

# **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)**

## ***What are the requirements for PD under CT Public Act No. 12-116 (An Act Concerning Educational Reform)?***

- Provide a minimum of 18 hours annually of PD;
- Preponderance of small group or individual instructional setting;
- Comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach to improving teacher and administrator effectiveness in increasing student knowledge achievement;
- Focus on refining and improving various effective teaching methods that are shared between and among educators;
- Foster collective responsibility for improved student performance;
- Shall be comprised of professional learning that meets the following criteria–
  - aligns with rigorous state student academic achievement standards;
  - conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by principals, coaches, mentors, distinguished educators, or other appropriate teachers;
  - occurs frequently on an individual basis or among groups of teachers in a job-embedded process of continuous improvement
  - includes a repository of best practices for teaching methods developed by educators within each school that is continuously available to such educators for comment and updating.

## ***What constitutes professional development?***

When people use the term “professional development,” they usually mean a formal process such as a conference, seminar, or workshop; collaborative learning among members of a work team; or a course at a college or university. However, professional development can also occur in informal contexts such as discussions among work colleagues, independent reading and research, observations of a colleague’s work, or other learning from a peer.

## ***How does professional development in K–12 public education differ from professional development in other fields?***

In public schools, effective professional development affects students. Student learning and achievement increase when educators engage in effective professional development focused on the skills educators need in order to address students’ major learning challenges.

## ***Why do educators need professional development? Didn’t teachers learn everything they need to know in college?***

College and university programs cannot provide the extensive range of learning experiences necessary for graduates to become effective public school educators. Once students graduate, meet their state’s certification requirements, and are employed, they learn through experience. As in all professions, new teachers and principals take years to gain the skills they need to be effective in their roles. The complexity of teaching is so great that one-third of teachers leave the profession within three years and 50% leave within five years (Ingersoll, 2003). Even experienced teachers confront great challenges each year, including changes in subject content, new instructional methods, advances in technology, changes in laws and procedures, and different student learning needs. Educators who do not experience effective professional development do not improve their skills, and student learning suffers.

## ***What is effective professional development?***

Effective professional development enables educators to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students’ learning challenges. To be effective, professional development requires thoughtful planning followed by careful implementation with feedback to ensure it responds to educators’ learning needs. Educators who participate in professional development then must put their new knowledge and skills to work. Professional development is not effective unless it causes teachers to improve their instruction or causes administrators to become better school leaders.

### ***When do public school educators typically engage in professional development?***

Professional development is most effective when it occurs in the context of educators' daily work. When learning is part of the school day, all educators are engaged in growth rather than learning being limited to those who volunteer to participate on their own. School-based professional development helps educators analyze student achievement data during the school year to immediately identify learning problems, develop solutions, and promptly apply those solutions to address students' needs. Professional development also can be useful if it takes place before classes begin or after they end.

Professional development may occur:

- During the regular school day;
- At school, but before classes begin or after they end;
- After school on an educator's own time;
- During days a school system sets aside solely for professional development; or
- During the summer and other school breaks.

### ***Where does professional development typically occur for educators?***

Educators benefit most by learning in the setting where they can immediately apply what they learn — in the school where they work. However, other professional development may occur at:

- An educator's school district office or professional development center/ school;
- A third-party site such as an education service center or learning center;
- Another school, school system, state, or a foreign country;
- A college or university (summer or evening courses, or institutes);
- Local, state, or national conferences, seminars, or workshops; or
- Online.

### ***Why can't educators just use online professional development?***

Online professional development can be useful for learning content and even observing video demonstrations of effective teaching or leadership. Some online professional development also provides interactive, real-time discussion among participants and an expert.

However, there are limitations to online professional development:

- The professional development may not relate to the specific learning challenges of an educator's students.
- An educator learns in isolation rather than as a member of a team where participants learn from colleagues' expertise, experience, and insights.
- Educators' collective growth has a greater impact on student learning across the school than individual learning does.
- No one will know whether or how well an educator applies his or her learning to benefit students.

### ***What are typical modes of professional development?***

- Individual reading/study/research.
- Study groups among peers focused on a shared need or topic.
- Observation: teachers observing other teachers.
- Coaching: an expert teacher coaching one or more colleagues.
- Mentoring of new educators by more experienced colleagues.
- Team meetings to plan lessons, problem solve, improve performance, and/or learn a new strategy.
- Faculty, grade-level, or departmental meetings.
- Online courses.
- College/university courses.
- Workshops to dig deeper into a subject.

- Conferences to learn from a variety of expertise from around the state or country.
- Whole-school improvement programs.
- Proprietary programs by private vendors.