

Designing a Professional Development System

Context Report

Strategic Priority: Plan and implement a comprehensive, research based professional development system to meet the needs of individuals and organizations.

Introduction

In January 2003, the Executive Team of GWAEA identified four strategic priorities that represented actions that would hold the greatest promise of achieving the agency wide goals identified as a result of a comprehensive needs assessment. It was determined that a white paper would be developed to provide guidance for the future direction of each priority. Bonnie Boothroy, Executive Director, was assigned to assemble a representative group within the agency to develop the white paper focusing on Professional Development.

Participants in the process were representative of agency staff. They were: Vicki Burketta, Curriculum Consultant; Tammy Carolan, Registrar/Secretary; DJ Corson, Planning and Development Specialist; Chris Day, Regional Facilitator; Kris Donnelly, School Improvement Consultant; Kathy Dulle, Professional Development Consultant; Bob Furino, Technology Consultant; Erica Larson, Curriculum Consultant; Nancy Lochner, Executive Assistant; Mary Muehl, School Improvement Consultant; Marcia Mundy, Regional Facilitator; Shirley Pike, School Psychologist; Deb Preisser, Regional Facilitator; Leslee Sandberg, Special Projects Coordinator; Jane Smith, Assistive Technologist; June Teigland, Staff Development Registrar; Eric Weissman, School Psychologist; and Maggie White, Media Specialist.

The Professional Development Committee met four times: January 14, February 11, 19 and 26, 2003.

Research Findings

The following were adapted from *Revisioning Professional Development: What Learner-Centered Professional Development Looks Like*, National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 1999. They provide a summary of research findings in this field.

Professional development should:

- focus on what students are to learn and how to address the different problems students may have in learning the material.
- be based on the differences between (a) actual student performance and (b) goals and standards for student learning.
- involve teachers in identifying what they need to learn and in developing the learning experiences in which they will be involved.
- be primarily school-based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching.
- be organized around collaborative problem solving.
- be continuous and ongoing, involving follow-up and support for further learning – including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and new perspectives.
- incorporate evaluation of multiple sources of information on (a) outcomes for students and (b) the instruction and other processes involved in implementing lessons learned through professional development.
- provide opportunities to understand the theory underlying the knowledge and skills being learned.
- be connected to a comprehensive change process focused on improving student learning.

- be guided by strong leaders – teachers, principals, central office staff, superintendents, and school boards – operating collectively and collaboratively to govern the staff development/school improvement system.

While the above are broadly applicable to all learners, the committee believes we need to be sensitive to the differences between the professional development needs of individuals and organizations.

Benchmarks

- Every Child Reads: Accelerating Reading Achievement Through Structured School Improvement. Every Child Reads is a structured school improvement effort with technical assistance provided by the Iowa Department of Education's K-3 Reading Team. This model incorporates the research findings for collaborative large-scale professional development focused on accelerating student achievement in the content area of reading. This structured school improvement initiative aligns with the Iowa Professional Development Model. The technical assistance provided by the Department's K-3 Reading Team can be replicated at the AEA level to build capacity for working with schools engaging in on-site, quality professional development focused on improving student performance.
- Arrowhead AEA 5: The professional development program connects relicensure directly to the work of teachers in schools. This is done by offering credit for experiences that are linked to goals of districts' comprehensive school improvement plans. These experiences can be courses, learning teams or workshops. Courses/workshops are held in the summer or during district professional development time. They include the research-based components of theory, modeling/demonstration and practice (during the class), as well as feedback and coaching in the classroom (throughout the school year). Teachers are expected to implement in their classroom the instructional strategies they learn in classes. After completing a 15-hour course, participants are required to attend a two-hour session in which they review their implementation data and the impact it had on student achievement. Internal AEA professional development is done through learning teams focused on AEA priority areas. Each learning team has a trained facilitator.

Our investigations indicated that many intermediate service agencies are in the same stage(s) of development as Grant Wood AEA. In a few cases, processes have been identified but implementation data have not been collected.

Grant Wood Current State

Professional Development at Grant Wood AEA is in a period of transition. From a historical perspective two main systems have been in place. The Staff Development program, approved by the Board of Educational Examiners, is a provider of teacher and administrative license renewal courses. Through this program educators have the opportunity to take graduate level courses and obtain graduate degrees and endorsements. The Professional Development program, an approved provider of Continuing Education Units for several professional affiliations, offers seminar and conference opportunities on a wide variety of educational topics aimed at the needs of AEA and LEA staff, students, parents and the community.

The two systems (Staff Development and Professional Development) have been combined and identified as Professional Development. Opportunities for professional development are provided in a variety of formats: on-site study group models, single events, on-going job embedded trainings, seminars, courses, and conferences. Technology has provided additional resources for delivery including distance learning and computer assisted instruction. The content of professional development is driven by data, state and federal mandates, district initiatives and/or requests, research, and individual staff needs. Some professional development activities follow theory, demonstration, practice, coaching and feedback and provide assistance to staff in the districts to maintain sustainability.

Grant Wood AEA supports the Every Child Reads initiative. This initiative is most closely aligned with the research findings for large-scale professional development. Other Grant Wood AEA programs and initiatives approach these findings but may not encompass all of the listed attributes. Professional development programs are transitioning from focusing on an adult learning model to including a student-centered model. Internal learning and redesign efforts need to focus on aligning more closely with the large-scale professional development research findings (distributed leadership, capacity-building, collaborative problem-solving, research-based content, alignment of

individual and organizational goals, job-embedded and on-going learning, data-driven decision-making, formative and summative evaluation, and a comprehensive change process).

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