

JOB-EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN WRPS



Note

Questions have emerged regarding the eleven (11) job-embedded collaboration days built in to the 2018 – 2019 school calendars. Two reference documents contain language that is foundational to understanding that job-embedded collaboration days are teacher/staff driven with the clear understanding that it is truly collaborative and cooperative work with colleagues which includes administration. As words matter key words have been bolded to help with common understanding.

Job-Embedded Professional Development: What It Is, Who Is Responsible, and How to Get It Done Well

We believe that the requirement to provide ongoing, high quality, job-embedded professional development to staff in a school is clearly tied to improving instruction in multiple ways. First, the requirement that professional development be “job-embedded” connotes **a direct connection between a teacher’s work in the classroom and the professional development the teacher receives.**

What Is Job-Embedded Professional Development?

Job-embedded professional development (JEPD) refers to **teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers’ content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning** (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hirsh, 2009). It is primarily school or classroom based and is integrated into the workday, consisting of teachers assessing and finding solutions for authentic and immediate problems of practice as part of a cycle of continuous improvement (Hawley & Valli, 1999; National Staff Development Council, 2010). JEPD is a shared, ongoing process that is locally rooted and makes a direct connection between learning and application in daily practice, thereby requiring active teacher involvement in cooperative, inquiry-based work (Hawley & Valli, 1999). High-quality JEPD also is aligned with provincial outcomes for student academic achievement, school and division improvement goals.

Job-embedded professional development can be undertaken alone, with one-on-one guidance, and/or in teams. JEPD varies in the extent to which it is more or less situated inside classrooms and schools. Some types of professional development may be very valuable learning opportunities for teachers; however, **because they are not focused on the immediate work of teaching the students to whom the teachers are assigned, they are not considered job embedded.**

In JEPD teachers learn in the course of their school day, so JEPD is reform-based professional development in which **the majority of teacher learning takes place in schools.** It is professional development situated *in* schools that is always *about* the current work of schools.

Although JEPD can be undertaken by a teacher alone, a view of professional knowledge as social, situated, and distributed among colleagues undergirds JEPD (Putnam & Borko, 2000). In other words, in JEPD, **teachers’ professional development is largely a product of formal and informal social interactions among the teachers, situated in the context of their school and the classrooms in which they teach and distributed across the entire staff.**

In JEPD, **teachers primarily draw from the professional knowledge that exists in their own school and among their colleagues** (Wei et al., 2009), which is informed by other professional development opportunities that help teachers learn research-based practices (Killion & Roy, 2009; Lieberman, 2000).

Similar to students as learners, teachers as learners benefit from multiple opportunities to learn. Those opportunities are created when teachers are afforded the time, space, structures, and support to engage in JEPD. Division and school administration can provide this support by eliminating excessive

paperwork and other non-instructional duties for teachers; coordinating teacher schedules; clarifying goals, outcomes, and priorities of the JEPD; and assisting in collection of valid student and teacher performance measures (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

The school's professional culture significantly affects teachers' opportunity to learn. School leaders are instrumental in fostering an organizational culture of continuous learning and teamwork through venues such as professional learning communities and professional norms, including, for example, open-door policies for observing each other's classrooms. In addition, JEPD produces enduring effects when it is matched to the curriculum, [provincial] standards, and assessment of student learning; is compatible with daily school operations; and is framed to address the particular instructional needs of a teacher's given assignment (Blank & de la Alas, 2009; Wei et al., 2009).

Adults learn best when they are self-directed, building new knowledge upon preexisting knowledge, and aware of the relevance and personal significance of what they are learning—grounding theoretical knowledge in actual events (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). **Therefore, effective professional development should begin with an analysis of school needs in terms of both student and teacher learning based on formative evidence of their performance.** Through an analysis of these data, learning goals can be developed and aligned with JEPD methods. Powerful and practical connections also can be made between division and school improvement plans and JEPD, resulting in greater coherence across the system.

Conclusion

Learning to do a complicated job well requires constant scholarship, taking place both in academic classrooms as well as through guided, on-the-job practice. The work of teaching—whether it's helping a distracted 6-year-old recognize letters or a struggling 16-year-old find the derivative of a function—requires extensive knowledge of learners and learning, teaching techniques, behavior management, and the content itself. Such professional knowledge requires not only years to master fully but also the willingness to change as the evidence base of effective teaching grows, as curricula change, and as the needs of learners evolve. Given the imperative for teachers to continually hone their knowledge, skills, and practices, teaching has been aptly called the “learning profession” (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). Job-embedded professional development—skillfully implemented and supported by local policy—constitutes a powerful lever to advance student learning.

The Literature on Teacher Professional Growth

Recent academic literature and jurisdictional policies highlight three broad themes. First, teacher professional growth is an essential condition for student learning and achievement. Second, **collaborative and inquiry-based approaches are most effective for supporting teacher growth**. Third, when professional learning is embedded in practice, reflected in professional standards, and articulated through rubrics and exemplars, educators feel supported and guided.

The relationship between teacher growth and student learning is forged in the literature of the past decade. **A strong message from the literature is that teachers and school leaders must remain focused on what matters most: student achievement** (Hirsh & Killion, 2009). **Efforts to improve student achievement can succeed only by building the capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practice and the capacity of school systems to advance teacher learning** (Wei et al., 2009, p.1).

The key message is that impact on student learning is the *raison d'être* of professional growth planning; **growth planning that is divorced from the specific impacts on students is ineffective**.

Hirsh and Killion (2009) described this shift to a focus on teacher growth in four ways: (a) from in-service education and professional development **to professional learning**, (b) from individual learning **to team-based, school wide learning**, (c) from separate individual teacher, school or district professional development plans **to effective professional learning embedded into team, school, and district improvement efforts**, and (d) from improving teaching practices **to improving teacher quality and student learning**.

Recent research has identified the teacher and their teaching context as the site at which professional development is most effective (Brady, 2009, p.337). Teachers learn when they have opportunities to reflect upon and critique their practice vis-à-vis student learning over extended periods of time (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

What is understood as effective professional development has shifted significantly over time, from participation in workshops and conference sessions designed to offer information about teaching practices, to active and **sustained explorations of instruction practice tied explicitly to student learning outcomes and achievement**. Literature of the past decade clearly identified collaboration through involvement in professional learning communities and teacher inquiry into practice as two of the most effective and empowering forms of professional learning.

Findings from international studies indicate that “higher-performing countries intentionally focus on creating teacher collaboration that results in more skillful teaching and strong student achievement” (Darling-Hammond, 2015, p. 16).

Findings from many studies suggest that participation in a professional community with one’s colleagues is an integral part of professional learning that impacts positively on students.... If teachers are to change, they need to participate in a professional learning community that is focused on becoming responsive to students, because such a community gives teachers opportunities to process new information while helping them keep their eyes on the goal (Brady, 2009, p. 19).

According to Timperley (2008), the key distinction between a collegial community and a PLC is that collegiality often end(s) up **merely entrenching existing practice** and the assumptions on which it is based (p. 19). By contrast, a PLC maintains an explicit focus on teachers learning to improve student learning through the active and collaborative development of professional understandings and practices.

As a form of professional learning, inquiry into practice empowers teachers, supports the construction of new forms of pedagogical knowledge, and enhances learning for students.

No longer will in-service training and workshops disseminating information be adequate; professional learning founded in the context of instructional practice will require new structures for both individual and organizational learning.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) wrote, “To create new structures for individual and organizational learning, the usual notions of in-service training or dissemination must be replaced by possibilities for knowledge sharing anchored in problems of practice. **To serve teachers’ needs, professional development must embrace a range of opportunities that allow teachers to share what they know and what they want to learn and to connect their learning to the contexts of their teaching.** Professional development activities must allow teachers to engage actively in cooperative experiences that are sustained over time and to reflect on the process as well as on the content of what they are learning. Structures that break down isolation, that empower teachers with professional tasks, and that provide arenas for thinking through standards of practice are central to this kind of professional growth (p. 84).

References

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