DISTRICT LEADERS' GUIDE FOR
DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN

INTRODUCTION

With staff shortages, teacher retention challenges, and student learning concerns on the rise, K–12 educators need more support than ever. Professional learning is a crucial tool for districts to nurture employee growth and well-being, as well as achieve district-wide goals.

Many districts, however, struggle to build comprehensive professional learning and development plans that engage and inspire educators. So what does a successful professional learning plan look like?

A high-quality professional learning plan is an ongoing, coherent program designed to improve the knowledge, skills, and abilities of teachers and instructional staff to ultimately enhance student academic outcomes. A combination of structured and job-embedded learning opportunities allow educators to collaborate with peers, build new skills, increase job satisfaction, and develop a more sophisticated understanding of each other's teaching practices.

This guide provides recommendations, strategies, case studies, and a discussion guide to inform vibrant professional learning plans that will help districts, educators, and ultimately, students thrive.

An effective professional learning plan should:

▸ Include learning goals, actions to be implemented, a timeline, indicators of success, and an evaluation plan

▸ Ensure professional learning is relevant for teachers by differentiating based on content area, grade level, and career pathway

▸ Provide customized activities for novice and veteran teachers that incorporate active learning, collaboration, coaching, mentoring, and opportunities for feedback and reflection

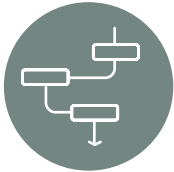Reach your district's professional learning goals with **Hanover's Educator Learning Center.**

CONTENTS

BEST PRACTICES

Districts with successful professional learning outcomes share some common characteristics:

Professional learning plans typically consist of several components.
These components include: learning goals and objectives; related actions and interventions; necessary resources; a timeline for implementation; a person(s) responsible for oversight; indicators and measures of success; and an evaluation plan.
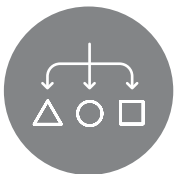
Professional learning is provided through multiple delivery methods.
Common delivery methods include blended learning, coaching, mentoring, professional learning communities, online training modules, and in-person sessions. Districts can use a needs assessment to understand teachers' preferences to ensure the delivery methods selected accommodate a range of learning styles.

Professional learning strengthens teachers' instructional practice.
For example, professional learning can build teachers' capacity to develop curricula, set learning goals, participate in co-teaching, facilitate project-based learning, and use other research-based instructional practices. For ELA and math, districts typically provide professional learning on curriculum standards, instructional strategies, assessments, and related district programs and initiatives.

Professional learning topics are varied to align with teachers' grade levels.
Although the professional learning delivery methods may be similar for all teachers regardless of grade level, the topics addressed often vary. Specifically, teachers should receive professional learning on content and instructional strategies that are relevant to the grade level(s) they teach.

Differentiated professional learning opportunities engage and retain veteran teachers by helping them progress in their careers.
Districts can provide some flexibility in professional learning to ensure veteran teachers have opportunities to develop their careers while meeting district or school goals. For example, Houston Independent School District offers a career pathways program in which teachers can take on more responsibilities and leadership roles while remaining in the classroom.

DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN

Professional learning plans are designed around a district's strategic goals, which emerge from student needs. With your district's goals in mind, follow this seven-step process to build an effective professional learning plan.

STEP 1: ANALYZE STUDENT LEARNING NEEDS

- Gather multiple forms of student data

STEP 2: EXAMINE COMMUNITY, DISTRICT, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT, AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

- Gather data about educators
- Gather data about the learning context
- Analyze the data to identify trends, patterns, and areas of needed improvement
- Identify the features of the learning context that influence student and educator learning
- Identify potential contributors to the current state of learning

STEP 3: DEVELOP IMPROVEMENT GOALS AND SPECIFIC STUDENT OUTCOMES

- Establish SMARTIE goals for student learning that align with state standards and the district strategic plan

STEP 4: IDENTIFY EDUCATOR LEARNING NEEDS AND DEVELOP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Develop SMARTIE goals for educators

STEP 5: STUDY RESEARCH ON SPECIFIC PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS, STRATEGIES, OR INTERVENTIONS

- Review research and evidence on successful professional learning programs or practices
- Identify those relevant to the current goals and objectives

STEP 6: PLAN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

- Develop a theory of change
- Develop a logic model

STEP 7: IMPLEMENT, EVALUATE, AND SUSTAIN THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

- Enact the plan
- Monitor progress and adjust as needed
- Evaluate progress and results
- Sustain support to achieve deep implementation over time

Source: Learning Forward

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN ELEMENTS

Throughout the development process, districts should consider the content, process, and context of professional learning.

CONTENT

The new knowledge, skills, and understandings that form the basis of professional learning. The content should come directly from a needs assessment that identifies gaps in teacher knowledge that will enhance student learning and achievement.

PROCESS

How professional learning is planned, organized, carried out, followed-up, and evaluated. Ideally, district professional learning plans will contain several elements to guide the development and implementation of professional learning, and they will span anywhere from one to three years.

CONTEXT

The organizational system, or culture, in which professional learning takes place and where the new understandings are to be implemented.

ELEMENTS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLANS

GOALS

Goals specify the desired outcomes of the professional learning. Goals are typically oriented toward student learning.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives define short- and long-term changes that are required to meet the overall goals. Objectives are typically focused on knowledge, attitude, or skill changes in educators.

TIMELINE

The timeline explains when actions will be completed and goals/objectives achieved.

RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S)

The responsible person(s) is the point person or persons who know about the actions and each action's status.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS/INTERVENTIONS

Actions or interventions define what a district or school will do to accomplish the goals/objectives.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Indicators of success describe how the district will know whether the actions have occurred and the goals/objectives have been achieved.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Measures of success identify how the data or evidence will be collected to demonstrate the indicators of success.

EVALUATION PLAN

The evaluation plan measures the success of the professional learning. It uses the indicators and measures of success to guide data collection and determine if the goals/objectives were achieved and if the actions were properly implemented.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Resources may include the staff, technology, funding, materials, and time necessary to accomplish the objectives and goals.
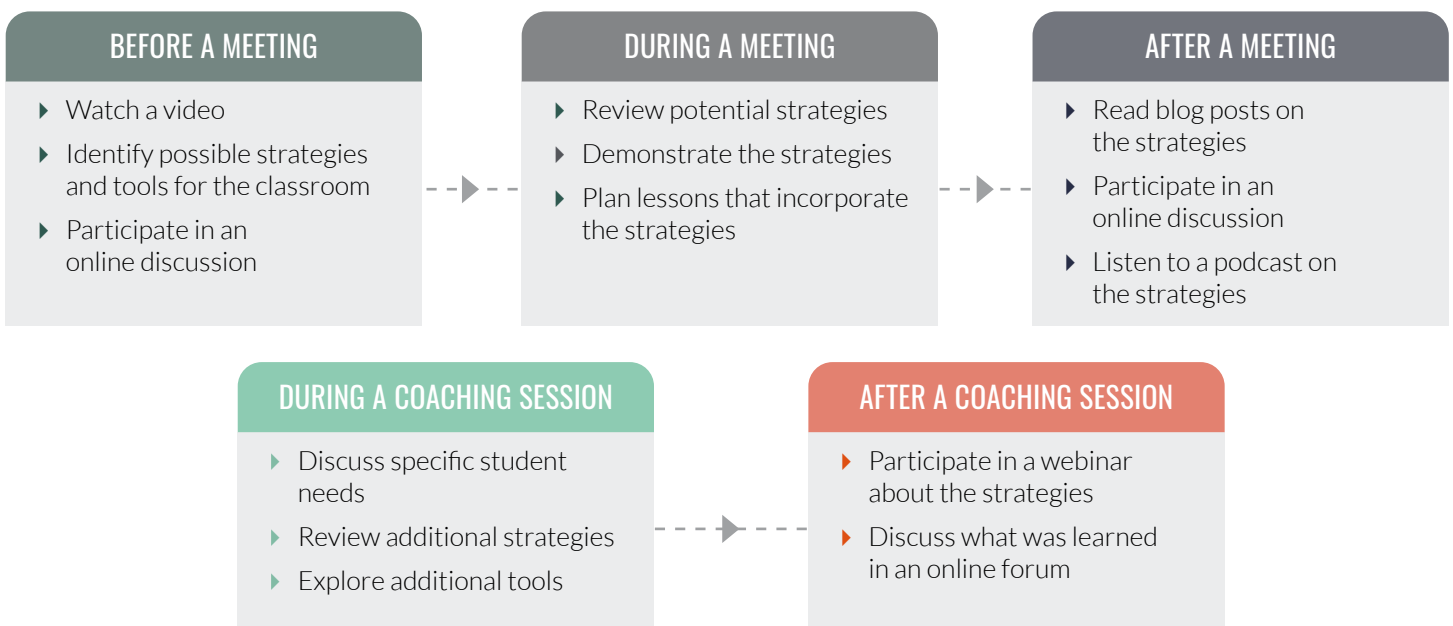
DELIVERY OPTIONS

District leaders should incorporate different types of professional learning delivery models to meet different needs and preferences. These delivery models include:

- Action research
- Annual trainings
- Blended learning
- Book study
- Case studies
- Classroom visits
- Coaching
- Collaborative analysis of student work
- Collaborative curriculum development
- College coursework
- Conferences
- Department meetings
- Focused conversations
- Individual analysis of student work
- Journaling
- Mentoring
- Online professional learning programs
- Professional learning communities
- Professional learning sessions
- Self-reflection
- Shadowing
- Study group
- Summer institutes
- Virtual learnings
- Workshops

Sources: Coppell ISD; Clear Creek ISD; Learning Forward; and Alberta Education et al.

Blended Professional Learning Process

Blended professional learning, found to be effective for improving the instructional practices of middle school math and science teachers, can be applied to teachers of any subject in any grade level.

BEFORE A MEETING
- Watch a video
- Identify possible strategies and tools for the classroom
- Participate in an online discussion

DURING A MEETING
- Review potential strategies
- Demonstrate the strategies
- Plan lessons that incorporate the strategies

AFTER A MEETING
- Read blog posts on the strategies
- Participate in an online discussion
- Listen to a podcast on the strategies

DURING A COACHING SESSION
- Discuss specific student needs
- Review additional strategies
- Explore additional tools

AFTER A COACHING SESSION
- Participate in a webinar about the strategies
- Discuss what was learned in an online forum

Sources: Owston, Sinclair, and Wideman; Lee; and Power Up What Works

COMMON TOPICS

Districts cover a variety of topics in professional learning activities, ranging from classroom instruction to diversity issues. Common topics include:

- **Instructional strategies:** Developing learning goals, co-teaching, facilitating project-based learning, planning lessons, developing curricula, and using other research-based instructional techniques

- **Social-emotional learning:** Substance abuse prevention and positive behavioral interventions and supports

- **Classroom management:** Bullying prevention, responsive classrooms, and conscious discipline

- **Equity and inclusion:** Culturally responsive teaching, understanding bias, inequities in education

Sources: Salt River Schools; Arlington Public Schools; Connecticut Technical High School System

CASE STUDY: Arlington Public Schools (VA)

Arlington Public Schools covers several topics in its professional learning activities, such as inclusion, curriculum, and personalized learning.

INCLUSION
- Co-teaching models
- Understanding English learners
- Assistive technology
- Supporting mental health care

WHOLE CHILD APPROACH
- Bullying prevention
- Social-emotional curriculum
- Substance abuse prevention
- Positive behavioral interventions and supports

PERSONALIZED LEARNING
- Blended learning
- Flipped classrooms
- Project-based learning

CURRICULUM
- Curriculum framework
- Overview of VA Standards of Learning
- Vertical articulation

AUTHENTIC AND ENGAGING LEARNING EXPERIENCES
- Critical, computational, and creative thinking
- Conscious discipline
- Number talks
- Responsive classroom

Source: Arlington Public Schools

Topics for ELA, Reading, Literacy, and Math

Districts cover a variety of professional learning topics related to various subject areas. Below are examples of some common topics addressed by districts.

ELA/READING/LITERACY	MATH
• Science of Reading • Small group instruction • Text Talks • Managing independent reading • Understanding lexiles	• Storytelling and literature in math • Effective use of math manipulatives
• Renaissance STAR and AR programs • Learning centers • Align STAR Curriculum with CCS learning progressions • Strategies to support reading	• ALEKS program • Mastery-based learning • Developing and using common assessments in Algebra • STAR Curriculum
• Curriculum previews, updates, and reviews • When Readers Struggle • Leveled Literacy Intervention training • STAAR Curriculum • Benchmark Writing Score	• Curriculum previews, updates, and reviews • Formative assessment in math • STAAR Curriculum
• Foundations of Reading • Words Their Way • Expository writing (Grades 3-5) • Spelling/phonics/ vocabulary instruction • Foundations of Writing • Essential practices for teaching the writer	• Foundations of elementary math, middle school math, Algebra, Algebra II, or geometry • Elementary math journals • Formative assessment • Understanding elementary math standards

Sources: Salt River Schools; Connecticut Technical High School System; Clear Creek ISD; and Humble ISD

Topics by Grade Level

Although there do not seem to be differences in the delivery methods of professional learning for elementary and secondary school teachers, the teachers at these levels should receive professional learning on content that is relevant to the grade levels they teach.

CASE STUDY:
Clear Creek ISD (TX)

Most differences in the professional learning that Clear Creek ISD provides to its teachers at the elementary and secondary school levels are related to each grade level's programming.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

ELA, MATH, AND SOCIAL STUDIES	SCIENCE
• Curriculum updates, previews, and reviews • Formative assessment in math • Leveled Literacy training • Social Studies Alive	• Curriculum review • Formative assessment • STAAR • Science notebooks with inquiry • Technology integration • Discovery Dome training

SECONDARY SCHOOL

ELA	MATH	SOCIAL STUDIES	SCIENCE
• Curriculum review and lesson planning • STAAR • Online book review • Benchmark scoring in writing • Leveled Literacy training	• Curriculum review and lesson planning • Common assessment writing • STAAR • Instructional strategies • Coaching • Curriculum writing	• Course-specific collaboration • STAAR • Reading and writing in social studies • Technology integration • Backward-design lesson planning	• Curriculum review and lesson planning • Assessments • STAAR • Course-level planning • Data disaggregation • Science Fair • Benchmarking data

Source: Clear Creek ISD

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR NOVICE AND VETERAN TEACHERS

Guidelines for Effective Professional Learning for All Teachers

BE SUSTAINED AND ONGOING

Professional learning must be ongoing and significant in duration to allow time for teachers to learn a new strategy and grapple with implementation.

PROVIDE TEACHER SUPPORTS

There must be support for a teacher during the implementation stage that addresses the specific challenges of changing classroom practice.
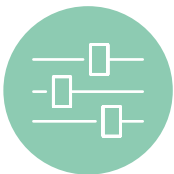
INVOLVE ACTIVE LEARNING

Teachers' initial exposure to a concept should not be passive. Rather, it should engage teachers through varied approaches so they can participate actively in making sense of a new practice.

INCLUDE MODELING

Modeling has been found to be highly effective in helping teachers understand a new practice.

BE CONTENT SPECIFIC

The content presented to teachers should not be generic. Instead, it should be specific to the discipline (for middle school and high school teachers) or grade level (for elementary school teachers).

Source: Center for Public Education

Topics for Novice vs. Veteran Teachers

Novice Teachers

Districts have provided professional learning for novice teachers that focuses on classroom management, instructional strategies, assessments, equity issues, content knowledge, and professionalism. Many also have established mentoring programs, coaching, and peer support groups to provide ongoing supports for new teachers.

Veteran Teachers

Professional learning can help develop veteran teachers' skills while keeping them engaged in the teaching profession. Examples of offerings for veteran teachers include:

PROVIDING LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES	DIFFERENTIATING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING	CREATING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING TEAMS
Districts should provide opportunities for veteran teachers to take on additional responsibilities and leadership roles. These opportunities can help veteran teachers remain motivated to stay in in their districts longer. Districts can offer these opportunities by providing professional learning for different career pathways.	Districts should keep in mind the experience of veteran teachers when planning professional learning to avoid redundant topics. Districts and schools might consider administering needs assessments to veteran teachers to identify those areas. Districts and schools can also observe classrooms to identify areas of need.	Veteran teachers can benefit from collaborative time with other teachers. Collaborative time is also beneficial for novice teachers, who can learn from more experienced teachers.

Source: National Association of Elementary School Principals

Learning Delivery Preferences

To plan more effective and engaging learning experiences for teachers at all levels of experience, leaders should consider individual learning needs and delivery preferences. Conducting a needs assessment or asking participants a few simple questions before selecting specific professional learning methods and activities can enhance their ability to acquire and retain the target competencies:

- How much self-directed learning do you like? What do you need to be successful with this?

- What kind of active learning do you prefer (e.g., didactic teaching, the Socratic method, problem-solving, collaborative discussion)?

- How do you like applying your learning (e.g., discussions, simulations, case studies, problem-solving, reflection)?

- In what ways do you like to collaborate while learning (e.g., discussion, paired work, debate)? How much collaboration do you like to do?

- How do you connect current learning to past knowledge and experience?

- When is the best time for you to do professional learning (e.g., during planning, during professional development days)?

- Do you need learning broken up into smaller chunks or have any other modifications that help with your learning?

NEPTUNE TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

CASE STUDY:
Neptune Township School District (NJ)

The professional development plan at Neptune Township School District (NTSD) includes a goal to develop novice teachers' skills and knowledge, along with a set of structured activities throughout the year to reinforce their learning.

GOAL	RATIONALE
• Provide opportunities for collaborative and reflective practice that will enrich the skills and knowledge of novice teachers, as well as help to create a culture of continuous learning and ongoing professional growth for all staff members.	• Coaching exemplifies the ongoing, embedded type of professional learning recommended in the Standards for Professional Learning and makes a real difference for educators and students. NTSD believes in a mentoring system that is a structured process of assistance and support for our novice teachers, and includes the active involvement of NTSD's seasoned professionals.

INITIAL ACTIVITIES	FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES
• Provide New Teacher Handbook • New Teacher/Staff Orientation • Novice teachers meet with their mentors regularly for 30-34 weeks • Professional Development (PD) • Coordinator to provide mentor training • Provide assistance in the performance of duties and adjustment to the challenges of teaching • Informal observations conducted by mentor and PD Coordinator	• Monthly New Teacher Roundtables • Additional break-out sessions offered as appropriate for specific roles • Professional resources and PD opportunities will be offered by the District Professional Development Coordinator • Use of SWIVL video observations for reflections

Source: Neptune Township School District

DIFFERENTIATED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR CAREER PATHWAYS

When differentiated to meet teachers' unique needs, professional learning can empower teachers to alter their instructional practices and more effectively support their students. Delivery options for differentiated professional learning are the same as for general professional learning. At the end of a professional learning session, facilitators should also administer a formative assessment to evaluate what teachers learned during the session.

Building Agency Through Professional Learning

Ultimately, effective professional development encourages participants to solve problems in their daily work, make positive choices about their professional growth, and contribute to their colleagues' growth. Use these practices to ensure employees have opportunities to enhance their own sense of agency:

When differentiating professional learning, districts should consider:

1. **What teachers already know**
2. **What teachers are interested in learning**
3. **The learning styles of individual teachers**

- Build on the expertise of individual teachers and leaders by including them in the design and delivery of professional development
- Use professional learning networks to build engagement
- Ensure that leaders at all levels support continuous professional learning

- Provide more structured professional development for new or struggling teachers and leaders while allowing more experienced teachers and leaders a choice of professional learning options
- Begin with small improvements to existing professional development and deepen collaboration over time

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BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CASE STUDY:
Baltimore City
Public Schools (MD)

Baltimore City Public Schools offers a tiered system of career pathways. Teachers can progress through each tier to gain more responsibilities and leadership roles.

LEAD PATHWAY
- Serve as lead academic teacher at a school
- Collaborate with the principal to improve academic performance

MODEL PATHWAY
- Serve as model of excellence
- Play a leadership role
- Create professional development opportunities

PROFESSIONAL PATHWAY
- Focus on classroom success
- Active in school-based roles

STANDARD PATHWAY
- Focus on instruction
- Professional development

Sources: Grierson and Woloshyn; District Administration; NYC Department of Education; Teach HUB; Cirillo; Baltimore City Public Schools

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are our **top two or three instructional goals** for the year, both at the school and district levels?

2. How do our instructional goals translate into **professional learning outcomes for all teachers**, specific teams, and individual teachers?

3. What teacher **professional learning options** are already available to us, both internally and externally?

4. What can we do to make professional learning **practical?**

5. How will we know if our teacher professional learning plan was **successful?**

6. How can we **engage teachers** through the three phases of professional learning: planning, implementation, and evaluation?

7. How can we make sure we have **time** for teacher professional learning?

Source: Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA)

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ABOUT HANOVER RESEARCH

Hanover guides K-12 leaders in tackling academic and administrative challenges to ensure that students, parents, and staff have the tools they need to ensure all students succeed.

OUR K-12 EDUCATION SOLUTIONS

DISTRICT OPERATIONS

Determine the true effectiveness of your district operations and identify opportunities to improve.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Identify areas for improvement in your district to help all students feel supported.

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Build your strategic plan to achieve organizational alignment, engage stakeholders, and address improvement areas.

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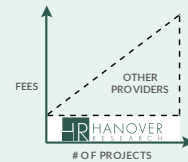
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