

**FRAMING THE FIELD:  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
IN CONTEXT**

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## PREFACE

Professional development – including both pre-service and in-service training – is a critical component of the nation’s effort to improve schools and student achievement. Key to ensuring that teachers, principals, and other educators have the knowledge and skills they need to meet the challenges of today’s classrooms is ensuring that they have access to sustained, intensive professional development. Financing directly affects what professional development takes place, how it is made available, who participates, who pays, and what impacts it has. Thus, improving professional development in education will depend on better information about what various models of professional development cost, how cost-effective those investments are, what resources are available to finance professional development, and how financing strategies can help achieve education reform goals. It will also depend on an assessment of whether efforts to improve professional development could be enhanced by changing the ways in which it is financed.

To begin to address these issues, in April 2000 The Finance Project received a planning grant from the Ford Foundation to launch a new initiative on financing professional development in education. The Finance Project is a nonprofit policy research and technical assistance organization whose mission is to support decision making that produces and sustains good results for children, families, and communities by developing and disseminating information, knowledge, tools, and technical assistance for improved policies, programs, and financing strategies. Through research and development of tools and materials, The Finance Project continues to build its extensive body of knowledge and resources on how financing arrangements affect the quality and accessibility of education as well as other supports and services for children, families, and communities. The Finance Project also brokers information on financing issues and strategies to a broad array of audiences, and provides technical assistance to “reform ready” states and communities engaged in efforts to align their financing systems with their policy and program reform agendas.

The purposes of The Finance Project’s Collaborative Research and Development Initiative on Financing Professional Development in Education are to:

- Create a better understanding of how much is spent on professional development in education and what those expenditures purchase
- Delineate how financing affects the quality and accessibility of professional development and the costs, cost burden, and cost-benefit of alternative approaches to the preparation and training of educators
- Develop new policy tools to help design and implement improved financing for professional development that is aligned with education reform strategies
- Develop a technical assistance capability to share information about financing issues and strategies and make technical resources available to state and local policy makers and school officials who are engaged in efforts to reform financing for professional development.

During the planning phase of the initiative, The Finance Project began to identify and research

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critical issues in the financing of professional development in education by consulting with a wide array of relevant professional organizations, education researchers, advocates for teachers, principals, and other educators, higher education leaders, education reformers and professional development experts. Based on the input of these education leaders and with the oversight of an Advisory Group comprised of a diverse set of nationally-recognized education leaders, The Finance Project prepared the following series of products that lay the groundwork for further research, development, and technical assistance:

- *Profiles of Selected Promising Professional Development Initiatives*, which provides a base of program and financing information on 16 professional development reform efforts
- *Framing the Field: Professional Development in Context*, which examines what is known about effective professional development from both research and the profiles developed under this project
- *Cost Framework for Teacher Preparation and Professional Development*, which lays out a comprehensive framework for understanding the types and levels of resources involved in both pre-service and in-service professional development
- *Issues and Challenges in Financing Professional Development in Education*, which contrasts the financing strategies and challenges of new professional development initiatives with those embedded in traditional programs
- *Catalog and Guide to Federal Funding Sources for Professional Development in Education*, which identifies and analyzes 96 federal programs that can be used to fund professional development in education.

Each of these products adds to The Finance Project's working paper series on issues, options, and strategies for improving the financing of education, family and children's services, and community development. Each reflects the views and interpretations of its author or authors, and may lead to further exploration or refinement over time. Together, these products highlight the changing conceptualization of effective professional development in education and the array of promising new approaches that are emerging. They also significantly contribute to an understanding of the salient issues in financing professional development—including cost, available resources, and strategies for matching resources with education goals. Finally, they point to multiple directions for further research, development, and technical assistance to help build the capacity needed to advance effective reforms.

This paper, *Framing the Field: Professional Development in Context*, was commissioned by The Finance Project to examine key factors and conditions that contribute to or hinder success among professional development initiatives, especially as these factors and conditions relate to the financing of these initiatives. The paper reviews the relevant literature, as well as draws on information gained through the development of profiles of selected promising professional development initiatives under this project, to assess what is known about well-designed and effective professional development. It also points to the development of organizational capacity, including better understanding of financing issues and

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strategies, as a key attribute requiring further research, development, and technical assistance.

This paper was prepared by Robert A. Kronley and Claire Handley of Kronley & Associates. Carol Cohen served as project manager. Many individuals commented on earlier drafts of this paper. The authors would like to thank The Finance Project staff, notably Carol Cohen, who had valuable ideas about organization and content. Members of the Advisory Group to The Finance Project's Collaborative Research and Development Initiative on Financing Professional Development in Education provided especially useful insights; the authors are particularly appreciative of comments from Colleen Seremet and Jack Jennings. Other readers, notably Bruce Haslam and Sophie Sa, drew on their extensive knowledge of professional development to suggest changes. The cumulative effect of these comments is a stronger analysis; the authors take responsibility for any weaknesses, errors or omissions that remain. I am grateful to all of these individuals for their contributions to the development of this paper.

Cheryl D. Hayes  
Executive Director

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is part of an effort undertaken by The Finance Project to bring coherence to the fragmented and still emerging field of professional development for educators and, in so doing, to build greater understanding of what makes professional development effective. It seeks to inform not only the practice of educators in the classroom and the administrators that assist them but also decisions made by foundations and by policymakers, whose knowledge of and support for effectively designed professional development is critical to its dissemination, implementation and success.

### **Toward Coherence: the Emerging Field of Professional Development**

For the last two decades, since the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, America's public schools have undergone successive waves of reform. Improving the capacity of educators to better meet the needs of students has been central to most of these efforts. The work of many organizations, including the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, begun in the 1990s and continuing today, has reinforced the belief that improving teachers' knowledge and skills must be at the core of any strategy to improve student learning. The growing knowledge of how teachers shape student learning has converged with another force – the standards-based reform movement – which has given particularly urgency to the need to understand professional development and what makes it effective. Virtually every district and every state has begun the march toward standards-based reform, the foundation of which is the belief that every child can learn to the same high academic standards and that teachers possess, or ought to, the knowledge and skills to get students there. These standards are accompanied by strict accountability measures; districts, schools and, in some places, administrators and teachers can be sanctioned if students do not reach those standards. For everyone involved in public education, from students to superintendents, the stakes have never been higher.

As a result, considerable time, energy and funds have been invested in professional development for educators. Despite this influx of resources as well as the growing attention being paid to professional development by the research community, our knowledge about professional development – including, among other things, what makes it effective both in content and form, its cost, how context shapes its delivery and success – is fragmented.

This fragmentation reflects and is reflected by the tremendous diversity in professional development programs or strategies. Professional development is conducted under a variety of auspices – schools, districts, states, professional associations, and universities, either individually or, increasingly, through collaboration between them. The purpose of these programs varies from familiarizing educators with new state or district requirements, improving curriculum or specific instructional techniques, sensitizing educators to approaches to reform, and much more.

Professional development is also delivered through a wide-ranging variety of mechanisms. Duration varies from “one-shot” presentations lasting less than a day to multi-day experiences that occur at various intervals over a year or longer. Some offerings rely on the traditional lecture format while others eschew it, instead using structured exercises, learning teams or other cooperative activities designed to help participants construct their own knowledge.

Similarly, funding for professional development comes from divergent sources including federal, state or local governments, philanthropic groups, and the participants themselves. Tracking funding sources, particularly when there are multiple sources, is difficult and few professional development

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providers do it well. Even more difficult is determining the true cost of professional development. Many initiatives define cost by the funds available. Others consider cost to be the price charged to participants. Providers often do not take into account, or have difficulty determining, such items as development costs, indirect costs including rent for facilities, in kind contributions, release time for participants, and technology. This lack of information makes it very difficult to fairly compare programs or to fully understand what would be required to take them to scale across a district or state.

### **Toward Understanding: What is Known about Professional Development**

This paper reviews selected literature on professional development and considers the progress the research community has made in understanding and assessing professional development and identifying areas that need continued exploration. The literature review also yielded a summary of characteristics of professional development programs that research has shown led to changes in teacher knowledge and practice if not improvements in student achievement.

Research on professional development has been underway for several decades and, though not yet complete, it is evident that programs that successfully change teacher practice often share some attributes. These include, but are not limited to, extended duration, collaborative learning experiences, adherence to a philosophy of continuous reflection and learning, multiple contacts which allow for trial of and feedback on new techniques, and a content that is responsive to teachers' concerns and requests rather than one which is dictated to them.

Recent research is beginning to indicate that, however important the form professional development programs take, their content is at least as important. Researchers are exploring the efficacy of focusing on subject area knowledge as well as how children learn specific subject areas. They are also considering how closely the curriculum of professional development programs should be linked to the curriculum of students. The research community is learning, as well, that the context in which these programs operate significantly shapes their success and they are beginning to explore questions of context and of implementation. These are only some of the questions researchers and practitioners are sifting through, and the answers have not yet emerged.

Because so much remains to be learned about what makes specific professional development strategies effective, and because those strategies cannot be considered separate from the contexts in which they operate, the literature may be best used, at this point, to identify practices that are ineffective and to point the way toward practices that appear promising. It does not yet offer a guaranteed prescription for effective professional development.

At the same time as it undertook the literature review, The Finance Project also initiated a scan of programs widely regarded as promising. These programs, identified by experts and frequently cited as models of what professional development should look like, vary dramatically in form, content and purpose. The Finance Project did not evaluate them for their effectiveness, although several had sought independent review of their work to understand how it may affect student achievement. Instead, the scan was an opportunity to understand the philosophy and design of these programs as well as to identify characteristics that influence their success. In preparing the scan, Finance Project staff and consultants reviewed program materials and conducted extensive interviews with program directors. From this process, we culled a list of characteristics that appear central to the programs' effectiveness. The characteristics that have resulted in recognition for these programs are:



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1. Extended duration;
  2. Clear purpose;
  3. Connection to a school or district's theory of change;
  4. Drawn from a clear vision of teaching and learning, and containing well-articulated goals;
  5. Flexibility in form and willingness to reflect and change;
  6. Collaboration;
  7. Supportive leadership;
  8. Reliance on proven theories of adult learning;
  9. Research-based;
  10. Strong content;
  11. Aware of and responsive to context.

Some of these characteristics conform to, and in some instances the design of scanned programs was driven by, the literature. Some programs, however, have forged ahead of the literature and explored new philosophies about and strategies for professional development. As practitioners continue to try new innovations, as research on them continues, and as the literature grows, this list of critical ingredients will assuredly expand.

Most of the characteristics listed above, and those identified in the literature, focus on specific components of discrete programs. They relate less to the organizational capacity to consider professional development in a larger context of systemic change. Yet the success of professional development efforts to improve student learning is, to a large degree, grounded in a vision of systemic change and an understanding of professional development's place in realizing that vision.

The need for more extensive organizational capacity is powerfully apparent in the lack of essential knowledge most organizations display regarding both the financing and costs of professional development. The programs reviewed as part of the scan were not unique in this. As with most other professional development initiatives, they were unable to provide detailed information about the full cost of their activities.

Without real appreciation of actual cost, organizational capacity is compromised. The possibility of bringing programs to scale and of sustaining them is rendered remote. With an undeveloped understanding of the magnitude of the investment required to disseminate an effort, it is difficult to attract such investment, and, even if successful in generating an initial investment, it is difficult for providers – such as districts – to plan appropriately for the continuation of an effort in the absence of the investor.

Put differently, most professional development providers lack a coherent theory of resources that

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begins with a clear understanding of available financing sources, their potential uses and their limitations. It is evident that private funding sources – while having a critical role in stimulating the creation of and adding value to comprehensive professional development initiatives – are not adequate to support such initiatives at the duration, intensity and scale that the literature and feedback from program providers and participants indicate are essential to transforming teaching and learning. The success of privately-supported efforts may ultimately rest on their ability to engender public investment in programs that are not only effectively designed but are effective in producing increases in educators' capacities that in turn positively affect student outcomes.

An operative theory of resources, then, must look to public support and consider how best to engender and use this support. Accessing public funds, in turn, requires two other attributes. The first is the ability to demonstrate results. Few programs have implemented assessment measures to gauge changes in teacher practice; fewer still have implemented measures to connect changes in practice to improvements in student learning. Such steps are essential for generating public support for continued and increased investment in learning for educators.

The second attribute is the ability to communicate the importance of continuous learning for educators and its impact on students to the public and to policymakers. Increased public investment in training for educators – who many already regard as sufficiently well-educated – requires public support and political will. They will not come in the absence of a greatly expanded understanding of the pivotal role of professional development in improving outcomes for students.

### **Toward Transformation**

Professional development is a complex endeavor. Understanding its elements, mastering its implementation and considering its impacts involve continual reflection and analysis. This effort – reviewing the literature, scanning highly-regarded professional development programs, and synthesizing learnings drawn from each – is a first and critical step toward transforming a group of detached efforts into a flourishing field. For discrete professional development initiatives to evolve into a field, the initiatives themselves must be linked by their focus on transforming individuals, schools and districts. Transformative professional development is, at its core, systemic and rooted in what we know about effective design. It is:

1. Aligned with educational reform efforts that are explicitly and demonstrably embraced by school districts and schools;
2. Connected to clearly articulated theories of adult learning;
3. Directed to developing and/or enhancing specific capacities that will promote the reform adopted by districts and schools; and,
4. Characterized by defined outcomes – long- and short-term – and ways by which these outcomes can be measured.

The need to develop a coherent field out of these diverse professional development programs and our fragmented knowledge about them is patent. There remains much we do not know about

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transformative professional development and we must continue to explore new innovations and undertake additional research to increase our understanding of how adult learning – and the environment it occurs in – influences and can improve student learning. We must also develop the tools and provide technical assistance to schools, districts and other providers to help them transfer research and emerging knowledge into effective practice. In so doing, we will begin turning a frontier into a field.

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## **TOWARD COHERENCE: THE EMERGING FIELD OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

This paper is part of a comprehensive effort by The Finance Project, a Washington, DC-based organization, to help define and contour a domain – professional development for educators – that is fluid and still emerging. In doing so, the paper draws on a separately-developed scan of several well-regarded professional development programs, which differ from one another in many significant attributes. The accompanying scan supplies insight into the forms these diverse efforts take and the approaches that they utilize. It provides background to this paper’s attempt to identify some of the significant gaps in what we know about the design and delivery of professional development that can affect educators’ practice in ways that will ultimately improve outcomes for students. For professional development to have this effect, the paper argues, it must evolve from a set of discrete and often disconnected programs into a field that focuses on transforming educators and the environments in which they work.

Arguments for greater coherence in, deeper understanding of, and a transformative approach to professional development are directed toward those with a stake in its effective design and delivery. These include both designers and participants themselves – who in some cases may be the same individuals – and a burgeoning group of researchers concerned about what makes professional development successful. Finally, they embrace those who invest in professional development – representatives of foundations, which have in the last few years displayed considerable interest in the subject, and policymakers. The latter are increasingly important because, as professional development is recognized as central to the educational enterprise – as necessary and important as current textbooks or state-of-the-art technology – it will more and more require significant and continuing public support. Policymakers must not only be aware of its impact on teaching and learning, they must also be able to distinguish professional development with transformative potential from that which is offered and pursued for a host of other reasons.

### **The Quest for Capacity**

Professional development for educators embraces multiple approaches and several interim steps to a loosely defined end – building capacity in adults to improve learning for students. While increased attention is being devoted to designing and implementing richer professional development for superintendents and principals, learning experiences for classroom teachers have for many years been at the center of inquiry and concern about education reform. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 ushered in successive and continuous periods of reform; each of these has seen substantial time, energy and resources invested in teacher training as a means to promote lasting improvement in instruction and learning. The emphasis on adult competency as key to student success has been reinforced by the work of the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future and remains at the forefront of current thinking about education reform.

As a result, there is no shortage of reasons why educators are motivated to pursue professional development. In many states and school districts, increases in pay grade and promotions are contingent on additional training. Certification in various specialties necessitates further course work. Districts and schools that adopt specific approaches to instruction often mandate that professionals devote time to mastering these approaches. For some professionals, and in some districts, more training confers greater prestige. Each of these factors ensure that teachers will, probably at multiple points in their careers, be

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engaged in one or another learning experience to enhance their abilities or standing. In many instances, teachers assume the costs of this training, which they see as necessary to their careers.

While the foregoing, and perhaps other, reasons provide powerful incentives for professional development, they are dwarfed by the advent of standards-based reform and the extensive accountability plans that accompany it. Rewards – or sanctions – will now be meted out to schools and school districts based on specific measures of student performance. As a result, a new urgency infuses the continuing conversations about the need to build capacity. Standards-based reform, regardless of whether it is well-designed and calibrated to improve learning or hastily enacted to satisfy demands that someone answer for unsatisfactory test scores, has brought the need for effective professional development home to teachers, principals and superintendents.<sup>1</sup> Professional development is essential if educators are to master issues of organization, pedagogy, skills and relationships as well as their systemic connections to each other and to direct these new learnings to improving outcomes for students. The assumption that educators will be prepared to lead all students to new levels is now embedded in the theory that underlies standards-based reform; educator and student success in the new climate may consequently depend on professional development.

Understanding the acute need for effective professional development is substantially easier than accessing it. How and where educators will get the training they require has become a central question in efforts to bolster student performance. These questions do not arise because there is a dearth of opportunity to engage in professional development; the current climate features an expanding array of possibilities, many appearing to have some unique elements.

### **Exploring the Frontier**

Professional development is sponsored by state agencies, school districts, quasi-governmental organizations, universities, unions and other professional associations, both for- and not-for-profit school reform organizations, businesses, and foundations. The most prominent are those conducted by states, school districts and universities. Increasingly, however, professional development has multiple auspices. These existing and developing partnerships recognize that delivering professional development is often a complex endeavor, requiring different competencies and approaches. The growth of these cooperative efforts also surfaces issues about what form collaboration in professional development should take and how diverse organizations can together best design and implement focused professional development initiatives.

The design of professional development varies greatly. Some efforts are designed to deal with curriculum and instruction. Others seek to sensitize educators to new approaches to reform. A third group is concerned with imparting specific skills to teachers and administrators. Some are organized to ensure that participants earn the requisite “seat time” to comply with state and district mandates while still others are conducted to impart competencies that will enable educators to earn recognition in their schools or districts.

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<sup>1</sup> The demand that new standards and accountability creates for effective professional development is expressed on several levels. Teachers may simply need deeper knowledge of specific subject matter and may require professional development to get it. Increasing student diversity – in race, national origin, language, economic status and family structure, among other things – makes it imperative for both teachers and administrators to know more about how to teach and relate to heterogeneous student populations. New assessment tools to measure student performance require educators to know more about how students learn. Each of these developments is associated with new standards and each calls for increased or new capacity from educators.

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Substantially different mechanisms are employed to deliver professional development. Duration varies from “one-shot” presentations lasting less than a day to multi-day experiences that occur at various intervals over a year or longer. Some programs draw on the expertise of their own staffs to deliver a curriculum that they have designed and tested. Others rely exclusively on outside experts to present on specific subjects, while a third group employs both approaches. Some offerings eschew lectures whenever possible and seek to enable participants to construct their own learning by interacting with one another in structured exercises, through the creation of learning teams, and the design of other cooperative activities. Others embed technology into aspects of their work, most often to promote follow-up activities, but significant questions remain regarding the extent to which educators actually rely on electronic communication with others as a learning device.

Professional development relies on widely divergent sources for support. Some initiatives depend exclusively on participant fees, while others are wholly-funded by public – federal, state or district – monies, through appropriation, budget item or contract. Membership dues to unions or other professional associations support some activities. Foundation grants fund other activities, in whole or in part. Some initiatives combine diverse funding streams in an effort to provide a more comprehensive professional development effort or to expand their offerings.

Funding aside, it is difficult both to determine the actual cost of professional development in discrete programs and to compare costs among different programs. Many initiatives define cost by the funds that are available from governments, foundations or unions. Others consider cost to be the price that is charged to participants. In estimating the actual per unit cost of professional development, providers often do not take into account, or have difficulty determining, such items as development costs, indirect costs including apportioning rent for facilities and associated items to the program, in kind contributions, release time for participants, travel to a site, and technology. Promoting efficiencies, along with sustainability and scale, in professional development will remain a hard-to-reach goal without agreement on standards by which to measure cost.

Follow-up to professional development varies greatly. Some programs do not attempt to maintain contact with participants; others provide some opportunities for individuals to “refresh” themselves on subject matter. A few sponsor gatherings of alumni and use at least part of these meetings for brief substantive follow-up activities.

Assessment of the impacts of the various programs is neither uniform nor robust. Many initiatives survey participants about aspects of their experiences, but the scope of the inquiry varies widely among providers. Some are content with “satisfaction” surveys, while others go beyond this limited inquiry to attempt to determine the impact of the professional development on individual practice in classrooms and schools and on systemic approaches to reform. A few programs have attempted, either on their own or in cooperation with independent evaluators, to understand how specific interventions with educators have affected outcomes for students.

Today, there appears to be a growing number of professional development programs offering a range of activities and seeking to deliver a wide array of learning to educators. These programs have different goals, diverse sponsors, rely on varied methods to promote learning, and employ different standards and means in assessing their impacts on participants and their students. They seek to provide much needed training, often not otherwise available, to educators at all levels. In some instances, specific

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professional development strategies and programs have changed educator practice, and some initiatives are able to associate their approaches with improvements in student performance.

Yet, at a time when professional development is seen as central to improving outcomes for students, the various offerings continue to be isolated from one another and often from state- or district-based reform efforts. Fragmentation is compounded by an incomplete understanding of and poor communication about best practices and, perhaps as a result, no generally accepted guidelines for systematic assessment of methods or outcomes. Given these circumstances, a significant undertaking for policymakers and educators is to help to achieve some understanding of what professional development does, what it ought to do and the principles and methods that guide its operations, as well as to encourage clear expectations about outcomes and to devise acceptable means to monitor results. Put differently, the challenge is to create a coherent field out of a diverse group of programs and activities that taken in their entirety display the characteristics of an uncharted frontier. (Kronley, 2000b)

### **A Mélange of Approaches**

Some indication of the array of approaches embedded in the concept of professional development is provided by the *Profiles of Selected Promising Professional Development Initiatives* developed by The Finance Project as part of this project. While each of the programs profiled can be characterized as a professional development initiative, in many cases that is the only similarity among them. Some deal exclusively with imparting specific skills to teachers or administrators. Others seek to engage teachers and administrators in broader considerations of change within a school or district. Still others are styled as reform efforts, of which professional development is a key element. There is no attempt here to compare or evaluate programs; rather they serve to illustrate, among other things, the need for a common understanding of what is meant by effective professional development, how we determine it, and how we make distinctions among professional development activities.

While the programs presented in the *Profiles* display significant differences from one another, each was identified in interviews and surveys administered by The Finance Project as an outstanding example of professional development. The Finance Project staff queried a broad spectrum of educators, policymakers, researchers, program providers, foundation officials and others to yield a list of program sponsors. In this scan, interviewers attempted to elicit the perceptions of knowledgeable observers of or participants in professional development about what programs were effective in transforming individuals and the schools or districts in which they learned or worked. Initiatives that were suggested by multiple respondents were culled to yield a diverse group of policies and programs. Leaders of each of the selected initiatives were interviewed in depth by Finance Project staff or consultants. They were asked, among other things, about the program's goals, funding, cost, methods, and outcomes and to describe any assessments that it might have undertaken. The interview protocol is found in Appendix A to the *Profiles*.

A primary purpose of this exploration is to raise questions that will stimulate additional, deeper inquiry. The scan concentrates on a few initiatives and does not attempt to catalogue the plethora of programs that provide professional development for educators. Those programs that are described were recommended by a diverse set of informants; inclusion in or omission from the scan is in no way intended to be a judgment about the success or efficacy of any program. Our methodology resulted in an examination of very different programs that are well-known and well-regarded by individuals who are

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familiar with professional development offerings. Information about each of the programs in this scan is limited to what has been gathered through interviews with and materials provided by program personnel. There has been no effort to evaluate any program or to provide an independent assessment of its results.

This section is followed by a brief look at what research tells us about the characteristics of well-designed professional development and how the programs presented in the *Profiles* display some of those characteristics. The paper concludes with a discussion of some of the outstanding issues in recognizing the elements of effective professional development and understanding when it can transform educators and improve outcomes for students.

## **TOWARD UNDERSTANDING: WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT WELL-DESIGNED AND EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The initiatives included in the *Profiles of Selected Promising Professional Development Initiatives* represent diverse approaches to professional development for teachers and administrators. The scan provides an introduction to the wide range of activity that seeks to increase the capacity of educators. It is at best an incomplete introduction – the descriptions are limited to programs that are known to many observers and have impressed them as well-designed. The scan does not enable us to draw independent conclusions about the effectiveness of any program, nor is it intended to draw comparisons among the programs. It is constructed to consider offerings that are relatively well-known and, which, for the most part, have been in operation for several years; as such it does not treat those efforts that are at the outer edges of the frontier that encompasses the array of professional development programs. Taken as a whole, however, the initiatives do offer some validation of what many independent observers have identified as well-designed professional development and support an emerging agreement about what the elements of effective professional development are.

Calls for changes in and improvement of the professional development offered to teachers have been heard at points throughout the last century. (Novick and Grimstad, 1999) In the last three decades, however, the once sporadic and sparse voices calling for change have evolved into a chorus clamoring for new approaches to educator learning. Professional development for teachers has become an issue of sustained inquiry by the research community as many participants in and observers of efforts to build capacity for educators – including teachers themselves – began questioning the efficacy of traditional forms of professional development. As it was typically offered (and in many schools and districts continues to be offered), most professional development experiences were short-term, often lasting a day or less, focused on topics disconnected from teachers' real concerns and practical classroom questions, and were passive learning experiences. They often followed a seminar format in which an expert would impart new knowledge or skills through lecture. Such professional development experiences – however well intentioned and carefully planned – rarely seemed to lead to the hoped-for changes in teacher practice or improvements in student achievement. (Peixotto and Fager, 1998)

For the past several decades then, much time, energy and funding has been invested in efforts by the research community, as well as by others including professional associations, states and districts, to identify effective professional development programs and strategies. Though the research is by no means complete, there appears to be consensus about at least some of the characteristics of well-designed professional development programs.



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## Characteristics of Well-Designed Professional Development

Drawing on and synthesizing the literature, though without suggesting that the list is complete, effective professional development is characterized by several salient elements. Effective professional development:

1. Is guided by a vision of effective learning and teaching;
2. Is part of a larger effort to implement this vision at the school (possibly district) level;
3. Is site-based;
4. Promotes the development of a learning community – a culture of learning that nurtures not only student learning but continuous reflection and analysis by adults;
5. Is connected to the real questions and challenges that teachers confront in their classrooms and with their students;
6. Encourages active participation and learning among teachers through inquiry and experimentation;
7. Fosters collaboration among teachers;
8. Encourages teachers to be responsible for their own learning by helping them to set goals and develop strategies to meet those goals;
9. Encourages teachers to become leaders to facilitate not only their own learning but also that of their colleagues;
10. Provides opportunity to observe, practice, reflect on and receive feedback about new practice;
11. Is flexible, allowing for mid-course refinements;
12. Is sustained;
13. Is evaluated at least in part on its effect on student learning.

This list is extensive in part because it extracts items that are sometimes embedded in broader concepts.<sup>2</sup> It is also extensive because it reflects evolving knowledge not only of professional development but also of education reform and, more specifically, teachers' roles in promoting reform. The reforms sought in the 1990s – standards-based and driven by an underlying premise that all students

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<sup>2</sup> It is far from the only such list. A number of organizations including the Education Commission of the States (2000), the National Staff Development Council (February 2000), and the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (1996) have provided useful distillations of what comprises high-quality and effective design of professional development. See also the discussion by Jennifer King Rice in "Recent Trends in the Theory and Practice of Professional Development: Implications for Cost," 1999.

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can be taught and can learn to academically rigorous levels – placed new demands on teachers, on students, on administrators and – as important – on the schools in which all of these groups work and in the districts that support this work. Reform and the professional development necessary for it to succeed not only sought to enhance or strengthen what teachers did in the classroom, it challenged long-held assumptions about who could learn, what was learned, who was responsible for ensuring that the learning occurred, and the environment in which teaching and learning should occur. As the vision of teaching and the role of teachers, both within and outside of the classroom, has evolved, so too must the professional development provided to them similarly evolve.

### **What the Literature Reveals**

In their analysis of the literature, Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) draw upon earlier research to identify common characteristics of effective professional development.

In their analysis of the research on several models of professional development that draw on these characteristics, Sparks and Loucks-Horsley found evidence that professional development experiences which incorporate the active participation of teachers in setting goals (which requires an understanding of the problem, often achieved through data collection and analysis) and designing the activities to meet those goals, particularly activities that occur over time and include observation and feedback of new techniques, have positive and in some instances dramatic impact on teacher practice and student achievement.

In 1996, Loucks-Horsley, with Styles and Hewson, revisited the question of effective professional development, this time with a focus on mathematics and science teachers. Among other things, effective professional development expands teachers' knowledge of their subject areas, their knowledge of how children learn and, specifically, their knowledge of how children learn particular subjects. The authors argue that learning experiences for these teachers should reflect the type of learning experiences sought for students. This is achieved by allowing teachers to construct their knowledge (instead of receiving it) through inquiry, to participate in collaborative activities with peers, to engage in ongoing discussion with peers, and to observe, practice and receive feedback on effective teacher strategies. The authors also call for professional development activities to be held over a period of time and to incorporate follow-up assistance.

In this review, though, Loucks-Horsley and her colleagues go beyond describing the form of effective professional development. They examine the types of professional development policies and programs advocated by those calling for broad educational reform and by those focused more specifically on improving teacher knowledge and practice such as the National Staff Development Council. They found that, despite the difference in perspective of these two groups, they held a shared view of effective professional development that implicitly incorporates notions of what reform requires of teachers and systems. This evolving vision of effective professional development – one that places it squarely in a context of reform – was reflected by Bull and Buechler (1996). They compiled a list of five principles of effective professional development that shares some of the characteristics cited by Loucks-Horsley, et. al.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1996) also lay out a vision of effective professional development that is grounded in a new or reformed vision of teaching and learning – one in which teachers are active learners, engaged in a process of constructing knowledge as well as one in which they are responsible for student learning – the learning of all students to levels of rigorous achievement. In this

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discussion, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin consider what it means for professional development to be linked to a broader view of school change that they and so many others advance. Professional development programs or initiatives do not operate in a vacuum but in specific schools or districts that have distinct cultures as well as long-standing structures and processes that influence teachers' beliefs and practices. According to the authors, the success of professional development programs or initiatives – even those that possess characteristics cited in the literature as effective – is dependent on the context in which the programs operate. “New initiatives cannot by themselves promote meaningful or long-term change in teachers' practice if they are embedded in a policy structure at odds with the visions of student and teacher learning that reforms seek to bring alive.” (p. 204) If teachers are to develop new visions of their roles and their practice so too must the organizations in which they work.

This awareness that not only the capacity of teachers but also of schools and districts must be built is reflected in the ten principles of effective professional development posited by the U.S. Department of Education. The principles put forth by the Department rely less on the specific *form* that professional development may take and focus more on a *vision* for it and an *approach* to it. These principles include, among others: focusing on teachers while involving other members of the school community in improving student learning; emphasizing individual, collegial and organizational improvement; promoting continuous inquiry and improvement; and ensuring that professional development is driven by a coherent, long-term plan to improve student outcomes.

There is no set prescription for how schools and districts are to build their capacity to become learning communities. Movement in this direction requires, though, that teacher learning become a priority that is reflected in the actions of the school or district and those who lead them. This may mean establishing genuine partnerships with a university around research. It may mean reconfiguring the school schedule so that teachers have common and extended time to work together. It may mean including teachers in or delegating to them activities (such as curriculum development) that have often been considered the province of administrators. There is no one path to how organizations can build capacity – and it seems probable that schools and districts must undertake the journey on their own, using the experiences of others not as a rigid model but rather as a guide. The need for them to do so is no less urgent than it is for teachers. As Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love and Stiles (1998) put it, “...professional development can only succeed with simultaneous attention to changing the system within which teachers and other educators work.” (p. 40.)

Even, however, as researchers, educators, and policymakers concerned about outcomes for students grapple with the question of how to create schools and districts that support teacher learning, it is becoming clear that the book on effective professional development is not yet complete – new chapters are being written which underscore the need for further scrutiny of what have long been considered hallmarks of effective professional development.

Kennedy (1998), in a review of professional development experiences provided to mathematics and science teachers that vary in format and content, found that the content of those experiences has a greater impact on student learning than their form. She found that those programs that seemed to conform most to the ideal structure for effective professional development (whole-school participation, extended contact hours, multiple sessions, and classroom visitations) had less effect than those that diverged from the ideal.

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The programs, for math teachers, that appeared to have the most impact on student learning were those that focused on subject matter knowledge and on how students learn specific subjects as opposed to those programs that focused on teacher behavior or practice. It is also notable that programs that focused on developing teacher understanding of how students learn specific subjects were less prescriptive about teacher practice; in some instances they offered no prescription for practice at all. Teachers were not viewed as expert technicians implementing a specific practice but rather as knowledgeable professionals who have an ongoing and evolving role in developing that practice.

Cohen and Hill (1998) reached a similar conclusion about the importance of content in their review of professional development programs offered to math teachers in California. Teachers who participated in programs in which the content was based on a reformed student math curriculum that the state was promoting – a content which focused on the math children were expected to learn and considered how that math is learned and taught – appeared to develop the types of practice reformers sought. Though there are limitations to the data Cohen and Hill were able to draw upon, it appears as well that the changes in practice that these teachers made did lead to improvements in student learning.

At the same time, those teachers who participated in professional development programs that had a broader or more generic focus did not appear to change their practice or, if they did so, it was by adopting additional conventional teaching strategies rather than reconsidering and revising their beliefs about math and how it should be taught and learned.

The findings of Kennedy and Cohen and Hill do not invalidate the elements long believed to be components of effective professional development. Rather, they raise new questions on how content and form can be combined to provide the *most* effective professional development – that which leads to measurable improvement in student learning – to teachers. As Cohen and Hill found, professional development programs that devote sufficient contact hours to focusing on subject areas and students' mastery of those subjects have a greater influence on teacher practice than those of shorter duration.

An important piece of Kennedy and Cohen and Hill's work is that it connects professional development to student achievement. Many treatments of professional development do not define the standard by which a program is judged effective. When a definition is proffered, it is often related to changes in teacher practice rather than to improvements in student achievement. As students of professional development probe more deeply and learn more about the subject, they increasingly call for ongoing assessment of professional development initiatives and for linking assessment, at least in part, to student achievement.

This linkage is not always an easy or straightforward task as a recent study by Harwell, D'Amico, Stein and Gatti (2000) of Community School District #2 in New York, in which adult learning or professional development is the means for reform, shows. The authors considered student achievement, taking into account gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and English proficiency, against teachers' participation in professional development. Despite being more than 10 years into a district-wide effort to improve student achievement, primarily via professional development, professional development did not have the expected influence on achievement in math and literacy. This finding, however, does not indicate that District 2's belief and investment in professional development is wrong. Significant changes in culture as well as teaching philosophy and practices have been documented in District 2 and test scores have improved. (Elmore, 1997) The finding may instead suggest that specific strategies require closer

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scrutiny, that the implementation process may need review, or that additional factors need to be included in evaluations. It may also reflect the complexity of the change process and the difficulty in establishing clear connections between specific actions and outcomes.

### **What the Programs Reveal**

The literature provides means to look at professional development programs. Yet our knowledge about what triggers change in instruction, about the nature of the change, and about what this means for student learning as well as the context in which all of this takes place is evolving rapidly. The literature may at this time offer more clarity and more specificity about what is inadequate professional development than a deep and reliable understanding of what is “good” professional development. One reason for this is that investigations of professional development have focused on its design, enabling us to weed out designs that do not lead to transformation in how educators practice and how this practice ultimately affects student learning. We do not yet know enough about how capacity-building efforts are implemented and how implementation connects to the overall context of teaching and learning in a school or school district. Furthermore, even the best-designed professional development that is aligned with district and school goals may not succeed if it is poorly delivered.

The literature tells us, though, that professional development opportunities traditionally provided to teachers, and which in many places continue to be the predominant mode of professional learning, are not designed to build effective capacity for change in practice or improvement in learning. Professional development programs traditionally have been short-term (limited contact hours and few periods of interaction); disconnected from classroom practice; unrelated to curriculum or student learning; and detached from a vision of school or district reform and a comprehensive plan to implement that vision. Often these efforts concentrate on implementing new state or district requirements. Even when their focus is geared to improved practice, such as imparting new instructional techniques, there is rarely follow-up support for teachers so that they have little opportunity to practice the techniques, receive feedback on them, or even ask questions. These approaches are not supported by the literature, and the programs that are described in the *Profiles* have rejected many of them and are moving away from others.

They have done so by adopting what the literature identifies as some of the key characteristics of effectively designed professional development; this is why they are recognized by participants, educators, experts and others. Some of these ingredients are simply the inverse of those characteristics deplored by analysts; others are more complex. Some of these initiatives have pioneered in promoting effective design and, in doing so, have forged ahead of the research to explore new strategies in form or content. These, in turn, have led to the development of additional characteristics that have contributed to the high regard in which these programs are held. It seems then that while these programs are recognized by respondents to The Finance Project’s inquiry for characteristics that are often supported by the literature, there are additional elements that propel them to prominence. Ingredients that appear to have resulted in recognition for these programs are:

1. Extended duration;
2. Clear purpose;

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3. Connection to a school or district's theory of change;
  4. Drawn from a clear vision of teaching and learning and containing well-articulated goals;
  5. Flexibility in form and willingness to reflect and change;
  6. Collaboration;
  7. Supportive leadership;
  8. Reliance on proven theories of adult learning;
  9. Research-based;
  10. Strong content;
  11. Aware of and responsive to context.

This list is not presumed to be complete. Just as the research continues and the literature grows, so too does the practice of professional development. Standards-based reforms and their attendant accountability systems are pushing educators to seek out new and inventive strategies for strengthening instruction and improving learning. As these new strategies are developed, the list of critical ingredients will likely change. The programs reviewed here, however, provide useful insights into professional development efforts that have attracted positive attention and that can serve as a fruitful resource for future exploration of what constitutes effective professional development.

1. **Extended duration.** Expanding teachers' knowledge of both content and pedagogy is not a short-term endeavor. Changing their behavior – what they do in the classroom – is even less so. It does not happen in a single afternoon or even, in most instances, a day or two. It requires time – time for teachers to study and discuss the theory behind the changes they are being encouraged to make, time to absorb the change, time to experiment with their new knowledge and test it, time to collaborate with experts or other teachers. Well-designed programs understand this and provide teachers with adequate time. Most of the programs included in this scan, such as Different Way of Knowing (DWoK), offer not only extensive contact hours, they offer them over multiple interactions so that teachers have an opportunity to assess and reflect on what they are learning and the skills they are developing. DWoK, which is a multi-disciplinary, multi-year approach to systemic reform, is built on a three-year course of professional study. It includes annual summer institutes, multiple on-site workshops during the first year, coaching, and additional technical assistance.
2. **Clear purpose and carefully expressed strategies.** Likely most, if not all professional development programs, share a broad purpose – to improve student achievement by improving instruction. The better-designed programs, however, have more closely tailored purposes and

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clearly defined strategies directly connected to achieving those purposes. Consciousness of purpose allows these programs to prioritize resources and to focus their attention on fulfilling the purpose rather than spreading limited resources diffusely over a multitude of sometimes-unrelated initiatives. Targeted purpose does not constrain the *means* that these efforts employ to reach it – most rely on multiple and innovative strategies. The Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program in Connecticut exemplifies this. It seeks to ensure that every new teacher is capable of providing high quality instruction that is grounded in the state’s content standards for students and teaching standards. The mechanisms it uses – including a seminar series and mentoring programs for beginning teachers as well as a portfolio assessment process for them – are each directly linked to BEST’s purpose.

3. **Connection to a school or district’s theory of change.** In many schools and districts, professional development programs are add-ons. They are implemented with scant reference to the challenges teachers face in their classrooms and with little connection to the ongoing and emerging needs of the school or district. More important, they fail to capture and communicate in meaningful ways why change is necessary – based on a vision of effective teaching and learning – and how it is to be sustained. A theory of change pulls professional development out of the vacuum in which it is sometimes offered, situates it in the environment in which it must function, and lays out a pathway for altering that environment and reaching the hoped-for vision of education for both students and teachers.

Community School District #2 in New York developed a well-defined theory of change and has made clear the role that professional development plays in reaching the goals that the district has set. The district seized on professional development not merely as a component of change but as the vehicle for it. In doing so, professional development could not be an add-on; it required the creation of a culture of continuous reflection, assessment and learning among teachers. The leadership and faculty of District 2 have worked hard to create this culture by implementing not only formal professional development programs but encouraging informal learning experiences as well. It has also linked the successful development of this culture to personnel and financial decisions. Devotion to a clear theory of change has enabled the district to do so.

District 2’s experience in this regard is a powerful model for others. Professional development, whether offered by the district or by outside providers, whether encouraged by schools or pursued by teachers and administrators, must connect to a vision of systemic change. Districts must be clear about the changes that they want to see, when and where they want to see them and connect these goals with professional development.

4. **Drawn from a strong vision of teaching and learning and containing clear goals.** The purpose of professional development is to improve teaching so that students will learn more and that they will learn better. Regurgitating facts with little comprehension of their meaning or implications will no longer suffice for student learning, nor will old beliefs and practice be adequate for the form and philosophy of teaching required to lead students to these new levels of analysis and understanding. Making Middle Grades Matter (MMGM), a collaborative effort

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to improve middle grades led by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), is driven by a strong vision of teaching and learning and rests on clearly articulated outcomes for students. SREB has developed a comprehensive framework for implementing this vision. Key components of the framework are its insistence that middle schools have a strong academic core with rigorous content and performance standards, its expectation that learning activities will be engaging, varied and have “real-world” application, and its resolve that teachers, to develop such learning activities, will work collaboratively with one another and be supported by administrators and others in building their knowledge and skills.

5. **Flexibility in form and willingness to reflect and change.** Knowledge is not static. Not only is what is known about effective professional development evolving but so too is what we are learning about effective instruction – what makes a good teacher good both in terms of content and pedagogy and how she synthesizes them. Nor are the environments in which teachers teach fixed. They shift with demographic, economic and political changes and teachers, along with the schools and districts in which they work, must adapt to these shifts. Many of the professional development programs reviewed in this scan understand this; they are not rigid in form or content but, incorporating the continuous reflection and assessment they seek to instill in their participants, refine or alter their strategies to best meet participants’ needs. Flexibility in design and implementation is a key element of organizational capacity to deliver professional development. The program for teacher candidates seeking certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards offered by the North Carolina Association of Educators is such a reflective and flexible program. Due largely to the efforts of former Governor Jim Hunt, North Carolina has been at the forefront of the National Board Certification (NBC) effort. At the Governor’s urging, North Carolina provides generous incentives for teachers to pursue certification but the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has not had the resources to offer comprehensive support to teachers seeking NBC. NCAE stepped in to fill this void. It has built its program over time, relying on feedback from participants, advice from experts, and its own observations as well in recognition of its own limitations.
6. **Collaboration.** Some of these programs embrace collaboration on multiple levels and include systematic interactions among funders, providers and participants. They do so for several reasons. Where possible, collaboration among funders leverages additional resources to support the work. Collaboration among providers leverages knowledge and experience. Changing teachers and the institutions in which they work is a complex process that calls upon the advice, insights, expertise and goodwill of all the key stakeholders. Finally, these programs can be structured to facilitate collaboration among participants. Teachers typically function in isolation from one another. Collaborative professional development opportunities help break down this isolation, allowing participants to draw upon each other’s experiences and knowledge in a variety of settings including discussion groups, mentoring, and team planning. The Design for Excellence: Linking Teaching and Achievement (DELTA) incorporates collaboration at multiple levels. DELTA, sponsored by the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP) and funded by multiple sources, is a cooperative effort to



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improve teacher development at the pre-service, induction and in-service levels. DELTA partners are California State University and its Los Angeles county campuses, the Los Angeles, Long Beach and Pasadena Unified School Districts, the districts' teachers unions, and several reform organizations including Los Angeles Education Alliance for Restructuring Now, the Long Beach Education Partnership, the Pasadena Educational Foundation and the CSU Institute for Education Reform. DELTA participants also collaborate in several ways – between institutions and within institutions. Faculty from CSU campuses work with teachers from the districts and, within the districts, teachers from feeder schools work together.

7. **Supportive leadership.** Leadership matters. While responsibility for student learning must be shared by all adults throughout the education community, the commitment of the leaders of the entities involved – schools, districts, states, universities, community and business organizations – is the foundation upon which systemic reform is built. These leaders must guide the development of a vision of teaching and learning, encourage and direct the collaborative creation of sound strategies for implementing that vision, and build, through their own actions, a culture and environment which will support the vision. Without this, the changes in teaching that these programs are attempting to bring about cannot be sustained in the long-term. Leadership is what moves these programs beyond disconnected attempts to change individual teachers' practices in the isolated containers of their classrooms to a framework and plan that links their knowledge and skills to that of their students and to their colleagues. The leaders of the Long Beach Education Partnership – including superintendents of the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), the provost and several deans of California State University at Long Beach, the president and several deans of Long Beach City College, and others – have shown this kind of commitment. The work of the Long Beach Education Partnership – a collaborative effort to seamlessly link K-12 education to higher education that includes aligning curriculum across the K-18 continuum and explicit focus on teacher learning from pre-service to in-service – is not a peripheral program. It is intrinsic to the work of each institution, guiding not only how they work together but, in many instances, how they work individually.

Leadership, however, involves substantially more than efforts from the formal leaders of a district or school. Superintendents and principals must, in the first instance, fashion a setting in which adults not only can but also want to learn. This means more than a physical space, although that is important. It calls for recognition and articulation that relevant professional development is valued, that learners' perceptions are honored and that there is a shared stake in the educational enterprise. In focusing on the significance of leadership, the role of the principal – the building leader – cannot be overstated. Her approach to professional development, which will arise in substantial part out of her prior and current experiences with it, will define its effectiveness in each school.

As committed as superintendents and principals may be, teachers are also leaders. The concept of distributive leadership increasingly supports change in schools and districts. Peer interaction is central to effectively designed professional development. Teachers are more than consumers here and should be encouraged in actively participating not only in receiving but also in designing professional development that they value. It may be that some of what they

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value most is informal professional development – interactions around issues that do not require a prescribed curriculum or designated time. A milieu that supports professional development should take this need into consideration.

8. **Reliance on proven theories of adult learning.** Just as there are more effective and less effective strategies for helping children learn, so are there more and less effective strategies that promote adult learning. There are times in which the traditional lecture format is the most appropriate format for teaching but often knowledge is best gained and most thoroughly understood and new skills most completely mastered through different, more dynamic and participatory, means. These include, but are not limited to, reading and reflective writing, discussions with peers and experts, observation, practice, collaborative inquiry, and classroom-based research. Utilizing such strategies achieves a two-fold purpose. It enhances the adult participants' learning and it provides a model for them to use in their own classrooms with children. A teacher will be better able to use collaborative inquiry as a teaching strategy if she has done so herself, rather than simply being told the components of it in a lecture. The Principals' Center at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, which has drawn on the most current research, requests and monitors feedback from practitioners and the observations of its own staff to carefully develop both its curriculum and methodology, and employs these and other strategies in its institutes and other initiatives.
9. **Research-based.** Many of the professional development programs offered to teachers ignore what the research shows about both student and teacher learning; they often, in fact, ignore feedback from teachers who know better than anyone that in many instances, traditional professional development programs do not enhance or influence their knowledge or practice. For them, professional development is required "seat time." All of the programs in the scan are seeking to move beyond this type of professional development and, while relying on advice from experts, information and feedback from teachers, administrators and others as well as their own observations, are delving through the research to identify strategies of teacher learning that have shown evidence of success. They – and the students they are seeking to serve – do not have time to spare on programs of little consequence. Success for All, a comprehensive school reform model that focuses on literacy, exemplifies this approach. Its philosophy, content and form are grounded in, and refined as needed, by continuous research.
10. **Content.** Recent research indicates that not only does the form or structure of professional development matter, but so too does the content – if anything even more so. Ample time to practice new skills has little consequence if the skills are not valued by teachers and do not lead to greater student learning. Program designers who understand that connection craft curriculums that are closely linked to teachers' content knowledge, to the way in which the content is taught, and to desired student learning or skills. The National Writing Project (NWP) serves as an example of this carefully considered approach not only to form but also to content in professional development. Utilizing a "teachers-teaching-teachers" model, NWP helps

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teachers assess and improve their own writing skills, undertake research, and examine their practice of teaching writing.

11. **Aware of and responsive to context.** Every school and every district is unique. A professional development program that is highly effective in one school or district may not be effective in another, even if the other is very similar in obvious characteristics such as demographics or funding. Leadership, tradition, community norms and expectations, political environment – these and a multitude of other issues affect and are affected by what happens in schools. Effective professional development programs recognize and respond to this. They may and typically do rely on outside sources for guidance and inspiration but they tailor their structure and content to best meet their particular needs. The Southern Maine Partnership, a collaborative initiative joining three institutions of higher education and 34 school districts in improving teacher practice, has followed its own path. Founded to be part of a national network and originally having only seven members, the Partnership has grown dramatically, expanding not only its membership but also the scope of its work in response to the needs of communities in southern Maine. Housed at the University of Southern Maine, the Partnership’s oversight committee and its advisory council are comprised of local superintendents, teachers, principals and other community members, helping to ensure that its work continues to address the challenges the districts face.

### **Missing Ingredients**

It is not surprising that professional development initiatives that are regarded by observers as effectively designed display characteristics that are consistent with those identified in the literature as exemplifying good professional development. On the other hand, there are a number of important attributes that seem to be absent from some of the better-regarded professional development programs. In many instances, these missing attributes relate less to the form or content of the educational experience than they do to the organizational capacity to consider professional development in a larger context than design and delivery of a single program. In this regard, organizational capacity must embrace an understanding of the relationships between discrete professional development experiences and the systemic change required to improve outcomes for students. Equally important, though, organizational capacity should include a willingness and ability to fashion tools that will enable providers, participants, policymakers, other funders and researchers to understand the elements of professional development, its costs, and why it is central to teaching and learning.

The need for more extensive organizational capacity is powerfully apparent in the lack of essential knowledge that most organizations display regarding both the financing and costs of professional development. Most of the organizations that were surveyed in this scan were unable to provide detailed information about the full cost of their activities. Many equated cost with price or with outside funds available to the organization to implement a discrete project. Organizations could not provide, for the most part, reliable information about the unit costs of their endeavors. Incomplete understanding about cost seems to be more prevalent in universities, nonprofit organizations, associations and unions, which rely heavily on outside grants and also draw on often loosely monitored in-kind contributions for labor or facilities rental. School districts that have incorporated professional development into a reform-based

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theory of change and have dedicated specific percentages of their budgets for learning experiences for educators seem better positioned to provide more reliable information about actual cost.

Without a real appreciation of actual cost, organizational capacity is compromised. At the same time, the possibility of bringing programs to scale is rendered remote. An undeveloped understanding of the magnitude of future investment required to disseminate an effort will make it difficult to attract this investment and to achieve certain efficiencies that should accompany scale. Similar concerns affect sustainability. With the exception of districts that had dedicated a portion of their budgets to professional development and a few fee-based providers, most of the professional development efforts described in this scan were supported by outside funds. Providers were aware of the need to develop strategies to continue their efforts in the absence of continued outside support. Awareness, however, had not resulted in the emergence of plans to find other, more secure, ways of supporting the efforts so that they could continue.

Put differently, most professional development providers lack a coherent theory of resources. Such a theory begins with a clear understanding of available financing sources, their potential uses and their limitations. Private sources – foundations, contributions from unions and membership associations, and even fees from participants – are not by themselves sufficient to support professional development efforts of the duration, intensity and scale that both the literature and interviews with program providers and participants indicate are essential to transforming teaching and learning. Privately-supported efforts can add substantial value to or stimulate the creation of, publicly funded, comprehensive professional development initiatives that are closely connected to district or school-based reform strategies. The success of these privately-supported efforts may ultimately rest on their ability to engender public investment in programs that are not only effectively designed but are effective in producing increases in educators' capacities that in turn positively affect outcomes for students.

An operative theory of resources, then, must look ultimately to public support and consider how best to engender and use this support. In the first instance, program providers must be able to blend resources. Blending resources consists of combining private and public resources in ways that allow for optimal deployment of available and diverse funding. Beyond this, it means developing an understanding of the multiple streams of public funding for professional development (Eisenhower, Title I, Technology and Literacy Challenge Grants, state and district funds), combining these creatively, and aligning these available resources with clearly articulated professional development goals.

Accessing additional public money will require two other attributes that appear to be absent from even the most highly-regarded professional development programs. The first of these is the ability to demonstrate results. With a few exceptions, most professional development efforts have not yet implemented comprehensive assessment programs that show sustained changes in practice by educators. Fewer still have been able to connect changes in practice with improved learning or better outcomes for students. Professional development programs today embrace the importance of assessment, but demonstrating that a promised curriculum was in fact delivered or administering satisfaction surveys to participants are not assessments that are designed to elicit the public support that will lead to increased investment in learning for teachers, principals, central office staff and superintendents.

Effective design, organizational capacity to deliver professional development, understanding of financing mechanisms and cost issues, along with rigorous assessment, are all necessary to build new

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capacity among educators. As powerful as they are, however, they will make nothing happen without a strategic ability to communicate the importance and effectiveness of continuous learning for educators and its impacts on students. Increased public investment requires increased public understanding of need and benefit along with political will to provide additional training to a cadre of professionals who, in some quarters, may already be regarded as sufficiently well-educated. In designing their programs, providers must focus not only on the results that they want but also on how to explain the significance of these results to a public that may be reluctant to support additional spending on activities that can be characterized by some as remote from what is required to improve student performance.

## **TOWARD TRANSFORMATION**

Over the years, analysts and observers have identified, and come to some agreement about, the ingredients of effectively designed professional development. As essential – and as good – as these ingredients may be, however, they do not by themselves comprise a recipe for successful professional development. There are several reasons why this is so.

**The sum may be less than its parts.** Effectively designed professional development does not ensure that learning will take place. There are contextual issues – district policies, school leadership, the degree of individual commitment to a particular approach, among other things – that may impede professional development from “taking.”

**There is no magic bullet.** Professional development is, fundamentally, about changing people. In a world where very little turns out precisely as planned, and even the most careful design has unintended consequences, dealing successfully with the vagaries of individual needs and desires for learning that makes a difference is never going to be formulaic. It may be that one element of effectively designed professional development is that it sees itself as a dynamic, allowing always for experimentation, eclecticism and last minute adjustments.

**Practice may not make perfect.** Professional development seeks to inculcate permanent positive practice in what educators do. We do not, however, know enough about changes in practice arising out of professional development and resultant improvements in student learning. It may be possible to transform teacher practice without positively affecting student learning.

**Focusing on changing individuals is not enough.** Successful professional development is about more than changing what individual teachers and schools do. It must be connected to a powerful vision of systemic change. Long-term changes in practice depend upon transformation in the systems where practice occurs.

**Association is not causation.** Schools and school districts are busy places with many things happening simultaneously. It is difficult to assign degrees of influence to specific interventions. To show that professional development is effective and to build on its successes requires more finally grained assessments. Professional development designers, along with districts and participants, must promote these assessments by being much clearer about expectations from and measurements of professional development activities.

Professional development is a complex endeavor. Understanding its elements, mastering its implementation and considering its impacts involve continual reflection and analysis. The foregoing discussion of a few highly regarded professional development programs seeks to stimulate activity that

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will transform a group of detached efforts into a flourishing field. For discrete professional development efforts to evolve into a field, the offerings themselves must be linked by their focus on transforming individuals, schools and districts. Transformative professional development is, in essence, systemic and is rooted in what we know about effective design. It is:

- Aligned with educational reform efforts that are explicitly and demonstrably embraced by school districts and schools;
- Connected to clearly articulated theories of adult learning;
- Directed to developing and/or enhancing specific capacities that will promote the reforms adopted by districts and schools; and,
- Characterized by defined outcomes – both long- and short-term – and ways by which these outcomes can be measured. (Kronley, 2000a)

Professional development efforts vary tremendously in their goals, techniques, intensity and duration. The characteristics offered above distinguish transformative professional development initiatives from others that do not seek to make fundamental and comprehensive changes in how educators view their roles and act in the context of systemic reform that seeks to improve student outcomes. It is this type of professional development that requires further exploration because of its potential positive impacts on learners.

The nature of this exploration should involve additional research. Among the questions that invite consideration are:

1. What is the relationship between changes in adult learning and changes in student learning?
2. How does a professional development initiative add to the capacity of a school or district to conceive, implement, and assess reform?
3. How do we promote effective collaboration among discrete programs to enhance delivery, build on diverse strengths, and produce efficiencies?
4. What can we learn from the design and delivery of training in other sectors that can positively affect professional development for educators?
5. How do professional development initiatives approach restructuring educator roles in ways that will lead to better outcomes for students?
6. What are effective mechanisms that can bring initiatives to scale (blended funding, cost-sharing, technology)?
7. What policy changes are required to enable programs to draw most efficiently on multiple funding streams?

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Beyond research, the emergent field of transformative professional development requires both tools and technical assistance. These should embrace the following:

1. Understanding and developing theories of change and both interim and long-term measurements tied to the theories.
2. Developing and disseminating a catalogue of programs that provide professional development.
3. Providing an inventory of public and private resources that support professional development, either discretely or as part of a broader endeavor.
4. Developing commonly accepted mechanisms to calculate actual program costs.
5. Assessing and promoting informal professional development opportunities.
6. Understanding how to align program practices with school and district reform goals.
7. Developing communications and outreach plans that speak to the importance and efficacy of professional development.
8. Suggestions about model policies that will promote comprehensive, adequately funded, federal, state and local professional development initiatives connected to reform.

The foregoing list is not exhaustive. Again, it seeks to outline next steps that will frame a coherent field out of individual programs. One strategic step in this regard would be to convene practitioners to discuss this framework, and to advise on next steps. In this way, an emerging field will be informed by those who comprise it.

The need to develop such a field is patent. Professional development has for the most part flown under the radar that has focused on other components of education reform. As a result, a plethora of programs has appeared, all of which promise to build capacity in education professionals. While individual programs, and the activities they sponsor, can have an impact on what educators do, more systemic approaches to professional development are required if we are going to see the fundamental changes in vision and practice that are necessary to improve outcomes for all students. This means understanding what professional development's role in systemic reform is, well-defined expectations for what it can yield, and agreed-upon means to assess its outcomes. It also means developing mechanisms whereby sponsors, providers, and consumers collaborate regularly in its design, implementation, and assessment and where discussion among providers is encouraged. Addressing the research questions and developing the tools suggested here are important first steps in turning a frontier into a field.

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(AS OF JUNE 2001)**

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## ABOUT THE FINANCE PROJECT

The Finance Project is a non-profit policy research, technical assistance and information organization created to help improve outcomes for children, families, and communities nationwide. Its mission is to support decision making that produces and sustains good results by developing and disseminating information, knowledge, tools and technical assistance for improved policies, programs, and financing strategies. The Finance Project's work is concentrated in several areas:

- **Financing issues and strategies** related to education, family and children's services, and community building and development;
- **Results-based decision-making**, including planning, budgeting, management, and accountability;
- **Community supports and services** that reach across categorical boundaries and the public- and private-sectors to effectively link health care, education, family support, income security, and economic development;
- **Improved governance and collaborative decision making**;
- Planning and implementation of **comprehensive welfare and workforce development reforms**; and
- Development of **Internet-based capacities** for sharing critical information on the design and implementation of effective policies and programs.

Established in 1994, The Finance Project is a valuable intellectual and technical resource to policy makers, program developers and community leaders, including state and local officials, foundation executives, academic researchers, service providers and advocates who:

- **Seek creative ideas** for policies, programs and system reforms and effective policy tools to implement them;
- **Need information about what is occurring elsewhere**, how it is working and why; and
- **Want practical, hands-on assistance** to advance their reform agendas.

The Finance Project's products and services span a broad continuum from general foundation knowledge about issues and strategies to customized resources and intensive, hands-on technical assistance. They encompass efforts to cumulate knowledge and build the field over time as well as time-sensitive projects to address immediate challenges and opportunities, including:

- **Knowledge development** — gathering, assembling and analyzing data from numerous sources to advance theory and practice.
- **Policy tool development** — developing tools and other "how to" materials to support the implementation of promising policies, practices and systems reforms, including financing strategies.

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- **Information brokering** — organizing and presenting research findings, technical assistance tools and information about the implementation and impact of promising policies, programs and practices.
  - **Technical assistance** — providing and coordinating direct assistance to state and local decision makers on the design and implementation of policy, program and system reforms.
  - **Program management** — helping foundation executives manage large, multi-site initiatives by providing and brokering technical assistance to the sites, monitoring their progress and serving as liaison between the sites and the foundations.

This work is supported by national and regional foundations, federal and state agencies, and community-based organizations.