



Professional Development Should be Differentiated

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Last month, I wrote, "[Why I Differentiate PD.](#)" I shared that my experience of being forced to attend a PD where I was an expert was a waste of my time, and failed to develop other skills I wanted to improve. It is easy to implement a one-size-fits-all professional development plan. Leaders often don't get the results they want because they were lazy and took a simpler route. If we differentiate for students, we must also differentiate for teachers. Below are ways to better plan building wide PD.

Start with the school improvement plan (SIP)

The SIP should be the guiding star. It includes areas of improvement the school leadership wants to tackle. Those areas should be the PD focus. Focusing on too many areas is a quick way to divide attention in so many places that nothing gets done well. Also, collect feedback from staff members on where they would like to be developed. Staff wants must be included to help get buy-in for the overall plan.

Assess the skills of your staff relating to the identified focus areas

If an area is targeted for improvement, that doesn't mean all staff members have issues. If school administrators or instructional coaches don't know who has mastery, they probably need to be in classrooms more. For staff with mastery, have them help with PD implementation. They might not be able to come to another grade level meeting but even having them record a video explaining a concept or a video of them implementing the concept with students is powerful. Next, ask them where they want to stretch and grow. Just as proficient students don't always want to help others and wish they had something special for them, proficient teachers feel the same way.

Create a practical PD schedule

How often have teachers received a PD calendar just for dates to be canceled left & right? Schools should not have professional development meetings during the first month of the school year or the last month. This does not include PD before the school year begins. Teachers are bombarded with a lot of information during the PD that takes place before school begins. They need time to process and implement it. Administrators need time to get into classrooms to address hot spots with classroom management or routines. Also, all dates should be communicated to teachers before the school year begins. This allows teachers to plan appointments outside of those dates when possible.

Create a PD implementation plan

Receiving information and doing nothing with it is a waste of time. Instructional coaches and school leaders should have identified tangible actions they want to see happen based on the professional development. They should regularly check for all teachers throughout the school year to ensure it is actually happening. Most importantly, they should follow up and hold teachers accountable if they are not doing what was asked.

Make adjustments

Plans should be living documents. They should have adjustments based on how the implementation is going.

One size does not fit all when it comes to staff development. Teachers should have some autonomy and voice in their professional development. Leaders should have a PD plan and hold themselves accountable for effective implementation.