

Design and Structure

Quality professional learning reflects evidence-based approaches, recognizing that focused, sustained learning enables educators to acquire, implement, and assess improved practices.

As is the case with students as learners, educators as learners benefit from multiple opportunities to learn. Those responsible for developing quality professional learning design it to address the learning priorities of educators, supporting them to continuously improve practice across their careers. At the core of decisions about how to design and structure quality professional learning is the principle of planning and organizing processes that actively engage educators in inquiry centered on authentic problems and instructional practices to improve student performance. Quality professional learning is also designed to be job-embedded—that is, situated as realistically as possible in the work setting of the learner so that theoretical learning and its practical application are directly linked. Learning activities may take on various forms—for example, a study group, coaching network, web-based workshop, learning community, collaborative committee, or curriculum development group. They may vary in time duration, be scheduled within or outside of the regular school day, or be synchronous or asynchronous technology-based designs. However, all quality professional learning must provide for intensity, follow-through, and continuity. Taken together, the various designs and structures provide educators opportunities for differentiated learning experiences that are best suited to their individual and collective goals.

Element A: Focus and Time

Quality professional learning is purposeful, focused, and sustained over time.

INDICATORS

Quality professional learning:

1. Focuses on clearly identified purposes and needs related to educators' capacity to increase students' learning outcomes.
2. Is ongoing and requires consistent effort.

3. Requires dedicated time, within the school schedule, for educator learning, practice, reflection, and collaboration.
4. Leverages extended time opportunities for educator learning, practice, reflection, and collaboration.

Element B: Embedded in Practice

Quality professional learning provides many opportunities for educators to analyze their practice and apply new learning.

INDICATORS

Quality professional learning:

1. Utilizes real problems of practice as a base for new learning.
2. Clarifies how to apply and use new learning.
3. Incorporates deliberate practice of new learning with frequent reflection, feedback, and support, so that knowledge and skills become fully integrated.

Element C: Differentiation

Quality professional learning is relevant—building on the skills, knowledge, and learning needs of educators across career stages, grade levels, assignments, and contexts.

INDICATORS

Quality professional learning:

1. Builds on educators' schoolwide and district goals, and educator needs and perspectives.
2. Develops educators' knowledge, skills, and dispositions at every career stage, continuously developing educator capacity from novice to accomplished.
3. Responds to educators' contexts by considering grade level; subject matter; and school setting, performance, and demographics.

Element D: Active and Varied Methods of Learning

Quality professional learning employs diverse, research-based learning designs, with an emphasis on the active engagement of educators.

INDICATORS

Quality professional learning:

1. Ensures that educators interact with content and with one another during a continuous learning process.
2. Involves educators in a variety of learning processes that are focused on schoolwide goals and educators' interests, needs, and learning styles.
3. Applies evidence-based practices, is grounded in research, and provides educators with opportunities to analyze, apply, and engage in research.
4. Uses technology to enhance and extend learning opportunities.