

# **High-Quality Professional Development Criteria**

**Commonwealth of Virginia  
Department of Education  
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High-quality professional development is defined by several interacting factors. It implies rich content that is specifically chosen to deepen and broaden the knowledge and skills of teachers, principals, administrators, paraprofessionals, and other key education staff. High-quality professional development should be based on substantive, well-defined objectives. High-quality professional development requires structure, reflecting well-thought out delivery; efficient use of time; varied and effective styles of pedagogy; discourse and application; and the use of formative and summative assessment to promote understanding. High-quality professional development demands the guidance of experienced educators and other professionals who have a thorough and up-to-date understanding of the content themselves and who can fully engage the participants in the desired learning.

Criteria

High-quality professional development should:

- a. improve and increase teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach, and enable teachers to become highly qualified if they are teaching in a federal core content area;
- b. be sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and teachers' performance in the classroom;
- c. be based on, aligned with, and directly related to Virginia's Standards of Learning;
- d. be structured on scientifically-based research demonstrated to improve student academic achievement or substantially increase the knowledge and teaching skills of teachers;
- e. be sponsored by school divisions, colleges, universities, organizations, associations, or other entities experienced in providing professional development activities to teachers and instructors;
- f. be delivered by individuals who have demonstrated qualifications and credentials in the focus area of the professional development;
- g. support the success of all learners including children with special needs and limited English proficiency;
- h. provide training for teachers in the use of technology so that technology and technology applications are effectively used in the classroom to improve teaching and learning in the curricula and federal core academic subjects in which the teachers teach;
- i. promote the use of data and assessments to improve instruction; and
- j. be reviewed for high quality and evaluated after completion to determine if the intended results were achieved.

## Elaboration of high-quality professional development criteria

High-quality professional development should:

- a) improve and increase teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach, and enable teachers to become highly qualified if they are teaching in a federal core content area;

First and foremost, teachers must have a deep and broad understanding of the discipline(s) they teach. In planning and targeting professional development experiences, primary emphasis should be placed on providing continued learning experiences that are clearly focused on building the content knowledge of the discipline and fluency with the discipline's critical skills and processes.

- b) be sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and teachers' performance in the classroom;

The total duration of the experience should involve a significant investment of time to meet the learning objectives of a substantive professional development program. The professional development activity does not need to occur as one contiguous block. Sustained professional development often includes both preparatory activities, such as independent reading, and follow-up sessions that allow teachers to discuss and critique their application of new learning. An institute that meets Virginia's High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE), as required in the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, should be based on a minimum of 30 clock-hours duration including preparation, homework, and follow-up sessions. Shorter duration sessions may be added together to be considered "sustained," as long as there are predefined learning objectives to describe the activity. In other words, the activity should be deliberate and not an after-the-fact assemblage of disparate, short-duration workshops.

Intensive professional development is characterized by continuous, rigorous, and concentrated learning activities. Intensive professional development should involve participants in more than basic lecture-style learning experiences. Complex experiences, including problem solving, issue analysis, research, and systematic investigation, should be a core component in the overall program. Likewise, the rigor of the activity should demand more of participants than simple comprehension of the concepts presented. Teachers should be involved in applying the content and skills. Activities should be interrelated, sequential, and build toward an ultimate outcome. Activities should reflect substantial participant effort beyond attendance.

The content of any professional development activity must relate back to the classroom and have application to student learning and success. However, to the extent possible and in the appropriate context, achievement-related classroom issues may be included. For example, professional development should focus on such things as strategies for improving student academic achievement, improving classroom management, or developing ways teachers may work more effectively with parents to improve student achievement.

- c) be based on, aligned with, and directly related to Virginia’s Standards of Learning;

Ensuring student achievement of Virginia’s academic standards is the primary goal of K-12 instruction, and professional development should distinctly promote teachers’ fluency with the concepts, skills, and processes in the standards. Professional development should relate directly to the state academic standards documents and the companion curriculum frameworks in concert with the identified needs of teachers.

- d) be structured on scientifically-based research demonstrated to improve student academic achievement or substantially increase the knowledge and teaching skills of teachers;

Professional development activities should provide teachers with the opportunity to learn effective instructional strategies that are based on research. Generally, this includes strategies that have undergone a rigorous, objective, and systematic review; were evaluated using reproducible experimental or quasi-experimental designs; and were peer reviewed.

- e) be sponsored by school divisions, colleges, universities, organizations, associations, or other entities experienced in providing professional development activities to teachers and instructors;

- f) be delivered by individuals who have demonstrated qualifications and credentials in the focus area of the professional development;

- g) support the success of all learners including children with special needs and limited English proficiency;

Ensuring the success of all students, regardless of disability, language proficiency, or socio-economic status is a crucial goal for schools. It is important that professional development should address this goal. This clearly includes providing instruction in methods of teaching children of underserved and disadvantaged populations and with special needs, including the gifted; and giving teachers of limited English proficient (LEP) children, and other teachers and instructional staff, the knowledge and skills to provide instruction and appropriate language and academic support services to those children, including the appropriate use of curricula and assessments;

- h) provide training for teachers in the use of technology so that technology and technology applications are effectively used in the classroom to improve teaching and learning in the curricula and federal core academic subjects in which the teachers teach;

Professional development activities should demonstrate the use of technology to support curricular and core academic instructional goals consistently to facilitate learning for all students. Activities should advance an understanding and implementation of instructional strategies that effectively and appropriately use technology in the classroom to improve and enhance teaching and learning. Activities should also focus on the knowledge and skills needed to become proficient

in the use of various technologies. In addition distance learning technologies may serve to support and enhance follow-up sessions, remote audiences, or key instructors distant from the learning venue.

- i) promote the use of data and assessments to improve instruction; and
- j) be reviewed for high quality and evaluated after completion to determine if the intended results were achieved.

In order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and teacher performance in the classroom, professional development should be focused on the results it is intended to produce. A professional development program should be examined carefully to ensure that it meets the needs of teachers to become highly qualified. Likewise professional development should be reviewed for its impact on increased teacher effectiveness and ultimately, improved student academic achievement.