

What is Professional Development for Teachers - 2023 Guide

Professional development is the continuous process of improving teachers' skills, knowledge, and abilities to ensure they're up-to-date with the latest teaching techniques and educational trends.

Professional development is essential for teachers to provide their students with the best possible education and positively impact the educational system as a whole.

Administrators, policymakers, and school board members should focus on improving teacher professional development and building a positive school culture.

This means providing opportunities for teachers to learn and grow and creating an environment that encourages ongoing professional learning.

Today, we'll cover teacher professional development, its importance, benefits, and best practices.

We'll also explore different types of professional development opportunities and strategies for successful implementation to give you a better understanding of how PD can enhance the quality of education in schools.

What is Professional Development for Teachers?

From a teacher's perspective, professional development (PD) is the ongoing process of learning new skills and strategies to improve their teaching practices and in order to enhance student learning outcomes.

PD is essential for teachers to stay up-to-date with the latest educational research, teaching techniques, and technology. It allows them to adapt their teaching to meet the changing needs of their students and the ever-evolving educational landscape.

Professional development for teachers takes place at four different levels:

- District-wide: Provides teachers with a broader perspective and access to experts.
- School-based: Allows teachers to focus on the specific needs of their school and collaborate with colleagues.
- Classroom-based: Focuses on individual teacher needs and helps them to identify and address specific areas of weakness in their teaching

- Individual levels: Allows teachers to pursue their PD independently. They can seek the resources and support they need to improve their skills.

PD can be either mandatory or voluntary. At the district or state level, some professional learning opportunities are mandatory. In contrast, at the school or classroom level, teachers may have the option to choose whether or not to participate.

Professional development opportunities are occasionally subsidized by the school district or state. This helps provide teachers access to resources they may not otherwise be able to afford.

The focus of professional learning for teachers is acquiring new teaching techniques based on emerging research and strategies for implementation.

Why Professional Development Matters

Professional development is essential for educators to keep up with the dynamic nature of society and the constantly evolving ways to educate students.

In a classroom setting, it is crucial to research and implement new techniques and approaches to ensure that students receive the best possible education.

The ways to educate students are continually evolving, and what may have been considered the best practices several years ago may no longer be applicable.

For instance, technology and social media have changed how students learn in the past few years. Therefore, educators must stay current with these changes to ensure that they can use them to enhance their teaching methods.

In addition, changes in federal and state standards are another reason for constant education among teachers. As standards change, educators must adapt their teaching methods to ensure they meet the new requirements.

Professional learning provides a platform for educators to learn about the changes and updates in the education system and implement them in their teaching.

Types of Professional Development for Teachers

There are different types of professional development available for teachers. It's important to provide the type that matches the teacher's preferences and needs.

Courses/Workshops

This type of PD involves attending short-term courses or workshops focusing on specific topics or skills.

This type of PD helps educators acquire new knowledge and skills while interacting with other teachers. They are also able to gain professional development hours or credits.

Workshops and courses can be structured depending on the specific goals of the professional learning. For example, workshops on teaching strategies, classroom management, technology integration, or assessment techniques.

Education Conferences or Seminars

This type of professional development involves attending conferences or seminars that bring together educators from various schools and districts to discuss current education issues and share ideas. Conferences and seminars provide networking opportunities for educators and exposure to new ideas and trends in education. They also help them gain insights from other teachers' experiences.

Seminars and conferences commonly aim to focus on a particular issue. For instance, a conference may be focused on education policy, curriculum development, or educational technology for school leaders.

Degree program

Degree programs are a type of professional learning that involves pursuing higher education degrees such as a master's or doctorate in education.

Advanced degrees help educators gain in-depth knowledge in a specific area of education. This enhances their teaching skills and increases career opportunities.

Teachers can pursue different degree programs based on their career goals. For example, curriculum and instruction, educational leadership, and teacher education.

Observation visits to other schools

Observation visits to other schools as professional learning involves observing other teachers' teaching techniques and classroom management strategies.

Through this type of PD, teachers learn new teaching strategies and gain insights into other school cultures.

For example, teachers can observe teaching practices in other schools and participate in peer-to-peer classroom observation programs.

Join a network for teachers

In this teacher professional development model, teachers join a network or community of educators who share the same interests and goals.

This provides opportunities to network, share best practices, and get support from fellow teachers and become a more effective teacher.

Teachers can join online teacher communities or professional organizations to participate in this type of PD.

Areas of Professional Development for Teachers

As an educator, there are several areas you can pursue when it comes to professional development.

Let's briefly discuss the areas and how they can assist in improving your teaching style and career advancement.

Technical training

Developing technical, quantitative, and analytical skills is valuable for teachers. With these skills, they can analyze student performance data, identify patterns and trends, and use the findings to modify their curriculum or teaching techniques.

Technical training includes learning how to use software programs and tools for data analysis, such as spreadsheets or educational data management systems. It also involves training in statistics and data analysis methods.

With technical training, educators can get the skills to make data-driven decisions in their teaching strategies. It can also open them up for careers in educational administration at the school, district, or state level.

Specialized Training

Specialized training in your subject-teaching area can greatly improve your teaching skills and enhance student achievement.

Furthering your education and knowledge in your subject-teaching area can help you teach subject-specific content and concepts more effectively.

For example, if you are a math teacher, you can take courses in advanced math topics, such as calculus or statistics. This would not only deepen your knowledge of the subject but also allow you to better understand the challenges that students face when learning these concepts.

Leadership Development

If you're an experienced teacher looking for a new challenge, you can take PD in the form of leadership development training.

Leadership development training is designed to help individuals develop the skills to lead and manage teams effectively. You learn how to inspire and motivate others, set and achieve goals, manage conflicts, and make effective decisions.

Leadership development training can open up new career opportunities for positions that require strong leadership skills. For example, you can transition into a role as a principal, curriculum coordinator, or education consultant.

Classroom Management

Classroom management is a critical component of effective teaching. It involves creating a safe and positive learning environment for students.

If you're looking to improve your knowledge on student learning and engagement, you should take up professional learning in classroom management.

When you have strong classroom management skills, you'll be able to engage your students better and promote their learning.

With a well-managed classroom, you have more opportunities to observe your students and gather information about their learning needs, interests, and preferences. This way, you can tailor your instruction to meet their learning needs and motivate them to learn.

Professional Development Requirements for Teachers

The number of professional development hours required for teachers varies by state. Therefore, you should check with your state's Department of Education or public instruction for specific requirements.

Most states require an average of around six graduate credits or 120–180 professional development hours per five years to maintain a teaching license.

These requirements ensure that teachers stay up-to-date with the latest teaching methods, technologies, and best practices in education.

There is usually no professional development requirement to obtain a teaching license for the first time. This is because teachers traditionally take formal classes at a college or university to obtain their degrees and license.

However, ongoing teacher professional development is necessary to maintain the license and ensure that educators provide their students with the best education possible.

Benefits of Professional Development for Teachers

Teacher professional development offers the following benefits that positively impact both teachers and their students.

- **Improved learner outcomes:** Teachers can stay current with the latest teaching methods and technologies, leading to improved student achievement.
- **Increased teacher motivation:** Professional development opportunities inspire and motivate teachers to continue learning and growing in their careers.
- **Higher job satisfaction:** When teachers feel confident and competent in their teaching abilities, they are more likely to enjoy their work and feel satisfied with their careers.
- **Retention of teachers in the profession:** Teachers feel supported and valued, leading to higher retention rates and a more stable teaching workforce.
- **Elevation of a school's reputation:** When teachers have access to high-quality professional development opportunities, it leads to a good reputation for the school and district as a whole.
- **Wider sharing of best practice pedagogies for sector-wide improvement:** PD provides opportunities for teachers to share their best practices with colleagues and learn from each other, leading to sector-wide improvements in teaching quality.

Other Relevant PD Terms for Teachers

When discussing teacher professional development, other terms may come up.

Let's look at the terms and what they mean.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) refers to the ongoing learning and development that professionals undertake to enhance their skills and knowledge.

CPD is a way for teachers to stay current with new developments in their field and to continue to improve their practice.

CPD for teachers can come in many forms, such as conferences and workshops, participating in online courses or webinars, engaging in self-directed learning, and collaborating with colleagues.

Teacher (or Professional) Education

Teacher (or Professional) Education refers to the formal education and training teachers receive before entering the profession.

Teacher (or Profession) Education can be undergraduate or graduate degree programs and specialized training programs such as alternative certification pathways.

Teacher education programs are designed to prepare teachers for the classroom and to provide them with the necessary knowledge and competencies to be effective teachers.

Training

Training is a type of teacher professional development that's focused on building specific skills or knowledge.

Training sessions can be delivered in person or online and can cover topics such as technology integration or classroom management strategies.

Training is often designed to be practical and hands-on, with the goal of providing teachers with concrete skills that they can apply in their classrooms.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a form of effective professional development where a veteran teacher or mentor provides guidance, support, and feedback to a less experienced teacher or mentee.

Mentoring relationships can be formal or informal and are a valuable way for new teachers to learn and receive personalized support and guidance from experienced colleagues.

Coaching

Coaching involves a coach working with a teacher to provide personalized support, feedback, and guidance.

Coaching is often focused on improving specific aspects of teaching practice and can be tailored to the individual needs and goals of the teacher.

Professional Learning Community/Network

Professional Learning Communities/Networks (PLCs/PLNs) are groups of teachers who come together to share their experiences and knowledge. PLCs/PLNs can be in the form of school-based groups or online networks.

The goal of a PLC/PLN is to provide a supportive and collaborative learning environment where teachers can share, learn from one another, and improve their teaching methods.

Ready for Your Professional Development?

Professional development is important for individuals to improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities in their field of work.

Teachers must constantly update their knowledge and skills to create innovative and engaging learning experiences that meet student learning needs.

SimpleK12 offers a range of professional development courses designed to help educators enhance their skills and knowledge to improve student outcomes.

By taking [SimpleK12's professional development courses](#), educators can advance their careers, become more effective teachers, and provide students with a high-quality education.

If you are ready to take your professional development to the next level, check out SimpleK12's courses *today!*