

NURTURING QUALITY TEACHERS IN OREGON

A Profile of the Successes and Challenges of Six Oregon Districts

January 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESearchers agree strengthening teacher quality is the most effective and efficient way to boost academic achievement and believe rigorous professional development can play a key role in improving teaching practices. Yet, in Oregon and elsewhere, little is known about what's delivered and what's gained through professional development activities. Professional development is highly decentralized, with the most important work conceptualized and undertaken at the school-level. Fiscal accounting of the investment is incomplete, and officials struggle to evaluate outcomes.

To shed light on this critical area of education policy, this paper examines the professional development activities of six small and mid-sized districts from across Oregon. Reviews of budgets, collective-bargaining agreements, and calendars shows the size and nature of the professional development investment varies considerably across districts. If expenditures in these six districts are, on average, typical of other districts across the state, then Oregon's annual statewide investment in professional development stood at \$130 million in 2005-06—or 3 percent of operating costs.

Interviews with district-level officials found leaders who are well versed in the best practices literature and are embracing job-embedded professional development: activities that are incorporated into the day-to-day operations of the school, take place throughout the year, and are designed at the school-level. One-day workshops with no subsequent followup, which experts consider ineffective, are less common. At least one district conducts single-day inservice sessions with school-based followup, a method more likely to be more valuable than standalone daylong sessions.

While all the respondents were positive about their district's recent improvements in professional development, they uniformly call for more collaborative professional development time, better and equitable access to quality trainers, and increased networking with neighboring districts. They also recognize that as they expand their investments and strive to improve quality, they will need better outcome measures—changes in teacher practice and student achievement—to demonstrate their expected successes to parents, policymakers, and taxpayers.

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

A BROAD CONSENSUS exists across policymakers, academics, and the general public that the key to lasting educational improvement starts with putting excellent teachers in every classroom with students. A seminal study on teacher quality estimates that the difference between having a good teacher or an ineffective teacher equates to one grade level's worth of achievement gains.¹ And a recent study argues that improving teacher quality is among the most cost-effective ways to improve student outcomes.² The challenges of training, recruiting, mentoring, developing, and retaining good teachers are many. This report addresses one key aspect of strengthening teacher quality: ongoing high quality professional development activities in Oregon's schools.

Professional development in Oregon is highly decentralized. The scale, substance, access and delivery of professional development vary considerably across, and even within, districts, which makes broad characterizations about its content or effectiveness difficult. Moreover, the state's finance system does an inadequate job of accounting for spending on professional development. For example, a consultant's time and expenses presenting to a group of teachers typically counts as a professional development expense. But, teachers' time and expenses participating in the consultant's presentation usually does not.

Taken together, highly decentralized delivery and weak fiscal accounting leave policymakers and educators unclear about how much professional development takes place, what form

it takes, whether it changes teaching practice or, more important, improves achievement. For Oregon, this report is a pioneering attempt to investigate those issues.

Given the high degree of decentralization, painting a comprehensive picture of professional development in a state with nearly 200 school districts is not feasible. Consequently, this report focuses on the substance, resources, and outcomes of professional development in six Oregon districts. The districts vary along socio-economic and geographic dimensions, and their experiences convey a broad range of practices, successes, and challenges. Student enrollment in 2005-06 ranged from about 1,000 in the smallest district to almost 15,000 in the largest, and spending per student ranged from \$7,300 to almost \$10,000.

Each district has a pseudonym to facilitate the writing of the report:

- **East** is a small district in Eastern Oregon;
- **Mountain East** is a growing district east of Oregon's Cascade range;
- **Northwest** is a mid-sized district in the greater Portland metropolitan area;
- **South**, located in south-central Oregon, is similar in size to Northwest;
- **Southwest** is relatively small and located in Southwestern Oregon;
- **West**, another mid-sized district, is west of Oregon's Cascade range.

Our findings relate to the experiences in only these six districts, and we could uncover more issues by expanding our list—particularly to very large districts. We interviewed district-level officials including superintendents, curriculum directors, and business managers. Although we did not interview principals or individual teachers for this report, we are exploring the feasibility of surveying district staff about professional development for a follow-up report.

We used the same protocol with each interview,

which was shaped by our understanding of the literature on best practices in professional development (See Appendix A). The interviews explored the following questions:

- What determines the amount of time for professional development?
- Who decides what's delivered?
- What form does professional development take?
- What's discussed or delivered during the time devoted to professional development?
- How much do districts spend on professional development and how do they fund it?
- Can districts link professional development to student achievement or even changes in instructional practices?
- What would districts like to change?

The following section summarizes the literature on best practices in professional development. Then, subsequent sections report our findings for each of the questions outlined above. We conclude with some observations about what the findings mean for state and local policy.

WHAT CONSTITUTES HIGH QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

The list of ironclad best practices in professional development is short, but a consensus on promising practices is emerging. Achieving a positive outcome is complex. For professional development to be effective, an expert, mentor, or fellow teacher generally conveys a new content or method to a teacher who in turn must understand it and alter a teaching practice. Some observers might declare victory at the point of changed practice. However, for the process to be truly successful, the change in practice must result in an improvement in student achievement or some other metric of success (e.g., degree completion).

Outside the limited findings from an experimental “gold standard,” more is known

State-Level Direction On Professional Development

State policy requires teachers to establish a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) plan in order to maintain their licenses. Teachers renewing standard licenses must demonstrate 100 hours of professional development activity during each renewal cycle. State rules call on teachers to choose activities in one of the following domains:

Content of the subject matter or specialty area directly related to the educator's current assignment(s) or to responsibilities the educator reasonably expects to be assigned.

Strategies for assessment of pupil performance in achieving school and district objectives and State content standards and interpretation and application of the results.

Methods for effective teaching, classroom management, counseling, supervision, leadership, and curriculum development.

Understanding of diversity in abilities, social and/or cultural background and use of such knowledge to promote achievement of high standards for all students.

Knowledge of State and national education priorities and the application of that knowledge to one's school and district programs.

Competence in the uses of technology in schools and the application of that knowledge to one's assignment.

Source:http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/rules/OARS_500/OAR_584/584_090.html

about what teachers, administrators, and academics report as effective professional development. Clearly, an educator knows whether a particular professional development effort changed her practices or not. Only professional development that changes practice has an opportunity to affect student outcomes—either for good or bad.

While best practices in the area are clearly still emerging, researchers generally agree that:³

- **Well-designed and implemented professional development can improve student achievement.** Rigorously designed experiments—that incorporate randomized trials—have established links between a number of specific professional development programs and improved student learning. In the area of mathematics, proven practices include “active mathematics teaching”⁴, Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI)⁵, and relatively new curriculum materials that focus on fractions⁶. In the reading area, a two-week instructional institute dedicated to phonology strengthened student learning around letter-sound relationships.⁷ Likewise, teacher training in the Lindamood Phonemic Sequencing reading curriculum showed sizable positive impacts on the reading abilities of at-risk, K-2 students.⁸
- **A focus on content knowledge, rather than on generic education methods, stands a much better chance of changing practice and affecting achievement.** Reviewing both experimental research and teachers’ perception of quality, researchers have concluded that high quality professional development should be tightly focused on subject matter content, as well as the ways students learn that content. Put simply, there’s room for most teachers to expand their knowledge of the content they teach and, as they do so, teaching quality improves.⁹
- **Delivery of content matters.** Not surprisingly, a well-designed professional development activity delivered by a poorly qualified or uninspiring consultant or staff member does little to advance teacher skills or student learning.¹⁰ Consequently, the challenge in selecting high quality professional development is two-fold: 1) identify the evidence/research-based program and 2) choose an inspiring and competent expert to deliver it.
- **Longer duration strengthens teacher learning.** Learning takes time. Consequently,

experts have concluded professional development that takes place over several days or weeks and is reinforced through subsequent meetings and teacher observations stands a much better chance of improving student achievement than one-day workshops with no follow-up. In all the scientific studies that have established a link between professional development that changes teaching practice and increases student achievement, training took place over several days or weeks and was followed up by observation and guided practice.¹¹

- **Active, collaborative learning strengthens professional development.** Teachers report that professional development is more likely to affect their practices if it incorporates active learning opportunities, including reviews of student work, presentations of classroom plans, and direct class observation. Moreover, teacher surveys suggest active learning is particularly successful when it’s undertaken with colleagues from the same school or department within a school.¹²
- **Coherence with school, district, and state goals is key.** Researchers generally concur that professional development stands a better chance of affecting teaching practice if it is aligned with school, district, state and federal-level improvement goals. In the best cases, policy goals from administrators and policymakers are coherent, and professional development work supports them.¹³

WHAT DETERMINES THE AMOUNT OF TIME FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

School board policies and collective bargaining agreements between districts and teacher unions impact the amount of time available for professional development opportunities. Resources for compensated professional development exist in the gap between instructional time (with a minimum number of hours mandated by the state) and total contract

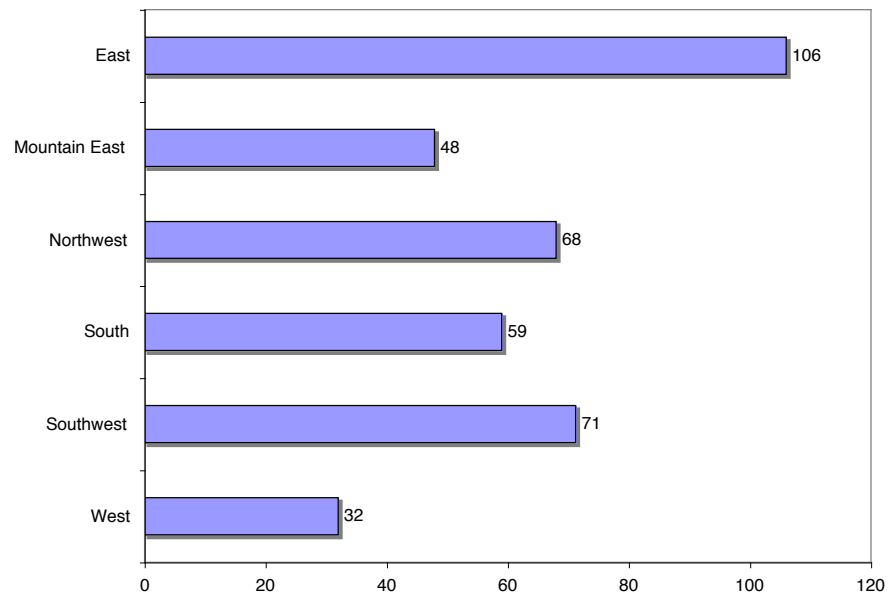
time. Between the boundaries of contract and instructional time, compensated professional development competes with holidays, personal leave, and planning/grading/conference time. So, generally speaking, the more contract time that districts and unions create above the state-mandated instructional time, the greater is the opportunity for *compensated* professional development. Outside of this compensated time, each of the districts can—and do—invite teachers to volunteer for other professional development activities.

The interviewed districts varied only slightly in the lengths of the contract years, from 190 (three districts) to 192 (one district). None had more than 175 instructional days.

The agreements draw clear distinctions between professional development and planning/grading days.

- East's agreement identifies eight full working days without students, and the superintendent indicated that five could be characterized as professional development days. Outside of the bargaining agreement, the administration and teachers have agreed to an early release calendar that allows for 2 hours of professional development each Friday.
- Mountain East's agreement includes a minimum of 4 days for teacher collaboration or professional development and specifies at least half of that time should be implemented through small planning groups. The administration and teachers agreed that

Figure 1: Annual Hours of Compensated Teacher Professional Development



Source: ECONorthwest calculated based on district interviews and reviews of collective bargaining agreements and calendars

elementary and middle schools would meet 1.5 hours weekly through an early release schedule. The high schools run half-day schedules once monthly and devote the second half of the day to professional development

- Northwest's contract identifies 8.5 staff-training days.
- South's contract calls for a single, full day of district inservice and up to two half days of professional development at the building level before the school year begins. The administration and teachers agreed to an early release schedule that provides 1.5 hours weekly for job-embedded professional development.
- Southwest's contract calls for nine teacher workdays to be split evenly between professional development and planning/grading. Then, it goes further to direct each building to devote at least one hour per week to professional development through Professional Learning Communities.

- West’s agreement earmarks four days to professional development: two full days and four half days.

Collective bargaining agreements may also specify policy on tuition reimbursement. Contracts specify the number of reimbursable credits available to teachers annually, and the share of the related tuition that the district will cover. Others go even further and earmark annual appropriations to tuition reimbursement.

WHO DECIDES WHAT’S DELIVERED?

While collective bargaining agreements shape *how much* professional development takes place, school- and district-level improvement plans govern the *substance*. Each of the six interviewed districts has delegated governance of the major professional development activities to principals, teachers, and building site councils. In exchange for that authority, district officials call on principals to demonstrate that their efforts are tightly aligned with improvement plans. Below, we describe the types of activities.

- **District-directed development.** Beyond an annual “State of District” meeting and occasional trainings, district-wide implementation of professional development is the exception not the rule. Superintendents and curriculum directors may establish a tone or vision for a year—writing, literacy, or math. In Northwest, the central office had devoted much of the professional development in 2007-08 school year to the creation of small teacher working groups and the use of technology in the classroom. District officials also may convene subject-matter or principal teams. But, most officials agreed a “one-size-fits-all” district-level training was hard to pull off effectively.

Central offices do have a say in the selection and deployment of instructional coaches and mentors. In those districts that use roving instructional coaches, the central office

decides the content focus, how many are employed, and in which schools they will focus.

- **Building-directed development.** Across the six districts, officials conveyed clearly that the leaders of individual schools drove the content of professional development. All described similar collaborative processes through which principals, teachers, and site councils developed school improvement plans and tailored professional development activities to support the plans. Within the schools, small working groups—typically called professional learning communities—develop plans specific to grade levels or content subjects. The composition of the groups differs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Elementary working groups are more likely organized by grades, and middle and high school groups by subject.
- **Teacher-directed development.** Through their small working groups, teachers drive the substance of professional development more than they did in the past. In addition to their small group work, teachers also independently pursue continuing education at local universities and colleges. Officials at each districts indicated that the substance of on-going teacher education was driven by teacher’s *individual* professional development plans, which teachers and principals review annually. The individual professional development plan must also link with school- and district-improvement plans. In addition to the principal’s oversight, some districts have formed tuition committees to oversee and approve the tuition reimbursement process.

WHAT FORM DOES PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TAKE?

Professional development takes a wide variety of forms across, and even within, the six interviewed districts. Periodic in-service days

remain a staple in all but one district, and teacher directed college coursework is active and funded in most. Nearly every district has embraced the concept of professional learning communities, so development activities are more likely undertaken by small teams of teachers rather than through building-wide workshops. Some districts are also taking steps to “embed” professional development into the day-to-day operations of the school—either through formal early release days or roving teacher mentors or consultants. The following sections underscore seven methods the interviewed districts employ to deliver professional development.

- **Periodic, full-day development activities.**

Dedicated calendar days remain a consistent form of professional development in five of the six districts. Typically, districts place at least one of these days prior to the beginning of the school year. The pre-service day provides an opportunity for the superintendent to set a vision and goals for the year. However, after the annual “State of the District” address to kickoff the year, the control of these daylong sessions reverts to the building level. As one district official put it: “If you plan a district-wide math event, what would the literacy teachers do?”

Through district-level interviews, a picture emerged on how schools organized these days, but less is known about the content covered. With respect to organization, a number of districts have embraced small working groups or professional learning communities. In Southwest, for example, the periodic development days serve as extensions of ongoing early release and allow the district’s 40 or so professional learning communities to supplement their weekly work. The other five districts also report the evolution of professional learning communities. Large building- or district-directed workshops are rare.

- **Job embedded collaboration time for teachers.** Four districts—East, Mountain

Oregon Mathematics Leadership Institute (OMLI)

Two of the districts interviewed for this study participated in the three-year Oregon Mathematics Leadership Institute—OMLI. This type of intensive, off-site professional development, commonly out of the budgetary reach of school districts, is underwritten by the National Science Foundation and delivered by Oregon State University. Through a series of intensive summer institutes and follow-up activities during the academic year, OMLI seeks to develop a network of school- and district-based intellectual leaders and master teachers of mathematics. About 100 teachers participated in each of the summer institutes, which concluded during Summer 2007. Anticipated outcomes of the 10-district partnership include:

- A cadre of teacher leaders with strengthened mathematics content knowledge and enhanced skills in pedagogy, curriculum, leadership, and assessment.
- An on-going and self-sustaining network of mathematics teachers, school administrators, and university/college faculty.
- An expansion of professional learning communities of mathematics teachers and administrators from K-12 core partner districts.

The Portland-based RMC Research Corporation is serving as the project’s evaluator.

Source: <http://omli.org>

East, South, and Southwest—have created weekly early release periods that accommodate on-going teacher collaboration throughout the year. The policy sets aside an hour or two per week during which small groups of teachers share teaching lessons, examine achievement data and student work, and revamp school or department improvement plans. The adopting districts argue teachers need more time to reflect on their teaching practices, observe colleagues’ approaches, and drill down on where students are making progress and where they aren’t.

During the weekly release time, teachers are organized into small groups, and the organization varies by grade level. At the elementary level, teachers typically organize themselves by grades or grade-pairs (e.g., K-1). At the high school level, teachers may collaborate by subject or department. The districts charge principals with facilitating and monitoring the use of the time, and the groups generally submit progress reports. With the exception of Southwest, which directed its groups to focus specifically on writing in 2006-07, district officials had no detailed knowledge of the content of job-embedded time.

Adoption of early release periods was not without controversy.

Some teachers questioned whether added development time was worth the foregone instructional hours, particularly at the high school level. “Just let me teach” was a sentiment among some high school teachers in the Mountain East School District. Some parents argued early release schedules complicated the logistics of pickup and drop-offs and increased the cost of childcare. Moreover, creating weekly, paid opportunities for teachers to collaborate comes at cost. For example, when East transitioned to an early release calendar, the district’s investment in professional development more than doubled.

Despite the cost and pushback from some stakeholders, superintendents in the four districts view the strategy as integral to their education reform strategies. They argue the weekly sessions stand a better chance of changing teacher practices, and quality, than the other methods of professional development they employ. “Teachers are willing to talk to other teachers about what they do,” said one Mountain East official.

Teachers are willing to talk to other teachers about what they do. We’re deprivatizing what we do.”
– Mountain East Official

“We’re de-privatizing what we do.”

- Job embedded instructional coaches and consultants.** West employs a second form of on-going, on-site professional development through its use of instructional coaches and mentors. The district employs coaches for literacy and math, a science consultant, and a part-time analyst to review assessment data and develop instructional strategies. Each of these positions serves teachers across the district, and they deliver assistance through one-on-one classroom observations, data analysis, workshops, and support of professional learning communities. The instructional coaches are teachers, not administrators, and West officials believe the distinction is a key to their acceptance in classrooms across the district. Like the early release strategies discussed above, West officials view this job embedded approach as more likely to change teacher practice and quality than periodic workshops or seminars.
- Multi-week, off-site seminars.** Two districts participated in the three-year Oregon Mathematics Leadership Institute (OMLI), which was funded primarily through a National Science Foundation grant. While neither district traditionally invests heavily in offsite professional development, both believed the intensive program showed strong potential to boost the mathematics content skills of its participating leaders. Having just completed the program in Summer 2007, the districts recognized the value of the program would increase if OMLI participants remained in the district and actively shared their newly acquired skills and techniques with non-OMLI participants.
- One time offsite workshops and seminars.** Generally, district officials reported a reluctance to fund attendance at shorter

(1-2 day) offsite workshops. Occasionally, districts send teachers to seminars to observe consultants who are being considered for on-site training. Otherwise, a workshop must have a very specific goal or opportunity. For example, West occasionally sends Title I teachers to statewide conferences and workshops. In Summer and Fall 2007, Northwest and South sent administrators and teachers to a two-day, offsite training on professional learning communities. During subsequent inservice days, workshop participants are expected to share those lessons with colleagues. During Summer 2007, East sent staff to Summer Institute, a three-day workshop sponsored by the Oregon Department of Education, Oregon Education Association, the Confederation of School Administrators, and the Oregon School Boards Association. The 2007 Institute focused on literacy and offered training on instructional coaching, reading and writing in content areas, and safe and civil classrooms.

- **Voluntary development opportunities.** Some districts, and district-partners, deliver a variety of free workshops throughout the year, but teachers are not compensated directly for attending them. Northwest has developed a fairly broad menu of training offerings. Each meets multiple times over the year, and some offer college credit. Northwest's voluntary courses provide teachers with foundations in the sheltered-instruction and differentiated-instruction approaches, as well as the Step Up writing strategy. In East, the district has partnered with the local ESD to offer a Summer Institute, which covers a wide range of topics including incorporating technology into the classroom and child safety.
- **Teacher-directed coursework.** Most districts offer some form of reimbursement or subsidy for job-related college coursework that teachers identify and complete on their own. Reimbursement policies are outlined

in collective bargaining agreements. West funds 50 percent (or more) of the six most expensive credit hours taken; Mountain East funds 75 percent of up to 15 quarter hours per year; Northwest fully reimburses nine quarter hours annually, and South earmarks \$25,000 annually and defers funding decisions to a tuition committee. Southwest does not reimburse tuition but distributes vouchers that offset 75 percent of courses' cost. East does not offer tuition reimbursement.

In participating districts, the course approval processes are not complex. Principals and district-officials expect teachers to seek and select courses that support their individual development plans. West has created a tuition reimbursement workgroup to oversee its approval process. None of the district officials interviewed expressed concerns about teachers attending inappropriate courses.

WHAT'S DISCUSSED OR DELIVERED DURING THE TIME DEVOTED TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

The emerging literature on best practices is clear on one point: the substance of what's discussed during professional development matters, and programs that advance teachers' knowledge of the subjects they teach stand the best chance of improving student achievement.

Professional development is highly decentralized in each of the six districts, and officials expect teachers, principals, and their site councils to use school-improvement plans to guide their specific activities. Having limited our interviews to district officials, we left the interviews with only a vague understanding of what's presented or discussed during the time allocated to professional development. One could develop a better understanding of the substance by reviewing the numerous plans and progress reports exchanged between teachers

and principals or by reviewing the agendas of occasional building-wide seminars. That type of detailed audit was outside the scope of this study.

While our interviews failed to tease out precisely how much time is devoted to mathematics, reading, writing, classroom management, or diversity issues, they did uncover key initiatives, or programs, that the districts had purchased, launched, and implemented with professional development time and resources. In some cases, the programs are trademarked and offered by a single vendor. In others, the intervention is somewhat more generic, and different approaches are advanced by competing consultants.

- **Step Up to Writing.** Offered by Sopris West Educational Services, the *Step Up to Writing* method instructs students to break the writing process into planning, translating, and multiple revising phases.¹⁴
- **Read 180.** Offered by Scholastic, Read 180 addresses individual reading needs through differentiated instruction, adaptive and instructional software, high-interest literature, and direct instruction in reading, writing, and vocabulary skills.¹⁵
- **Read Well.** Offered by Sopris West Educational Services, the *Read Well* program introduces and reviews reading skills and strategies, uses narrative and expository content to pique learner interest, and offers multiple activities including story maps, story retells, and guided reports¹⁶. West offers *Read Well*, but teachers attend voluntarily and are not compensated for their time.
- **DIBELS Assessment.** Developed by the University of Oregon's Center on Teaching and Learning, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development. The Dynamic Measurement Group (DMG) offers seminars and position papers to support the appropriate use of the tool.
- **Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP).** The model's goal is to facilitate high quality instruction for English Language Learners in content area teaching. The protocol's designers view SIOP as an umbrella under which other programs developed for improving instruction can reside or a tool for organizing teaching methods and techniques.¹⁷
- **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).** Disseminated by the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, PBIS is "a systems approach to establishing the social culture and behavioral supports needed for all children in a school to achieve both social and academic success. The approach calls for school-based teams to support positive behavior through defining/teaching behavioral expectations, outlining the consequences of inappropriate behavior, developing systems to link academic performance and behavior, and developing individualized student interventions."¹⁸
- **Response to Intervention (RTI).** Overseen in Oregon by the Office of Student Learning and Partnerships, the RTI approach couples low-performing readers with an intense individualized intervention. Teachers subsequently monitor academic growth and measure the "response to the intervention." Within the RTI approach, educators are expected to identify and implement an "evidence-based" reading intervention and measure outcomes using a recognized assessment tool (e.g., DIBELS or something like it).¹⁹
- **Professional Learning Communities (PLC).** PLCs are a method of organizing teachers and administrators into groups that examine and improve their professional practice. Groups vary in scale and purpose and range from grade-level teacher groups to cross-district, content-specific collaboratives. Given their nature, PLCs serve as a means

to implement professional development generally and newly adopted curricula specifically. Each of the districts indicated it had spent in-service time and resources conceptualizing, implementing, and refining the PLC concept, which included sending teams of administrators and teachers to technical assistance seminars. The School Improvement Network and Solution Tree have served as consultants.

HOW MUCH DO DISTRICTS SPEND ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOW DO THEY FUND IT?

Nationally, departments of education and school districts inadequately account for their professional development expenditures. Oregon is no exception. As discussed previously, a consultants' time and expenses providing a district-wide seminar on professional learning communities would appear as a professional development expense on most districts' books. But, the compensation of the teachers sitting in the audience would not. Researchers have

long recognized the accounting inconsistencies and have recommended alternative methods to fully measure professional development expenditures.²⁰

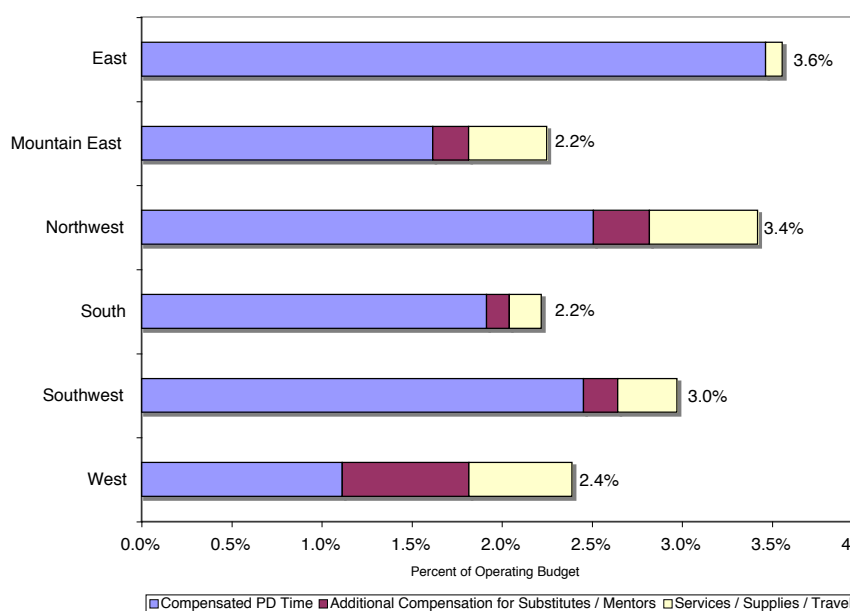
For the purposes of this study, we asked districts to collaborate in developing a more comprehensive estimate. We based our estimates on 2005-06 data—the most recent expenditure data fully audited and certified by the Oregon Department of Education. We built the estimates from two data sources:

- **Direct spending on instructional staff development.** Oregon's chart of accounts isolates spending on activities specifically designed for instruction staff to assist in using curriculum materials, understand best teaching practices, and other activities to improve teacher performance. The account—function 2240 in the state's accounting structure—captures spending on consultants, travel, and workshop fees.
- **Compensated professional development time.** Each district's collective bargaining agreement sets ground rules on the number of days or partial days

dedicated to professional development. From the district calendars and interviews with officials, we estimate the cost of teacher and administrator compensation paid during school improvement time. We did not count time related to workdays that are dedicated to planning, conferences, or grading. District contracts are clear about the distinction.

Taken together, the two sources provide a much more complete picture of district investments in professional development but still miss some activities.

Figure 2: Professional Development Expenditures Expressed as a Share of All Spending on Current Operations, 2005-06

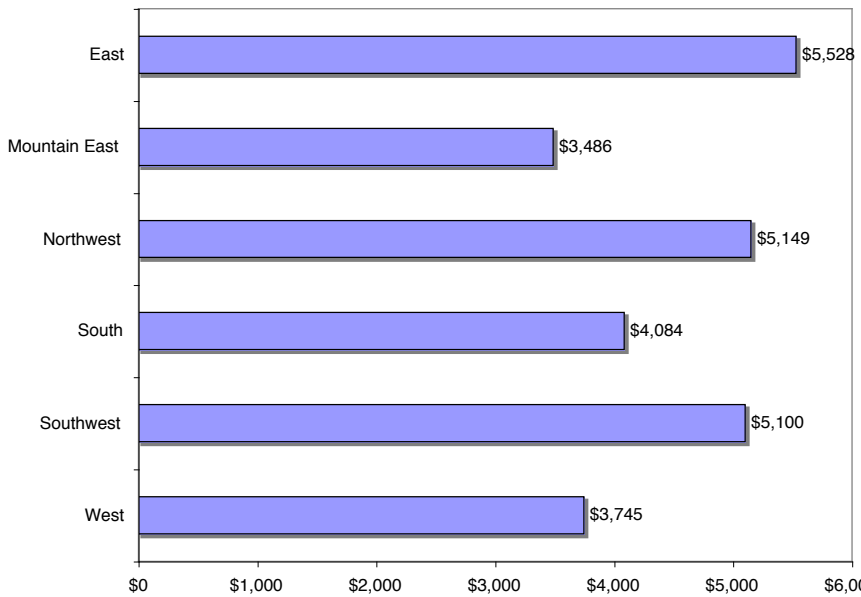


Source: ECONorthwest calculated using ODE financial data and information from district interviews

For example, most districts use substitutes to provide professional development for classroom teachers during the work day. Some districts isolate the substitute spending and code it as “staff development.” Others code it as a broad

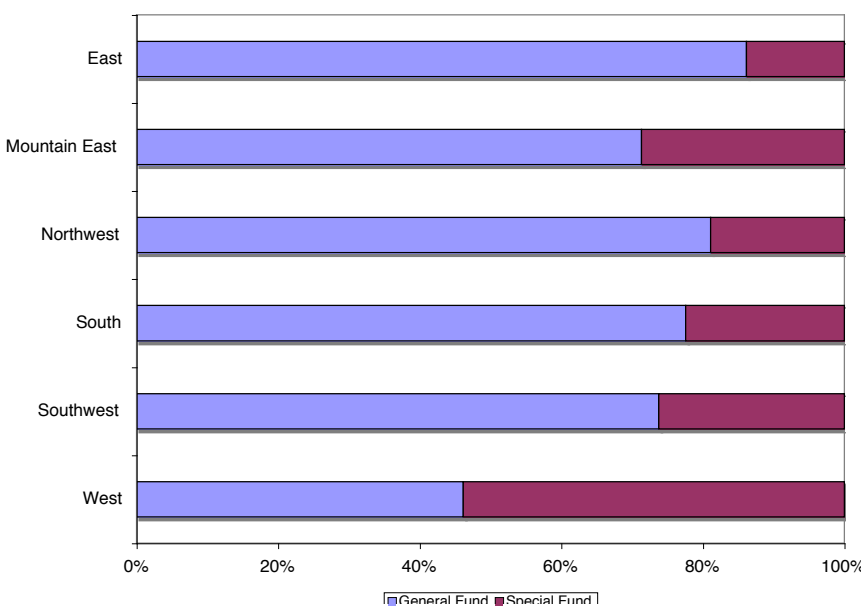
instructional expense. Without a careful cost accounting up front, it’s impossible to know what share of a district’s spending on substitutes supported professional development versus anything else. We also made no attempt to

Figure 3: Estimated Professional Development Expenditures per Full Time Equivalent Teacher, 2005-06



Source: ECONorthwest calculated using ODE financial data and information from district interviews

Figure 4: Revenue Sources for Professional Development Activities, 2005-06



Source: ECONorthwest calculated using ODE financial data and information from district interviews

estimate the time the superintendent, curriculum directors, or other officials spend planning and preparing for school improvement days. So, while these estimates are more complete, they likely still underestimate the professional development investment.

Limited to the two categories above, we estimate that these six districts spent between 2.2 and 3.6 percent of their operations budgets on professional development in 2005-06 (See Figure 2), or shares that are roughly comparable those reported in other studies²¹. If we assume the statewide average falls roughly in the middle—at 3 percent—then school districts across Oregon spent \$136 million on professional development in 2005-06.

In most districts, the compensated professional development time—of teachers and administrators—accounts for well over half of the spending. In East, compensated time—much of it related to early release Fridays—composes nearly all of its spending. Travel and consultants make

up the small remainder. By contrast, West's compensated professional development time—four days annually—represents a minority of its investment, and the districts places a greater emphasis job embedded instructional coaches and mentors. Estimated spending per full-time equivalent (FTE) teacher varies from \$3,486 in Mountain East to \$5,528 in East (see Figure 3). The two districts with lower spending per teacher (West and Mountain East) have less compensated professional development time than the others. While Mountain East negotiated early release time in the elementary and middle schools, the district does not have the periodic all day sessions that are a staple elsewhere. By contrast, East, South and Southwest have early release time *in addition to* periodic professional development days. Northwest has no early release days but offers more periodic professional development days than the others.

Most districts pay for professional development out of their general funds, which is not surprising given that compensated teacher time dominates spending in many districts (see Figure 4). West is the exception. The district funds less compensated time than others and has had recent success with federal grant writing. Federal grants run through districts' special funds. South officials have begun to question the net benefits of federal grants. Officials there note the reporting requirements are significant regardless of the size of the grant, leading one South official to wonder whether grants are worth the trouble.

CAN DISTRICTS LINK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OR EVEN CHANGES IN INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES?

By their own accounts, school districts have limited capacity and can make only modest attempts to evaluate the effects of their professional development efforts. Formal, third party evaluations of any aspect of

the professional development activities are expensive and therefore, rare. One exception is the OMLI mathematics collaboration, which will be evaluated through a National Science Foundation grant. One superintendent expressed frustration when an Oregon Department Education (ODE) audit found the district had insufficiently evaluated a professional development grant. The superintendent requested examples of good evaluations from the ODE auditor, who replied the department had none to share.

Short of formal evaluations, districts pointed to some positive achievement trends. West officials said the implementation of its Reading First program, and related professional development, has had a quick and measurable effect on increasing student achievement as measured by the DIBELS reading assessment. In Southwest, where professional learning communities across all grades focused on writing during 2006-07, the superintendent said she found impacts in state achievement tests.

More common, but also far from systematic, are qualitative evaluations of specific initiatives. Mountain East and East each survey teachers annually to measure satisfaction with recent offerings and gauge interest in future content.

WHAT WOULD DISTRICTS LIKE TO CHANGE?

Generally speaking, school district officials believe they have made some progress in offering more effective professional development during the past few years. All had made conscious efforts to deemphasize short (one time) offsite workshops and adopt different types of job embedded professional development, which they believed was affecting teaching practice and ultimately student achievement. While their self-critiques were almost universally positive, they also recognized the system has a long way to go if it's going to nurture top-tier teaching. A number of common themes emerged in their

recommendations for improvement. Specifically, they called for:

- **More time.** “Time’s the biggest issue,” said one official, and across the board, colleagues in other districts agreed educators need more time to collaborate. In districts without early release agreements, the perceived need was acute. In West, officials argue for four to five improvement days, spread sporadically across the year, are insufficient. While that limited schedule may allow a district time to introduce new content, it doesn’t permit the time to test, observe, refine, and implement the content. In the early release districts, officials were grateful for the extra time they had negotiated but called for increased professional development time before, during, and after the school year.
- **Resources coupled with new mandates.** Across districts, officials concurred that new mandates—and, in particular, the state’s new graduation requirements—will generate a significant need for professional development. As one superintendent said, “three high school math credits are great but the required level of difficulty will be tough. To meet the requirements, it will take more than retraining high school math teachers. We’ll have to redesign the entire K-12 curriculum.”
- **Need resources and professional development for teacher leaders.** In looking for expertise to implement new content or teaching methods, district officials look first to their own staff. “Your own people are the best providers,” said one interviewee. Consultants may jumpstart work on a new teaching approach, but lead teachers drive its implementation. Officials say their existing contracts and budgets leave them poorly positioned to compensate teacher leaders.

“It’s hard to know who’s good. If you pull together 200 teachers a bad trainer is a let down.” – District Superintendent

- **Need better information on the quality of consultants.** Although the paid consultant is not the central focus of professional development, districts expect quality when they invest in outside expertise. As one superintendent put it, “It’s hard to know who’s good. If you pull together 200 teachers, a bad trainer is a let down.” Officials at one district called for an approval process of professional development consultants. One official called for a reduced reliance on consultants in general. “We have to get away from the ‘wandering guru’ model,” he said.
- **“Just in time” expertise.** The timing of expertise can be almost as important as its quality. One superintendent noted that implementation of a new approach may stall if teachers don’t observe an example in practice. Inserting expertise at the right time is a key to successful adoption.
- **More equity of access, delivery, and information for high quality professional development.** School district officials want access to ongoing research based professional development that every educator can use to advance skills. Officials in small and large districts alike recognized the scale economies enjoyed by larger districts increased the opportunities for professional development. The superintendent of East, the smallest district visited, argued that diseconomies of scale and remoteness limited its professional development options and has slowed implementation of a writing-related program. He suggested, “Larger districts should help smaller ones.” Meanwhile, leaders in Mountain East recognized their own autonomy in designing an approach but recognized that nearby, tiny districts didn’t have that luxury. West officials noted that solid grant-writing capacity, which brought home the district’s participation in

OMLI, is lacking in small districts. Finally, most officials concurred with a general call for better coordination across districts. “Everyone operates in isolation,” said Northwest’s superintendent. “It’s hard to coordinate within a district, let alone across districts.”

- Improved models for teachers in specialized content areas, including high school teachers.** District officials struggle to meet the professional development interests of teachers of specialized content. Officials noted that practices embraced at the elementary and middle school levels—professional learning communities, early release—were not as successful at the high grades. “High school is always a struggle,” said one superintendent. “We need to convey the value of professional development to high school teachers,” said another. Other officials pointed to a lack of good development options for music and art teachers: “We have no money set aside for specialty teachers.”
- Relief from federal and state compliance activities.** The challenge of limited time is exacerbated by the proliferation of compliance and reporting requirements. While they consider many of the reports as either useful or necessary, they also see duplication. Northwest officials count 180 different reports they owe the federal or state governments during the school year. Assembling data for these reports and disseminating related rules takes time. “So much energy on compliance gets in the way of the collaborative model,” said Northwest’s superintendent.

In some form, most of the districts have embraced the concept of “job embedded” professional development, facilitating it either through early release time or roving instructional coaches.

CONCLUSIONS

Professional development of Oregon’s K-12 teachers is a significant enterprise. If the statewide investment in professional development resembles the levels observed in the six visited districts, we estimate Oregon school districts spent more than \$130 million in 2005-06. For comparison purposes, in the prior school year (2004-05), the state invested \$169 million to support upper and lower division education in the Oregon University System.²²

But, despite its scale and perceived importance, very little is known about professional development in Oregon. The state’s accounting substantially underreports the investment, and highly decentralized delivery makes drawing broad characterizations about substance impossible.

That said, interviews with our six districts suggest all are familiar with the best practices literature and have made strides in that direction. This includes a stated interest in moving away from off-site, one-day workshops. In some form, most of the districts have embraced the concept of “job embedded” professional development, facilitating it either through early release time or roving instructional coaches. Moreover, districts direct their school principals and program directors to tightly align professional development activities with school- and district-improvement plans, and some even mandate the implementation of activities through small working groups. In spirit, and most likely in practice, the districts get high marks on the best practices related to ongoing collaboration. An ongoing challenge for school districts is to assure coherence and sustainability of high quality professional development that changes teachers’

classroom practice sufficiently to increase student learning.

The professional literature is most unified on the point that a focus on subject matter content trumps a focus on generic educational topics. Assessing the substance of professional development time through our district-level interviews was impossible because the districts up to this time have not formally assembled or summarized the work or success of their schools—or small working groups. Districts provided numerous examples of content-focused activities, including those related to the implementation of Reading First programs and the OMLI-mathematics effort. But, districts also listed activities with a more general focus, which may ultimately prove beneficial but face a stiffer burden of proof.

Our interviews also exposed a lack of equity in the delivery of professional development across the districts. For the most part, districts are on their own in building and shaping their professional development programs. East, because of its small size and geographic isolation does not have the same investigative/research capacity, grant writing resources, or access to experts as Mountain East. Officials from big districts were as quick to make that point as officials from small ones. And when districts—big or small—go to market for expert talent and programs, they typically go alone and are armed with little information. As Harvard’s Heather Hill puts it, “A district official who wanted to compare the outcomes for professional development in mathematics offered by CGI, DMI, Math Solutions, and LessonLab could not do so, even though these are among the most widely used programs in the country.”

An ongoing challenge for school districts is to assure coherence and sustainability of high quality professional development that changes teachers’ classroom practice sufficiently to increase student learning.

In sum, our interviews with the six districts leave the impression that professional development is a sizable enterprise that has made solid progress over the past decade. Some districts have made sizable, recent expansions in professional development time, and all districts want more than they currently have. But, for districts to successfully persuade educators, parents,

taxpayers, school boards and other policymakers to invest more in professional development, school districts need more support to provide high quality, research based professional development that can be linked to increasing student achievement.

Beyond implementing nationally recognized best practices, individual districts may never have the ability to directly link their professional development investments and

specific achievement gains. Indeed, such rigorous evaluation should not be expected at the district level. At a minimum, however, districts need the ability to better track specific investments in professional development. Systematic teacher surveys would provide additional, valuable information about professional development participation, content, and usefulness. Only with this enhanced focus on the details will districts successfully demonstrate the value of their investments.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

There is no single way to address the professional development challenges identified in this report. However, this study indicates a logical set of next steps to be taken to assure increased student achievement and powerful teaching and learning in every Oregon classroom.

1. **Equity:** Develop partnerships with schools, districts, ESDs, higher ed. and public and

private educational organizations to support equitable time, access, and delivery of in-depth, sustained professional development.

2. **Quality:** Adopt standards for professional development. The National Staff Development Council has identified quality standards for professional development that are research based and have been adopted by over 30 states. Align the standards with state and district educational goals—particularly the implementation of the new high school diploma.
3. **Professional Learning:** Establish an electronic learning network to share research and best practices and allow teachers to reach beyond their own schools to collaborate and investigate new teaching and learning strategies.
4. **Time:** Encourage state and local policy makers to invest more time and resources for professional collaborative learning that is linked to increasing student achievement.
5. **Accountability:** Support accountability systems that link school district improvement plans and goals to school and classroom level professional development that will provide evidence of increasing student learning growth. Including systems to more reliably report districts' time and fiscal investments in professional development, the content and nature of program delivery, and the perceived and measured effects on teaching practice and student achievement.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kate Dickson of the Chalkboard Project and John Tapogna of ECONorthwest authored the report and conducted the district interviews. The authors received valuable comments on drafts of this report from the administrators of the participating districts, as well as, Dr. Randy Hitz (Portland State University), Dr. Rita Moore (Willamette University), and Dr. Judith Warren Little (University of California-Berkeley). All errors of fact and interpretation remain the responsibility of the authors.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹⁰ National Staff Development Council, *NSDC Standards for Staff Development*, www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm (August 2006).
- ¹¹ See Hill (2007)
- ¹² See, for example, Abdal-Haqq. 1996. *Making Time for Teacher Professional Development*. Washington DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher and Teacher Education.
- ¹³ Garet et al (2001)
- ¹⁴ See Sopris West Educational Services. Undated. *Step Up to Writing Research Base*.
- ¹⁵ See <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/read180/overview/>
- ¹⁶ See <http://store.cambiumlearning.com/resource.aspx?page=ProgramOverview&site=sw&parentId=019005451>
- ¹⁷ <http://www.siopinstitute.net/>
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- ¹⁹ See Oregon Department of Education Office of Student Learning and Partnerships. September 2005. *Identification of Students with Learning Disabilities under the IDEA 2004: Oregon Response to Intervention*.
- ²⁰ See, for example, Miles, Karen et al. Summer 2004. "Inside the Black Box of School District Spending on Professional Development: Lessons from Comparing Five Urban Districts" *Journal of Education Finance*. Volume 30. Issue 1
- ²¹ See Miles (2004) Tables 1 and 4.
- ²² See Heiligman, Nancy et al. June 2007 *Rethinking the Budget Framework*. The estimate on page A-8 indicates the state spent \$169 million on lower and upper division education in the Oregon University System in 2004-05.

APPENDIX

CHALKBOARD INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Professional Development policies and procedures

What are the key agreements, documents, or structures that govern the scope of professional development?

- a. How is professional development defined by the district? What activities are considered professional development? What are not?
- b. How does the teacher contract and collective bargaining shape PD activities?
- c. How do district and/or school improvement plans guide the PD focus—How closely does reality follow the plan? Is it useful? Does it meet your needs?
- d. How do state plans affect the delivery of PD? How about federal regulations?
- e. Are there district standards or guidelines for effective staff development?

2. Characterizing the District's Current Professional Development Activities

- a. District-Directed Professional Development (e.g., professional development activities that are conceived and implemented by district-level staff
 - i. Who oversees PD at the district level? (curriculum director, ESL, special education, Title I coordinator, etc.)
 - ii. Where and how do administrators/teachers coordinate across content areas?
 - iii. What's delivered under district control?
 1. What are the content areas of district-directed PD? (e.g., literacy, math, special ed, classroom management etc.) Does the content differ across grade levels?
 2. What are the revenue sources? (Federal, State, competitive grant awards etc.)
 3. Who provides the service? (e.g., consultants, ed schools, ODE, ESD?)
 4. How much time is set aside for professional development—are PD opportunities built into the teacher work year and/or workdays?
 5. What's the nature of delivery? (multiple day, 1-day workshops, coaching)?
 6. Is district-level support provided to beginning teachers i.e. mentoring program?

- b. School-Directed Professional Development (e.g., professional development activities that are conceived and implemented by school-level staff)
 - i. Who decides what PD is delivered at the school level? (e.g., site councils, principals, teacher management groups?)
 - ii. What's delivered under school control?
 - 1. What are the content areas of school-directed PD? (e.g., literacy, math, special ed, classroom management etc.)
 - 2. What are the revenue sources?
 - 3. Who provides the service? (e.g., consultants, ed schools, ODE, ESD?)
 - 4. What's the nature of delivery? Are PD opportunities built into teacher workdays?
 - 5. Is school-level support provided to beginning teachers?
- c. Teacher-Directed Professional Development
 - i. What's the method for approving teacher-directed PD?
 - ii. How much is spent?
 - iii. How many teachers participate?
 - iv. Is there follow-up on content?

3. What are the incentives for teachers to participate in professional development and to improve their practice?

- a. Reimbursements for college tuition
- b. Are salary increments linked to professional development
- c. Are there other professional development incentives

4. How does the district evaluate the effectiveness of PD?

- a. Does the district formally or informally evaluate the quality of PD? If so, where and how?
- b. Are there data on participation rates by categories of activity and teachers?
- c. Who are you responsible to for evaluating Professional Development? To what extent are your funders (Federal, state, grants) evaluating your activities?

5. What would you do differently, if anything?

- a. What is especially effective for PD now?
- b. What are you doing now for PD that you would like to change?
- c. Who are your best providers?
- d. Without new resources, is there something that you'd like to be doing that you can't because of a legal, policy structure, economic barrier?
- e. At the state policy level, identify two policies that could dramatically enhance the quality of your professional development?

