



# CABE Policy Highlights

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June 11, 2021

Volume 20 Issue 25

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**Report Identifies Commonalities of Top Professional Development:** A focus on content, collaboration, feedback and reflection, as well as personalized coaching and support are the hallmarks of high-quality professional development, according to a report from the Council of the Great City Schools. The report also identified common PD challenges, including lack of deep content and effective coaching support. The report was discussed by Roger Riddell, editor of *K-12 Dive*.

The recent report details criteria for what constitutes high-quality professional development, providing 13 case study examples from 10 districts including Denver Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools and Long Beach Unified School District in California.

Based on an examination of research, the report finds four common prevailing features in high-quality professional development, regardless of whether it's focused on in-person, hybrid or virtual models: a focus on content, support for collaboration, the provision of feedback and reflection, and personalized coaching and support.

The most common professional development challenges identified in focus groups with teachers, principals, principal supervisors and other instructional support staff across a variety of districts were: lack of differentiation in opportunities, lack of deep content focus, lack of effective coaching support and a lack of alignment between course offerings.

There has been a focus on rethinking approaches to student learning, so

too have educational leaders turned toward rethinking professional learning for educators. Even before the coronavirus pandemic disrupted public education, forcing a focus on ad hoc PD opportunities to close immediate knowledge gaps with virtual learning best practices, it was widely recognized that the traditional "sit and get" approach to professional development needed to change.

Ken Wallace, an Illinois superintendent stated that not paying careful attention to professional learning conditions is "one of the core mistakes that is made — we put all of our attention into focusing on student learning and not nearly enough on the need for continual processes for real adult learning." His district built a reputation for an "all-in" approach to professional learning that prioritizes strong teacher leadership roles and coaching opportunities, in addition to forging teacher training partnerships with local higher education institutions. This has led to higher teacher retention and student performance.

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the critical role of high-quality professional learning in building a successful tech initiative. A survey from the University of Virginia and the EdTech Evidence Exchange showed a disconnect between the perceptions of teachers and administrators in regard to professional development opportunities for remote learning.

There is an urgent need to update content, learning standards, and methods of assessing student learning," stated Shari Camhi, superintendent of Baldwin Union Free School District in New York. "We can no longer rely on the 'old way of doing things.' It is time to update our practice, allow for educators to create experiences that are meaningful and relevant for our students."

The Council of the Great City Schools report identified these preconditions for building and supporting a high-quality professional learning program:

- A strong unifying vision for high-quality practices based on rigorous college- and career-readiness standards, inclusivity and high expectations for students.
- A comprehensive assessment of the professional learning needs of

all teachers, instructional support staff and leaders, including the available technology and resources needed to deliver strong instruction in an in-person, virtual or hybrid environment.

- A comprehensive and multi-tiered district professional development plan based on the aforementioned instructional vision and needs assessment.
- A culture of data-driven instruction that regularly collects, analyzes and uses student progress data to inform decision-making.
- A district culture that embraces and prioritizes openness and collaboration for continuous improvement as a norm.
- A sufficient amount of time throughout the school year, negotiated with the local teacher's union, for professional development, coaching and focused collaboration of school-based personnel.
- A culture of shared accountability for student achievement across central office departments, staff and schools.
- A breaking down of silos between central office departments to encourage collaboration and strong working relationships.

Source: "What makes a high-quality professional development program?" Roger Riddell, editor, *K-12 Dive*, May 11, 2021.

**Policy Implications:** Policy #4131, "Professional Development," and its accompanying administrative regulation and appendix pertain to this issue. This is a recommended policy for inclusion in the district's policy manual.

**Continuing Practices that Worked during the Pandemic:** Research guru John Hattie of the University of Melbourne in an article in *Educational Leadership* stated, "Perhaps the greatest tragedy to come from Covid-related distance learning would be *not* learning from this experience to improve our teaching when we physically return to classrooms."

Hattie points to several positive developments he hopes will continue:

- *Focusing on equity* – The pandemic dramatically highlighted gaps in technology and access, and some progress was made. As in-person schooling resumes, Hattie urges that we double down, "shifting from measuring seat time to learning engagement; prioritizing assessments that illuminate student growth and learning; supporting acceleration in learning, not remediation; and identifying safe, culturally responsive practices."

- *Listening to the troops* – What succeeded over the last 15 months – rapid adaptation to new technology and new instructional practices – did not happen because of top-down mandates but through the initiative and ingenuity of teachers and other school-based educators. In the future, Hattie hopes that district leaders will be more willing to listen to their teachers and build collaborative teams.
- *Self-regulation* – Remote and hybrid instruction put a premium on teachers and students working more independently. "Teachers who talked a lot in class, asked questions that required less-than-three-word responses, and focused myopically on the facts and content had trouble engaging learners remotely," says Hattie. Students who already possessed (or picked up) the skills of independent learning thrived, as did teachers who focused on content and deep learning, taught in engaging ways, and gradually released responsibility. He urges educators to continue those practices in the new normal.
- *Connections* – Many educators used online tools to communicate more effectively with families and get them invested in deeper learning for their children. Teachers also had to get a better handle on how students were thinking, what they already knew, and what mastery of skills and content looked like. All of this should make teaching and learning more efficient and effective in post-Covid schools.

Source: "What Can We Learn from Covid-Era Instruction?" by John Hattie in *Educational Leadership*, May 2021, as summarized in *Marshall Memo 886*, May 10, 2021.

**Policy Implications:** Many policies are implicated by the above. They include, but are not limited to, the following:

#0523 – Equity and Diversity

#1101.1 – Parental Involvement

#1300.1 – Community Engagement

#4131 – Professional Development

#5123 – Promotion/Acceleration/Retention

#6141.1 - Independent Study

#6141.321 - Computers: Acceptable Use of the Internet

#6146 - Graduation Requirements

#6146.13 – Multiple Pathways

#6147 – Evaluating Student Performance

#6172.6 – Distance/Virtual Learning Learning

#6180 – Evaluation of the Instructional Program

#6180.1 – Student Achievement

**Board Policy Updates on the Horizon:** Monitoring changes to federal and state education statutes and regulations and court decisions is a year-long responsibility for CABE policy and legal experts. It is immediately following the regular session of the General assembly when things get even busier. CABE Policy Services will soon issue to subscribing districts the much anticipated policy updates published in the next issue of the *Policy Update Service* quarterly publication.

CABE's experienced policy and legal staff monitor legislation during the session to determine if policy changes are warranted. Following the conclusion of the legislative session, the careful process of drafting updates to model policy language becomes the priority activity. Drafts are then subject to a review process prior to publication and dissemination to boards of education.

CABE's model policy language provided to boards for consideration is informed by laws and/or best practices. CABE does not set law, but we formulate policy language we believe most effectively allows districts to operate within the law.

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