

Investing in High Quality Professional Learning



Prepared by the

Utah State Office of Education

August 28, 2013

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Utah teachers are facing many new challenges in the classroom as they strive to implement new student performance standards and effective teaching standards. In order to ensure teachers are prepared to meet these challenges by making the instructional shifts necessary for students to be ready for their future, they must have the opportunity to engage in high quality professional learning. The Utah State Office of Education has invested time and money on resources to support implementation efforts in LEAs. Resources include providing space and time for teachers to come together to learn best practices in both face-to-face and virtual settings. Online book studies, Saturday seminars, online learning communities, video exemplars, and virtual coursework are additional supports provided as critical follow-up to initial professional development.

The largest professional development investment by USOE in the past couple of years has occurred in the form of the **Utah Core Academy**. The Board of Education updated the Utah mathematics and English language arts standards in August 2010, creating the need for a large investment in helping educators understand the changes in the standards and the accompanying instructional expectations. In addition, the Board adopted a five year implementation time line in anticipation of a new assessment system. The Utah Core Academy was created to provide high quality professional learning based on replicating the kinds of experiences expected of teachers in the classroom with students. USOE specialists worked with effective teachers, administrators, and university professors to design four day intensive seminars located throughout the state, serving K-12 teachers in districts and charters.

Over the course of three years 12,556 teachers have been served and 20% of these teachers have attended more than one year. In addition, hundreds of educators apply to be learning facilitators for the summer sessions but less than one third are selected based on experience, demonstrated effective teaching, ability to work with adult learners and references. USOE specialists worked with lead teachers and facilitators throughout the year to design quality sessions and ongoing learning experiences. The cost breakdown of the Utah Core Academies based on year-long preparation (including facilitator training, curriculum and material development, design work, and on site expenses), are as follows:

	FY11	FY12	FY13
# of Participants	4,582	4,172	4,192
# of Facilitators	104	116	193
On Site Supplies	\$391,809.57	\$367,872.13	\$564,108.87
Facilitator Costs			
Lodging	\$27,136.00	\$79,272.00	*\$149,127.58
Mileage	\$54,163.08	\$90,782.67	\$112,802.67

Stipends	\$337,800.00	\$574,625.00	\$650,008.47
Substitutes	\$16,946.35	\$23,267.29	\$26,413.55
Total	\$827,855.00	\$1,135,819.09	\$1,502,461.14

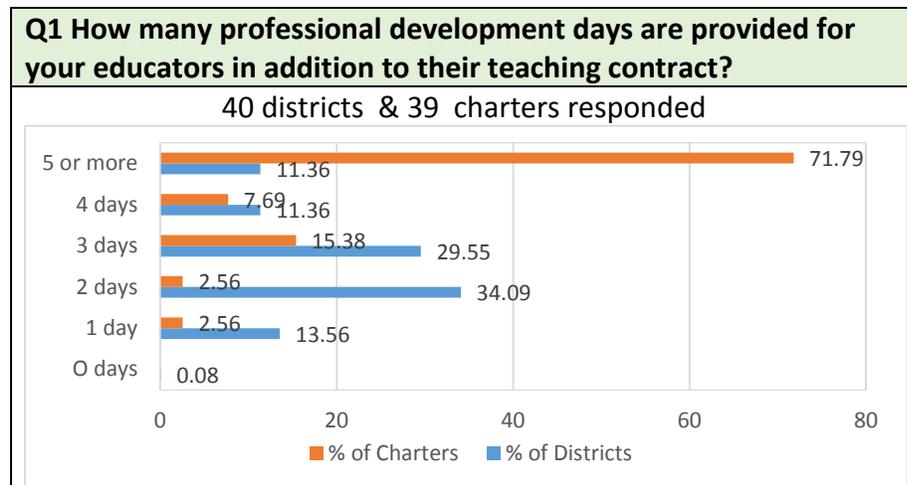
*The cost per person attending is about \$300 based on cost of supplies and materials, stipends for facilitators, lunch, and other expenses. The cost breakdown for 2012 and 2013 is reflective of expenses throughout the fiscal year that include training facilitators, preparing materials, working with design teams, travel expenses for facilitators to 14-16 sites, facilitator stipends, and printing. FY2013 supply costs are higher based on increased sites, additional printing costs for inclusion of new Utah Effective Teaching Standards, and providing funding for school sites to offset school costs associated with Academies. *Lodging reflects payment for San Juan participants and increase in hotel rates.*

How do we know these efforts made a difference? First we must look at the intended outcomes. The design of the Academy was created to increase knowledge in understanding the new English language arts and mathematics core standards and have experience with the instructional shifts called for to ensure all students will be ready for college and careers when they leave our system. This was a first important step in strengthening teacher practices in Utah classrooms. New skills were modeled for participants and they were then engaged in collaborative lesson design using new practices. By using all of these key elements of adult learning, the expectation is that there is transference of both knowledge and skills. Being able to evaluate the impact on student learning can only happen back at the school site, with the right conditions for ongoing collaborative work, time to practice new skills, and opportunities for feedback.

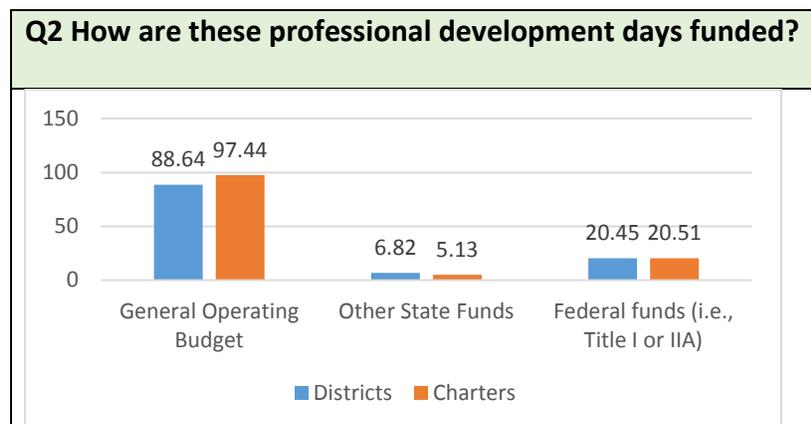
Our first level of evidence of impact is three years of robust survey data. Participants were not given credit for attending the four day Academy until they filled out an online survey that helped us collect data on change in attitudes and knowledge. This data gave us concrete information to share with leaders back in the charters and districts and provided feedback for improving future Academy designs. Key findings from the data included over 87% of the attendees feeling confident that teaching the new standards will help students be more prepared for college and careers and 90% indicated they learned new skills and increased their knowledge of instructional practices. In addition, we have viewed samples of student work based on the strategies from the Academies, received feedback from teachers about what they are changing in their practice, and have examined student achievement data this past year of our facilitators who have had the highest level of investment.

How are schools and districts providing resources for professional learning? Funds for professional learning given directly to schools and districts has greatly diminished over the past several years. With the **loss of nearly \$75 million dollars per year from the legislature by eliminating the Quality Teaching Block Grant in 2009**, schools have had a difficult time finding the necessary resources to invest in high quality learning for educators. This has resulted in fewer LEAs providing the support needed to provide follow-up and more time intensive

professional development. A brief survey was conducted recently (August, 2013) to assess how districts and charters are providing time for professional learning. Since many district leaders are asking for funding to be restored for professional development days, this was the focus of the survey. The questions and summary responses are as follows:



Charters significantly provide more professional development days in addition to the regular contract. One assumption is the ability of charters to be flexible with contract expectations. Another assumption is that districts have moved to more job-embedded models. Further analysis will provide a more accurate picture of why there is such a difference between the number of days provided.



Title I funds can only be used according to Title I federal guidelines which include professional development. Title IIA funds are available to all LEAs based on a weighted per pupil formula. Other state funds include grants awarded from MSP funds or legislated line items for specific programs or initiatives.

Q3 Have you used a waiver from Board rule of 180 instructional days as a way to provide professional development?

36% of Districts responding indicated using a waiver

26% of Charters responding indicated using a waiver

Districts or charters must make application to USOE requesting permission for a waiver to use one or more of the 180 instructional days for professional development. These percentages reflect greater response than the actual waivers that have been requested and granted. Further analysis is needed to determine why this discrepancy

exists. In addition, since charter schools in general have significantly more professional development days in the teacher contract, the need for a waiver warrants further explanation.

Q4 What is the purpose of professional development days in your LEA?	
<i>Listed by percentage of LEAs indicating this is a purpose of PD days</i>	
	LEAs combined
Improve Instruction	100%
Learn new knowledge and skills	82%
Analyze student achievement data	71%
Create lesson plans aligned with Utah Core Standards	63%
Study student work	28%

The most significant finding when disaggregating data between districts and charters was a much higher percentage of charter schools using the days to learn new knowledge and skills. This correlates with the higher number of new teachers and mobile teachers hired in charter schools. Learning how to implement new programs would occur at higher levels for teachers new to a school.

When do schools and districts find time for professional development? Professional development may occur during the school day, before or after classes, on weekends, days set aside in the calendar without students, during the summer or other breaks, or on the educators own time through technology or other means. Learning teams for adults (often known as professional learning communities), are becoming a prominent form of professional learning. Professional development is more relevant when team members are able to discuss what they have learned, practice with feedback in a classroom, and analyze student data to see if their instruction is making a difference. This is all part of the cycle of ongoing improvement, (Mizell, 2010). The next question looks at various ways LEAs are finding time for professional development in their settings and determining which of these seem to be the most effective. The limitation to this question is that it was answered by LEA leadership rather than by the educators who are participating in the professional development.

Q5 Rank the following as the most effective use of time for collaborative professional learning in your school or district. (Listed in rank order from most to least effective).	
Districts	Charters
1. Professional learning communities	1. Professional development days
2. Professional development days	2. Early release or late start
3. Workshops on specific topics	3. Professional learning communities
4. Team meetings	4. Workshops on specific topics
5. Common planning time	5. Team meetings
6. Early release or late start	6. Staff/faculty meetings
7. Staff/faculty meetings	7. Common planning time
8. Training after school or on weekends	8. Training after school or on weekends

The question might be asked, “Does the amount of money make a difference in providing professional learning opportunities?” Research from Jacob and Lefgren (2002), indicates that while more expensive professional development activities don’t necessarily guarantee it will be more effective, professional development done without the proper resources invested will almost certainly have little or no impact. What matters most is how the professional learning experiences are planned and implemented.

What do experts recommend for investing in professional learning? The chart below illustrates various resources that include staff, time, funding, technology, and materials needed to support high quality professional learning. The model identifies resources needed to support professional learning as well as realignment and repurposing of existing resources. Laura Goe suggests that given the importance of teacher quality to student learning and the link between teacher quality and professional development, the greater investment is likely to lead to greater levels of student learning, (Archibald, Cogshell, Croft, and Goe, 2011).

Investment	Purpose
<p>10 days embedded within educators’ work year and/or expanding educators’ work year.</p>	<p><i>To extend individual, team, school-wide, and district-wide professional learning, teachers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in university courses; • Enroll in expert- and peer-facilitated workshops; • Engage in blended, face-to-face, and online courses; • Attend local, state, or national conferences, and • Interact virtually or in person with researchers and other experts.
<p>Adjust school-day schedules to provide three to four hours weekly for collaboration among teachers, between teachers and their principals, and among principals.</p>	<p><i>To provide daily time for educators to transfer learning into practice, develop shared experience, and refine practice through continuous improvement by;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studying content standards and curriculum to plan units and lessons of curriculum, assessment, and instruction; • Analyzing student learning progressions to identify and design interventions; • Solving problems related to student learning; • Calibrating student performance expectations, • Supporting peer professional growth; and • Reflecting on and assessing practice.
<p>Provide technology infrastructure and innovative programs and resources to increase accessibility, efficiency, and adaptability of professional learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide access to just-in-time learning, models of effective practices, simulations of classrooms and schools, tools for knowledge management, analysis of practice, and presentation of learning; • To connect educators with local and global networks of experts and peers to solve problems, seek information and support, and give and receive constructive feedback; and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make educators’ practice public in networking environments.
<p>Provide differentiated staffing and compensation to support coaches, mentors, and teacher and principals leaders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To tap the expertise of educators within the school and school system through which master teachers and principals provide mentoring, coaching, and facilitated learning to individuals, teams and school faculty to adapt and implement learning; • To increase the accuracy and frequency of use of the practices; and • To increase their collective expertise.
<p>Increase funding for individual and school/team professional learning including expert consultants, technical assistance, conference registrations, program fees, print or electronic professional books and journals, memberships to professional associations, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To maintain professional libraries with resources linked to national, state, district, and school goals; • To provide registrations for local, state, and national conferences to acquire cutting-edge research and practices; and • To access technical assistance from experts with new perspectives and research-and evidence-based practice to support goal attainment and address identified gaps, needs, or problems.

From an evidence based adequacy model by Odden, Goetz, and Picus (2008). Included in “Investments in Professional Learning Must Change”, Killion and Hirsh, Learning Forward, JSD, August, 2013.

How do we evaluate professional development to ensure the investment is worthwhile?

Evaluating professional learning starts with the design. Student achievement data is the catalyst for determining what teacher knowledge and skills should be the focus of professional learning. Once this step is determined then the design must take into consideration the content and the duration required for educators to learn and apply the skills that will address the gaps in student learning (Mizell, 2010). Evaluating success of the investment then occurs at three levels:

1. What is the evidence that as a result of the professional development, educators learned what is necessary for them to more effectively address student learning problems? (After this analysis we must then determine what support or assistance is needed to help educators apply the knowledge and skills they have learned.)
2. What is the evidence that educators’ application of what they learned in professional development has enabled them to improve their instruction and more effectively address student learning problems?
3. What is the evidence that student learning and achievement have increased as a result of educators’ applying the new knowledge and skills they learned in professional development?

What can we do to improve professional learning practices that will lead to all students being ready for college and careers as they leave high school? Teachers and principals need multiple opportunities to develop deep content-specific knowledge, expand content-specific instructional strategies, examine how students learn, and apply new learning with extended support and constructive feedback. Principals need to expand their capacity to serve as instructional leaders and support teacher and student learning. To meet these expectations, schools, districts, states, and other educational interests, must make the investments outlined in the chart above. Those leading, offering, or facilitating professional learning, (including USOE staff, schools, districts, universities, or private vendors), “must be clear on the outcomes of professional learning, have a long-term plan for supporting implementation of new learning, and the committed resources the plan demands. There is no way around it”, (Killion & Hirsh, 2013).

The role of the Utah State Office of Education is to provide resources, expertise, and support in initiating systemic professional development to support Core standards and Board initiatives; paying particular attention to the LEAs who do not have the capacity to carry out large scale initiatives on their own. USOE must be committed to modeling best professional learning practices and engaging teachers in the kind of learning we expect to see in classrooms. At school, it is everyone’s job to learn. High quality learning must be assured for adults if we expect to see high levels of learning for all students.

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