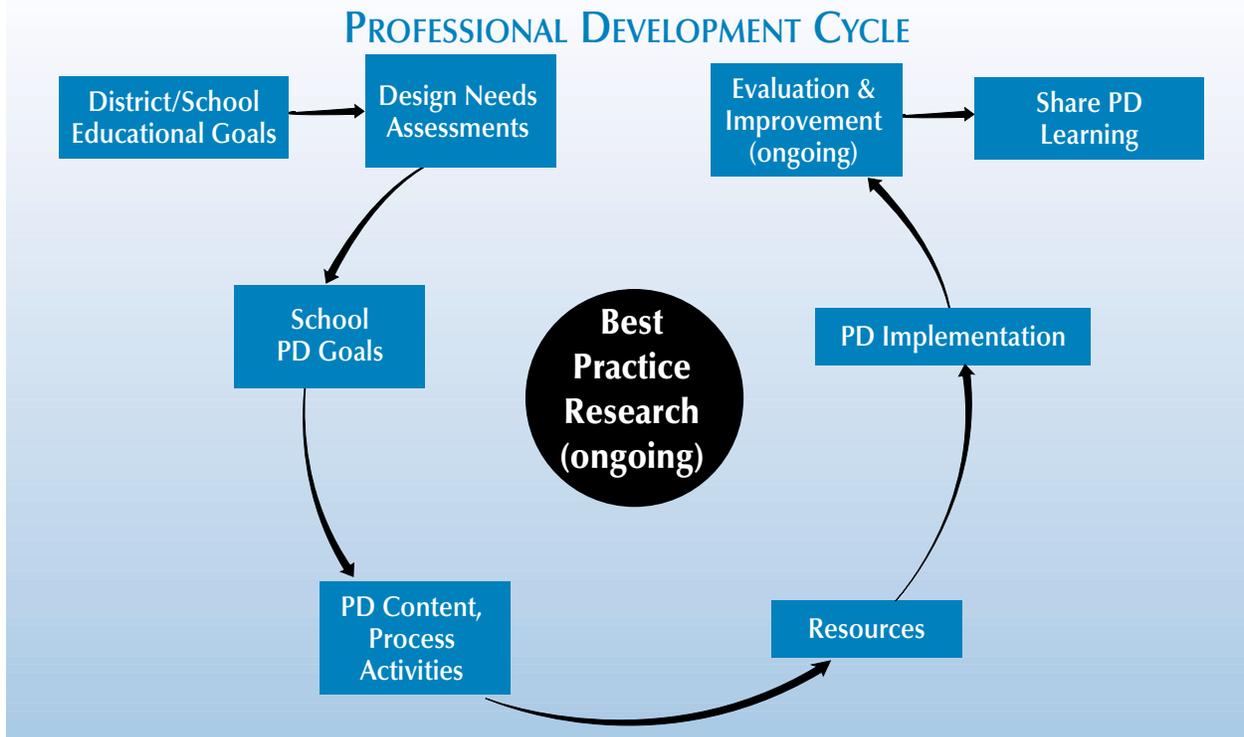
After you read this guide, you can expect to know:

- Key “how to” lessons from award-winning schools.
- Your action steps for leading professional development change in your school or district.

For many award winners, the process of changing professional development was a major learning event in itself.



Figure 1



Quick References

Throughout this toolkit, you will see references to key concepts in the margins. Use them to focus your thoughts and refresh your memory.

Technology— opportunities to use technology in support of your professional development efforts



Sustaining Professional Development— opportunities to ensure that your changes endure



Take Action!— organizers' checklists



Evaluation— evaluation and related opportunities



The *Design* section walks you through the elements of a complete professional development plan, including both content issues (what your plan should include) and process (how to organize yourselves). The success of what you do later is largely determined by how well you have planned. Design inherently includes planning to implement, evaluate, and share your ideas. Thus, this section gives detailed information about some topics also addressed later in the toolkit.

Other sections are equally important for sustained success. Implementation ultimately is as critical as design to good professional development. The *Implementation* section highlights success factors and shows you how to achieve them. *Evaluation and Improvement* outlines critical components of this part of professional development and reminds us that evaluation should flow directly from the planning process. Both the award criteria and this section go beyond simple measurement into how evaluation data are used to keep up with the changing world. The final section, *Sharing Professional Development Learning*, provides two simple steps that will make sharing your successes easier.

Each section has from two to four parts: Themes From Award Winners, Examples From Award Winners, Organizers' Checklists, and Action Planning Tools. Themes will help you quickly understand common highlights of winners' professional development. Examples will give you a sense of the variety of ways winners met the award criteria based on their own school/district goals and resources; each award winner appears in at least one of the examples. The Organizers' Checklists include action steps and decisions you will need. Action Planning Tools will help you organize and summarize your work with a team. Each tool includes an example from a school perspective.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLANNER: ORGANIZERS' CHECKLIST

Instructions:

Use this checklist to plan your organizing steps and meetings. Use Action Planner Tool 2 to document decisions and plan next steps wherever it is helpful.

Step One: Designing Professional Development

1. Include professional development participants and organizers in the professional development design process.

- Decide who should be involved in the initial PD design working team. (Use Tool 1, Parts A and B.)
- Decide what role other stakeholders will have in PD design, both initial and ongoing. (Use Tool 1, Parts A and B.)
- Invite/notify stakeholders to participate in PD design.
- Determine leadership roles for the PD design working team.
- Determine the process for the PD design working team: When should you meet? Who will schedule meetings? What do you need in advance and who will provide it? Who will collect and distribute additional agenda items and supporting material? Are standing meetings mandatory? What happens if someone cannot attend? Who will “facilitate” the meeting to ensure that you prioritize and get through all critical agenda items? How will you make decisions—by consensus, vote, or other? Under what circumstances will you make decisions outside of group meetings? How? Who is responsible for communicating decisions to those who cannot participate? What will each of you do when a decision or action with which you disagree is made without your participation? Other issues?
- Create a standing agenda for all PD working team meetings, including updates on work in progress, new issues/problems, identification of preparatory work for next meeting, communication (who needs to be informed of decisions made in this meeting), and documents from this meeting that need to be saved in the main file.

2. Make a clear plan that includes:

a. How professional development supports the school/district’s long-term plan.

- Review existing educational goals for the state, district, and school.
- “Map” district and school educational goals to ensure they are linked. (Use Tool 3.)
- Make a plan for linking team and individual classroom *educational* (not PD) goals to school goals in the future, including who will ensure linkage, when, and using what tools, and who will review and approve the goals. (Use Tool 3.)

b. A professional development needs assessment process.

- Plan and implement a student needs assessment process. (Use Tool 4.)
- Identify expert sources to assist with needs assessment, if required.
- Choose comparison groups.

- Choose sources of data, both existing and customized.
- Develop tools as needed to gather data.
- Gather data.
- Complete a summary of student needs after student assessments are complete. (Use Tool 4.)
- Plan a teacher/staff needs assessment process. (Use Tool 5.)
- Identify expert sources to assist with staff needs assessment, if required.
- Identify staff skills/competencies needed to close student achievement gaps.
- Identify the *actual* skill/competency level of staff.
- Complete a summary of your staff's gaps and strengths after assessments are complete. (Use Tool 5.)

c. Professional development goals.

- Create professional development principles (general goals and parameters). (Use Tool 6.)
- Create professional development objectives (specific goals). (Use Tools 3, 5, and 7.)

d. Professional development content, process, and activities.

- Plan a process for selecting PD content and activities at each organization level (district, school, team, and individual staff). (Use Tool 8.)
- Complete the following tasks for each organization level:
 - Identify specific PD content required to meet each PD goal. (Use Tool 9.)
 - Identify potential activities to learn PD content. (Use Tool 9.)
 - Research potential activities. (Use Tools 9 and 10.)
 - Select activities at each organizational level. (Use Tools 9 and 10.)

e. Research that supports the chosen content/process for professional development.

- Include research into best practices in the initial PD design. (Use Tools 9 and 10.)

f. Resources available to support professional development.

- Identify sources and uses of financial resources. (Use Tool 11.)
- Identify needs and sources of expertise for each selected PD activity. (Use Tool 9.)
- Identify needs and sources of expertise for PD design, implementation, and evaluation processes as needed. (Use Tool 9.)
- Identify needs and sources for PD-related facilities. (Use Tool 9.)

g. Professional development evaluation steps.

- Identify success measures for each PD goal and each supporting activity. (Use Tool 12.)
- Identify data sources and gathering method for each measure. (Use Tool 12.)
- Plan a process for reporting evaluation findings. (Use Tool 12.)
- Determine who will lead the process for making PD improvement. (Use Tool 12.)

3. Share the plan.

- Make a plan for ongoing communications, including information about the initial PD plan, with the school community. (Use Tools 1 and 13.)

Step Two: Implementing Professional Development

- Stay abreast of and incorporate best practices into teaching, learning, and leadership. (Use Tools 10 and 14.)
- Make sure school/district policies and practices support actual PD implementation for staff in schools. (Use Tool 14.)
- Identify critical factors for successful implementation into 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.)

Step Three: Evaluating and Improving Professional Development

- Ensure implementation of the evaluation plan. (Use Tool 12.)
- Schedule time to review and improve the evaluation process after the first round of evaluation/improvement.

Step Four: Sharing Professional Development Learning

- Keep records of PD decisions to guide future decisions.
- Keep implementation materials organized and available to others.



