

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE UNITED STATES: **Trends and Challenges**

Phase II of a Three-Phase Study



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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THE STANFORD CENTER FOR
OPPORTUNITY POLICY
IN EDUCATION



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Published by NSDC and SCOPE as part of their multi-year study,
The Status of Professional Development in the United States

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OVERVIEW

A new study that analyzes the status of professional learning in the United States reveals that the nation is making some progress in providing increased support and mentoring for new teachers. But the study also reveals that the United States has moved backward in providing the vast majority of teachers with the kind of ongoing, intensive professional learning that research shows has a substantial impact on student learning. In 2008, teachers nationwide had fewer opportunities to engage in sustained professional learning opportunities than they had four years earlier. They were also half as likely to report collaborative efforts in their schools than teachers did in 2000.

The new report, which examined 2008 data from the federal government's Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and other sources, summarizes Phase II findings of the three-part Status of Professional Learning study launched in 2008 by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) and a team of researchers from

the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE). (See sidebar for summary of Phase I findings). It also assesses each state on the quality of their professional development across 11 indicators that comprise a newly-developed Professional Development Access Index which is included on page 6 of this report.

PHASE I STUDY REVEALED SIGNIFICANT GAPS IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN UNITED STATES

In the February 2009 report, *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession*, NSDC and Stanford's School Redesign Network (SRN) — now a part of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) — examined what research has revealed about professional learning that improves teachers' practice and student learning. The report also described the relative availability of high-quality professional learning opportunities in the United States compared to high achieving nations that have been making substantial and sustained investments in professional learning for teachers over the last two decades.

In a thorough review of the research literature, the report found that effective professional development is ongoing, intensive, and connected to practice and school initiatives; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content; and builds strong working relationships among teachers. Rigorous scientific studies have shown that when high-quality approaches are sustained by providing teachers with 50 or more hours of support per year, student test scores rise by an average of 21 percentage points.

The report noted that U.S. teachers participate in workshops and short-term professional development events at similar levels as teachers in other nations. But the United States is far behind in providing public school teachers with opportunities to participate in extended learning opportunities and productive collaborative communities. Those opportunities allow teachers to work together on instructional planning, learn from one another through mentoring or peer coaching, conduct research on the outcomes of classroom practices, and collectively guide curriculum, assessment, and professional learning decisions.

This type of intense, collaborative, content-rich, and practice-focused professional learning, which leads to better student outcomes, is not typical in U.S. schools and districts, the analysis of national survey data revealed. The examination of the SASS database (2004 data) and the NSDC's Standards Assessment Inventory found that most U.S. teachers work in isolation, take a heavy dose of workshops, and do not receive effective learning opportunities in many areas, such as teaching students with disabilities or English language learners (ELLs), in which they want more help.

Mixed Picture of Progress

The new national data reveal patterns similar to those discovered in the previous report, with some improvements, but also some losses. On the plus side, the percentage of beginning teachers (those with 5 or fewer years teaching) who reported participation in an induction program during their first year of teaching has steadily increased over the years, with 74 percent reporting participation in an induction program in 2008 (a nearly 6 percent increase from 2004). Similar increases were also seen in the percentage of beginning teachers that reported working with a master/mentor teacher, participating in seminars or classes for beginning teachers, and having common planning time. Some features were stable from previous years, including high proportions of new teachers reporting supportive communication with a principal or other administrator (80 percent) but low proportions (only 11 percent) reporting reduced teaching loads.

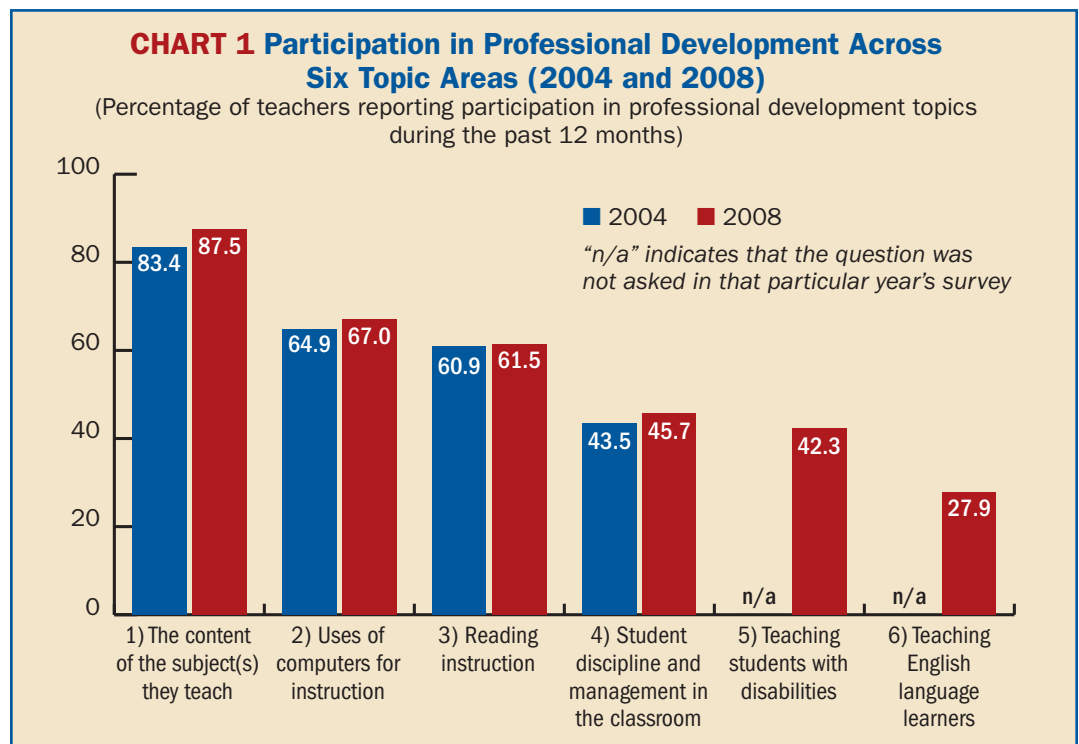
Meanwhile, the percentage of teachers who reported participating in professional development on the content of the subjects taught, the uses of computers for instruction, reading instruction, and student discipline and classroom management increased slightly from 2004 to 2008. (See Chart 1 below).

However, the intensity of the professional development—which is closely linked to teachers’ perceptions of its usefulness and its effectiveness in changing practice and improving student

outcomes—has declined in most of these areas, including the use of computers for instruction, reading instruction, classroom management, and teaching students with disabilities and ELLs. Chart 2 on Page 3 indicates significant increases in the percentage of teachers who report having received short-term professional development (8 hours or less) across key areas and decreases in those reporting longer-term professional development. Eight hours is significantly less than the threshold research consensus says affects student achievement.

Studies have suggested that professional development that is sustained over time and includes a substantial number of contact hours on a single professional development focus (averaging 49 hours in one multi-study review and close to 100 in another) results in increases in student learning. However, the report notes that the average reported number of hours of professional development in the United States was only about 44 hours combined across all six topic areas identified in Chart 1. Meanwhile, teachers in many high-achieving nations are provided with 100 hours of professional development time each year on top of the 15-25 hours per week that they have for collaborative planning and learning—about five times what U.S. teachers experience.

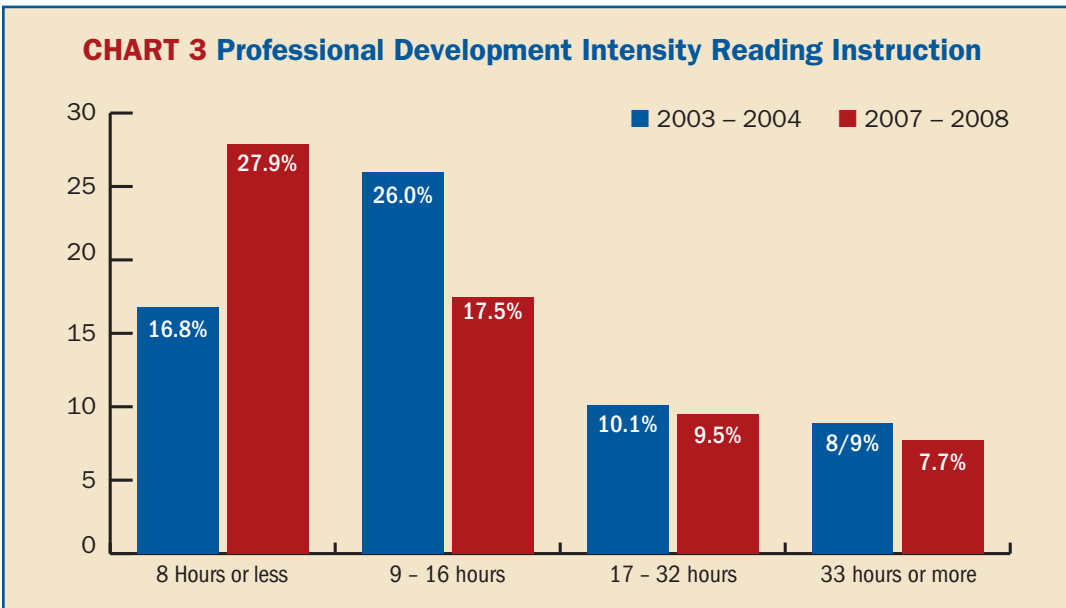
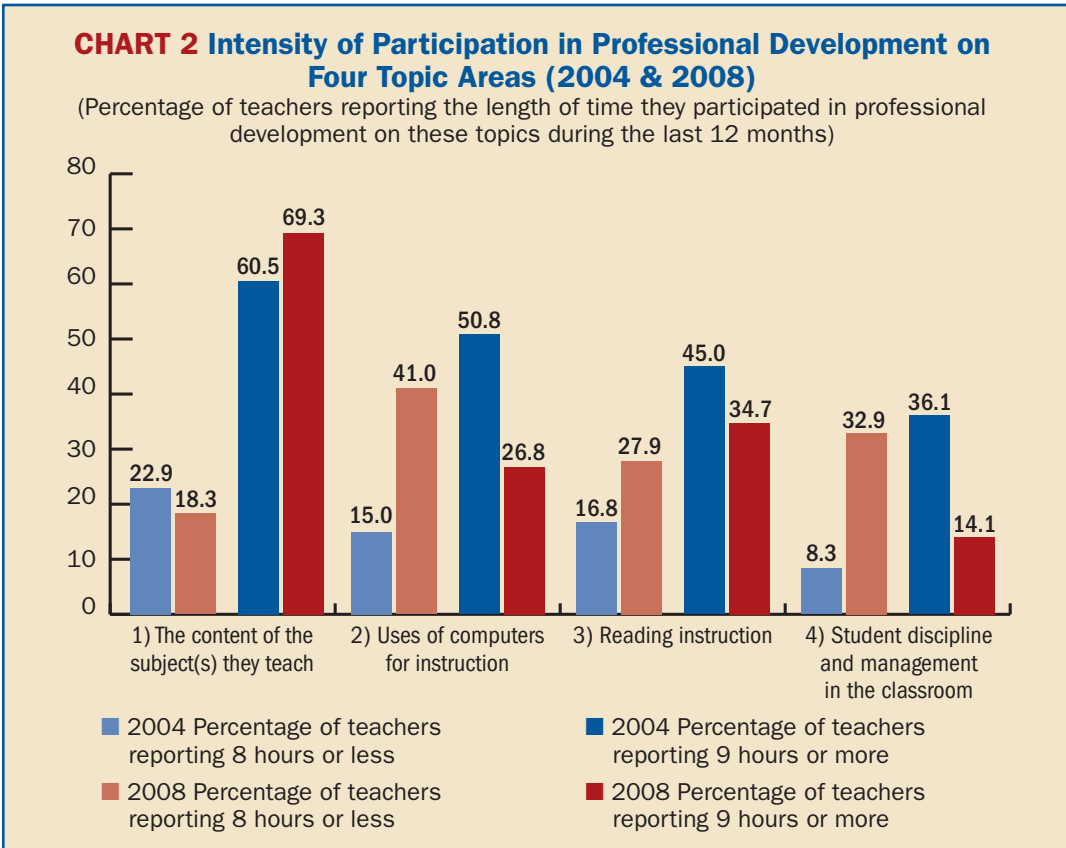
Unfortunately, in this regard, U.S. trends are going in the wrong direction. The data reveal that there has been a dramatic shift in the last decade away from professional development of a



modest duration of 9-16 hours to professional development of 8 hours or shorter in length. For example, in reading instruction, the percentage of teachers receiving 8 hours or less of professional development increased from 17 percent in 2004 to 28 percent in 2008. However, over the same period, the percentage of teachers receiving 9 to 16 hours dropped from 26 percent to 18 percent, with the percentage of teachers reporting 17 to 32 hours and 33 hours

or more also decreasing between 2004 and 2008. (See Chart 3 below).

The 2008 data reveal that most teachers (close to two-thirds) who participated in professional development across the six topics rated the experiences as useful or very useful. However, teachers with more hours of professional development rated the usefulness of their professional development experiences significantly higher.



ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- **Participation in professional development on teaching students with disabilities and English language learners.** Well under half of teachers reported access to professional development on teaching students with disabilities (42 percent) and teaching ELLs (27 percent), consistent with previous years' findings. In addition, only a third of teachers agree that their schools provide support for teaching students with special needs. The percentage of teachers agreeing that there was support for teaching students with special needs actually declined from 36 percent in 2004 to 33 percent in 2008.
- **Induction supports across school contexts.** While participation in induction programs by newer teachers has increased overall, (74% of beginning teachers now report participating in an induction program; this is up from 68% in 2004 and only 60% in 2000) access to these supports differs by school context. Teachers in urban and rural schools and schools with the highest Free and Reduced Lunch and minority enrollments participated in these programs less often than teachers in suburban schools and schools with fewer low-income and minority students. However, teachers in schools with high minority and Free and Reduced Lunch enrollment did report higher participation in common planning.
- **Participation in professional development across school contexts.** Participation in professional development varies for teachers in different grade levels and school communities and those serving different student populations. Elementary school teachers, teachers in urban schools, and teachers in schools with the highest populations of minority and ELL students, as well as in schools with the highest Free and Reduced Lunch program enrollments, had significantly higher participation rates in professional development on most topics, with the exception of the use of computers. Teachers in urban schools and in schools with a high proportion of low-income students had significantly higher average cumulative hours of professional development across all six topics cited in Chart 1 than teachers in suburban and rural schools and teachers in schools with few low-income students, respectively.
- **Highest priorities for further professional development.** The top three topics for further professional development remained almost the same from 2004 to 2008, with very small increases in the percentage of teachers ranking content of the subject taught as the top priority (24 percent) and student discipline/classroom management as the next priority (20 percent). There was a tie for the third place ranking: teaching students with special needs and use of computers in instruction were both ranked as the top priority by 14 percent of teachers. However, there was significant variation in the top priorities for further professional development by teacher characteristics (beginning teachers versus experienced teachers) and by teaching context (school community, school population), supporting the importance of local decision-making around the needs of specific teachers and the school community.
- **Opportunities for teacher collaboration.** A majority (56 percent) of beginning teachers with 5 or fewer years of teaching experience reported that common planning time was available to them as an induction support. Data from another recent survey (*Met Life Survey of the American Teacher*, 2009) indicate that about two-thirds of teachers have structured opportunities for collaboration in their schools, more of them elementary than secondary teachers. However, teachers report an average of only 2.7 hours a week for collaboration. A very small percentage of all teachers (16 percent) agree that cooperative effort occurs among staff members in their schools, consistent with results from the 2004 survey (17 percent of teachers in 2004 and 16 percent of teachers in 2008). This is a significant decline from 2000, when 34 percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that there is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff members in their school.

Studying Professional Development across States

The report provides a comprehensive look at the status of professional development across states and the variation among states in providing professional learning opportunities. The study found, for example, that the range in the average cumulative hours of professional development across states varied from 33 hours in Oklahoma to 56 hours in Arkansas and Arizona. In most states, the intensity of professional development is low (most teachers get 8 or fewer hours per year) across topics, but in a few outlier states, including Arkansas and Vermont, a majority of teachers report 16 or more hours of professional development on the content of the subjects taught.

The study also identified wide ranges in participation in states across several topics of professional development. Participation rates varied by 48 percentage points, for example, for use of computers from Rhode Island (41 percent) to Arkansas (89 percent) and by 40 percentage points in classroom management. More than two-thirds (68 percent) of Arkansas teachers, for example, received professional learning in this area, compared with less than one-third (28 percent) of teachers in Maine.

There also was a large gap in participation rates in professional development on teaching students with disabilities (Montana at 58 percent versus South Carolina at 31 percent). The largest state-by-state variation was in professional development focused on teaching ELLs. Not

surprisingly, states with large populations of ELLs tended to have higher levels of participation in professional development focused on teaching these students. For example, in Arizona, three-quarters of all teachers (75 percent) received professional development in this area followed by California (63 percent), New Mexico (49 percent), and Texas (46 percent). By contrast only one-third of teachers in Florida received this kind of training, despite large numbers of ELL students. At the other end of the distribution, only 7 percent of teachers in both Ohio and West Virginia received professional development on teaching English language learners.

The level of participation in induction programs also varies widely from one state to another. In 2008, the highest levels of participation were in South Carolina (93 percent), Iowa (93 percent), Delaware (92 percent), Colorado (91 percent), and Pennsylvania (90 percent). The lowest levels of participation in induction programs were in South Dakota (41 percent) and North Dakota (42 percent). Examining teachers' participation in the full range of possible induction supports, South Carolina had the highest percentage of teachers (51 percent) reporting exposure to all four of the most common induction supports (mentoring, common planning time, attendance in seminars/classes, and regular supportive communication with a principal/administrator) in both 2004 and 2008.

Professional Development Access Index

To provide an in-depth picture of professional development across states, the 2010 NSDC/SCOPE study identified the availability and quality of professional development across 11 criteria. The rationale for the criteria is explained in the full report. States like Arkansas and Utah

stand out for their higher levels of access to professional development for teachers, along with Colorado, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Oregon. To see where the 50 states and the District of Columbia stand against the 11 criteria, see pages 8 and 9 of this report.

Professional Development Access Index – State Performance on 11 Indicators

	Total Points (Out of 11 Possible Indicators)	Induction Indicators	1) At least 80% new teachers participating in induction	2) At least 80% new teachers working with a mentor teacher	3) At least 51% new teachers reporting 4 out of 5 induction supports	Professional Development Indicators	4) At least 80% teachers reporting PD on content
Nat'l			73.8%	78.4%	39.5%		87.5%
AL	🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏	🍏
AK	🍏🍏					🍏🍏	🍏
AZ	🍏🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏
AR	🍏🍏🍏🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏		🍏		🍏🍏🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏
CA	🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏	🍏
CO	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏🍏🍏	🍏
CT	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏🍏	🍏
DE	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏			🍏	🍏
DC	🍏🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏
FL	🍏🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏
GA	🍏					🍏	🍏
HI	🍏					🍏	🍏
ID	🍏					🍏	🍏
IL	🍏🍏					🍏🍏	🍏
IN							
IA	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏🍏	🍏
KS	🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏	🍏
KY	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏		🍏		🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏
LA	🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏	🍏
ME	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏		🍏		🍏🍏🍏	🍏
MD	🍏🍏					🍏🍏	🍏
MA	🍏🍏🍏	🍏	🍏			🍏🍏	🍏
MI	🍏🍏					🍏🍏	🍏
MN	🍏🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏
MS	🍏					🍏	🍏
MO	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏🍏	🍏
MT	🍏					🍏	🍏
NE	🍏					🍏	🍏
NV	🍏					🍏	🍏
NH	🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏	🍏
NJ	🍏🍏					🍏🍏	🍏
NM	🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏	🍏
NY	🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏	🍏
NC	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏🍏🍏	🍏
ND	🍏🍏					🍏🍏	🍏
OH	🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏			
OK	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏🍏	🍏
OR	🍏🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏
PA	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏🍏	🍏
RI	🍏					🍏	🍏
SC	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏🍏	🍏	🍏	🍏	🍏🍏	🍏
SD	🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏	🍏
TN	🍏					🍏	🍏
TX	🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏	🍏
UT	🍏🍏🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏🍏	🍏	🍏	🍏	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏
VT	🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏	🍏
VA	🍏🍏					🍏🍏	🍏
WA	🍏🍏					🍏🍏	🍏
WV	🍏🍏🍏🍏	🍏🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏🍏	🍏
WI	🍏					🍏	🍏
WY	🍏🍏🍏					🍏🍏🍏	🍏

	5) At least 51% teachers with 17 or more hours of PD on content	6) At least 67% teachers reporting PD on uses of computers	7) At least 67% teachers reporting PD on reading instruction	8) At least 67% teachers reporting PD on student discipline/classroom management	9) At least 51% teachers reporting PD on teaching students with disabilities	10) At least 51% teachers reporting PD on teaching ELL students	11) At least 50 average cumulative hours of PD on 6 topics
Nat'l	44.8%	67.0%	61.5%	45.7%	42.3%	27.9%	43.9 hrs
AL		🍏	🍏				
AK	🍏						
AZ			🍏			🍏	🍏
AR	🍏	🍏	🍏	🍏	🍏		🍏
CA						🍏	🍏
CO	🍏		🍏				
CT		🍏					
DE							
DC	🍏		🍏				🍏
FL		🍏	🍏				🍏
GA							
HI							
ID							
IL					🍏		
IN							
IA			🍏				
KS		🍏	🍏				
KY		🍏	🍏		🍏		
LA							
ME	🍏	🍏					
MD		🍏					
MA	🍏						
MI		🍏					
MN	🍏		🍏		🍏		
MS							
MO		🍏					
MT							
NE							
NV							
NH	🍏	🍏					
NJ		🍏					
NM							
NY							
NC		🍏	🍏				
ND		🍏					
OH							
OK		🍏					
OR	🍏		🍏			🍏	🍏
PA		🍏					
RI							
SC		🍏					
SD	🍏	🍏					
TN							
TX		🍏			🍏		
UT	🍏		🍏				🍏
VT	🍏						🍏
VA		🍏					
WA	🍏						
WV		🍏					
WI							
WY		🍏	🍏				

CONCLUSION

Research shows that teacher quality is the single most powerful influence on student achievement, and yet teachers in the United States receive far less professional development, mentoring, and planning time than teachers in the world's high-achieving nations. In order for our students to succeed, their teachers must also be supported to succeed. Studies have shown that teacher success can be fostered through high-quality professional development — professional development that is sustained, connected to practice and school initiatives, focused on academic content, and supportive of strong working relationships among teachers.

While professional learning in the United States is inconsistent and wide-ranging, there are states and districts that can be looked to as models of effective practice. Using a specific set of indicators this study points to those successful practices and suggests important steps for helping U.S. teachers succeed in their vital work.

One of the challenges NSDC and SCOPE encountered in analyzing the 2008 data is that

the federal government reduced the number of professional development items on the survey and changed the way others are asked, making some crucial questions more difficult to track over time. As researchers and policymakers learn more about what works in improving teacher quality and, by extension, student learning, the government must ensure access to more and higher-quality data.

CONCLUDING STUDY TO EXPLORE LINK BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE & STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Since the link between state policies and the effectiveness of professional development practices is relatively unexplored in research, the next phase of this study will include in-depth case studies of several states and districts that show evidence of exemplary, research-based practices and increases in student achievement. Through these case studies, NSDC and SCOPE hope to deepen current understanding of the kinds of policy contexts that lead to excellence in the practice of professional development at both the state and local levels. The concluding report will identify a set of state and/or national policies that can lead to more effective local professional development.

Sponsor

National Staff Development Council is a nonprofit membership group representing more than 12,000 educators committed to effective professional development for every educator every day. NSDC recognizes the singular purpose of effective professional learning as ensuring great teaching for every student so that all students achieve at high levels. NSDC believes that one way nations ensure high-quality teaching every day for every student is by creating policies that support school systems in delivering on this promise.

Funders

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is guided by the belief that every life has equal value and works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

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The Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE). SCOPE engages in research and development to support districts and schools that are equitable and enable all students to master the knowledge and skills needed for success in college, careers, and citizenship. Information on SCOPE can be found at: www.srnleads.org

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