

Teacher Professional Development in Tennessee – Part 2

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Key Points

- While there is little Tennessee-specific research on the effects of teacher professional development, studies from other parts of the country show that quality professional development has a positive impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement.
- In Tennessee, teacher professional development is primarily provided for and funded at the local level. The state education funding formula does not include a professional development funding component.
- Sufficient data does not exist to determine whether professional development offerings align with research-based practices; data on how much funding school districts allocate for professional development is not available.
- Professional development is undergoing significant changes through federal Race to the Top grant initiatives. Data remains limited on the impact of these initiatives.
- Results from a statewide survey of Tennessee teachers indicate that teachers believe that: (1) teacher professional development is aligned with school improvement plans and student data, (2) professional development is not targeted to meet the individual needs of teachers, and (3) there is a gap between the professional development that teachers believe they need and what they are currently receiving. This may be an indication that school improvement plans are not aligned with the needs of teachers.

Introduction

This is the second installment in a two-part series meant to inform the Tennessee General Assembly on the current state of teacher professional development in the state's^A K–12 public schools and to chart the changes to professional development scheduled to take place over the next few years. The first installment in this series, *Teacher Professional Development in Tennessee – Part 1*, provided an overview of professional development, listed best practices, described related state laws and policies, depicted the state of teacher professional development in Tennessee prior to the award of a federal Race to the Top grant, and described

Tennessee's original plans for changes to teacher professional development under the grant. This brief describes the changes in professional development as a result of the state's First to the Top initiative, analyzes changes to professional development policies and practices at the state and local level, and provides policy considerations.^B

In Tennessee, professional development is mostly provided for and funded at the local level.

^A This series of reports describes in-service teacher professional development (i.e., professional development provided by school districts or the Tennessee Department of Education) and does not include information on professional development provided by outside sources (such as colleges and universities) unless school districts or the Department contract with outside providers.

^B For the purposes of this report, the terms "professional development," "training," and "in-service training" are used interchangeably.

Overview of Teacher Professional Development in Tennessee

Research has shown that quality professional development has a positive impact on teacher practice, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement; however, little Tennessee-specific research exists on the impact of professional development. In Tennessee, school districts hold the primary responsibility for determining the training that teachers receive. School districts choose professional development offerings and provide most of the necessary funding. The state education funding formula, the Basic Education Program (BEP), does not include a professional development component. State and federal laws and policies exert some influence on teacher professional development. For example, Tennessee state law requires that all teachers attend specific professional development training sessions (e.g., sexual violence awareness and prevention) and requires school districts to set aside five days for in-service training, though districts determine the type of professional development provided. In Tennessee, professional development also impacts teachers' salaries, licensure, evaluations, and personal leave time.

One of the most significant recent changes to professional development in Tennessee stems from the state's federal Race to the Top (RTTT) grant award in 2010. More than a quarter of the state's share of RTTT funding (\$68.1 million or 27.2 percent) was budgeted for professional development and related initiatives.^C Federal law also governs professional development in districts that use funding from No Child Left Behind "Title II" grants for professional development. The law describes the characteristics of professional development activities that must be evident for school districts to receive grant funding (e.g., activities that increase teachers' content knowledge, are not short-term, and increase teachers' understanding of effective instructional strategies).

State-Level Teacher Professional Development Programs and Practices in Tennessee

Tennessee's role with regard to teacher professional development is focused on two main areas: administering the state's Electronic Learning Center (ELC) and administering RTTT grant-related initiatives.^D The ELC provides professional development for educators through online podcasts. One of the state's goals in its grant application was to create and implement "a thorough rollout plan of in-person, online, and school-specific professional development."¹ All of the grant's teacher professional development initiatives are funded for a period of four years or less, and may cease to exist once the grant funding expires. School districts will assign specific teachers to attend professional development offerings; teacher attendance is not mandated by the state.² The main state-level professional development initiatives and budgeted amounts for implementation are:

1. **Teacher and Principal Residency Grant Program (\$8 million)** – These grants are being used to support induction and mentoring programs for teachers and principals.³ The programs will serve both new and veteran teachers and principals and are being operated in conjunction with higher education institutions in Memphis, Nashville, and Chattanooga. The veteran teacher program grants are to "utilize the extensive professional knowledge and skills of veteran teachers to serve as researchers, trainers, and/or experts in the field."⁴ Memphis City Schools and the Hamilton County Department of Education each received a \$2 million grant to support programs for new teachers and principals. Metro-Nashville Public Schools and Memphis City Schools each received a \$2 million grant to support programs for veteran teachers and principals.

^C This includes, but is not limited to, funding for Common Core Standards professional development, Integrating Common Core Standards into Pre-Service, Integrating Data to Improve Instruction, ELC, Data Dashboard, STEM professional development, Oak Ridge Associated Universities STEM Teacher Training Academy, Sites-M and Rural Literacy Programs. (Tennessee Department of Education, "Budget Part 1: Budget Summary Narrative," <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Dec. 7, 2010).

^D Some divisions within the TDOE provide professional development for specific teachers, such as career and technical education teachers.

2. **Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) professional development (\$15.5 million, which includes \$4,150,000 in RTTT funding)**⁵ – The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE or Department) contracted with SAS and Battelle for Kids to provide educators free access to online training on how to access, understand, and use TVAAS data to improve instruction and address students' individual learning needs.⁶

3. **Professional development on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (\$5.9 million)**⁷ – The TDOE developed a multi-phase rollout plan to implement the standards over a four-year period beginning in 2011–12 with grades K–2.⁸ Department officials decided to implement K–2 standards first for two reasons: students in the early grades do not take state assessments under the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), and the more rigorous curriculum standards will help prepare the students to take assessments tied to the Common Core, which are expected to commence in 2014–15. The TDOE provided standards training in summer and fall 2011 to 1,800 teachers in grades K–2. After completing the training, teachers returned to their school districts and trained other teachers.⁹ In February 2012, the Department created the Common Core Leadership Council to advise and assist with the development and implementation of CCSS professional development.¹⁰ The Council will select and train Exemplary Educators to assist with training beginning in summer 2012.¹¹ The TDOE plans to provide further standards training in summer 2012, targeting 12,000 to 14,000 math teachers in grades 3 through 8; and in summer 2013, to the remaining grade 3–8 math teachers and teachers of 9–12 math, 3–12 English Language Arts, and 6–12 literacy for social studies, math and science.¹² The Department also has created standards training online through the Tennessee Electronic Learning Center and created a website with teacher resources: www.tncore.org.¹³

4. **Electronic Learning Center Expansion (\$4,764,767)**¹⁴ – Instructional resources and courses for teachers from the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) have been added to the ELC, including access to the PBS Digital Media Library online that has thousands of content area learning modules for teachers and students. The TDOE is partnering with PBS to develop learning modules on the CCSS. The Department has purchased 590 course enrollments from PBS and is in the process of determining how these resources align with the Common Core and how they can be utilized to meet Tennessee's professional development needs.¹⁵

5. **Expansion of the Sites-M Program (\$8 million)** – Through the Sites-M program, Tennessee colleges and universities provide professional development to math teachers in elementary and middle schools. Using RTTT funding, the Sites-M program expanded to include an additional university (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga) and extend service to nine additional elementary and middle schools. The Sites-M program works through six universities, including Tennessee State University, Fisk University, Knoxville College, Lane College, LeMoyne-Owen College, and University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and serves 12 elementary schools and four middle schools.¹⁶

6. **Establishment of the Tennessee STEM Innovation Network (TSIN) (\$16.3 million)** – The purpose of TSIN is to link together all STEM efforts in the state and encourage formal and informal teacher professional development as a means to increase teacher effectiveness in STEM-related fields.¹⁷ As part of the TSIN, six regional STEM Hubs will be created. The Hubs are formalized partnerships between business and community organizations, K–12 institutions, and postsecondary institutions in Tennessee.¹⁸ The Department contracted with Battelle Memorial Institute in October 2010 to manage TSIN. In November 2011, the Department awarded grants of \$850,000 to

Metro Nashville Public Schools and Knox County Schools to lead the Middle and East Tennessee Regional Innovation Hubs for two years (2012–2014).¹⁹ The Hubs will identify gaps in STEM K–12 education programs and work to fill those gaps in part by identifying existing high-quality STEM professional development, developing high-quality professional development, and creating a system for sharing professional development resources.²⁰

7. **Institutions of higher education K–12 STEM professional development grants (\$6 million)**²¹ – These grants are awarded to public and private institutions of higher education in Tennessee to fund the creation of STEM professional development programs for K–12 teachers.²² In 2011, the state awarded funding to Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, Lipscomb University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University, and University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. The first-year goal of the program was to provide professional development to 300 STEM K–12 teachers in the 2011–12 school year.²³ The Tennessee Higher Education Commission released another request for proposal in February 2012 for a second round of grant funding for the STEM Professional Development Program to provide approximately \$4.2 million for institutions from May 2012 to December 2013.
8. **Establishment of the STEM Training Academy (\$1.5 million)**²⁴ – The Department contracted with Oak Ridge Associated Universities to provide an annual three-day (11 hours per day) STEM Training Academy for Tennessee public school teachers and administrators.²⁵ The first training academy provided professional development for 55 lead STEM teachers in summer 2012, and a second training is scheduled for summer 2013 for 75

teachers. In summer 2014, teachers who attended the first two academies will receive additional training.

9. **Professional development for teachers at Focus Schools (\$3,745,000)** – In the 2010–11 school year, 176 focus schools (schools in either School Improvement 1 or 2 status) received \$3,000 (half-year) or \$6,000 (full-year), (\$840,000 total), to implement programs and practices that improve student achievement.²⁶ Most of these schools are using a large portion of their funding to send teachers and school administrators to training on best practices for turning around low-performing schools.
10. **Rural literacy program (\$1.5 million)** – The Department contracted with Save the Children^E for \$1.5 million over four years to expand the rural literacy program to provide instructional coaches and other intervention literacy supports for both teachers and students in three additional low-performing rural elementary schools in Tennessee.²⁷
11. **New teacher evaluation system (\$5.9 million)**²⁸ – See “Impact of the New Teacher Evaluation System on Teacher Professional Development” for more information.

The Department is creating a professional development provider report card that districts can consult when choosing a professional development vendor. The report card will include data on provider effectiveness (based on TVAAS trends) and customer satisfaction (based on satisfaction surveys of past participants). The TDOE is also developing a system that will collect information on the vendors that school districts are contracting with and the professional development each vendor is providing.²⁹

^E Save the Children is a nonprofit organization that works with policymakers, families, communities, and other organizations to improve the lives of children through education, health services, emergency response services, and advocacy.
<http://www.savethechildren.org/>

Impact of the New Teacher Evaluation System on Teacher Professional Development

The new state teacher evaluation, the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM):

1. evaluates teachers' professional growth, measured in part by teachers' participation in professional development;
2. is designed to be used by teachers and evaluators to determine the professional development teachers need;
3. encourages LEAs to identify effective teachers and use those teachers to provide training and support to other teachers.

The new evaluations are used by teachers to identify their professional development needs and by school administrators to determine what professional development should be provided to meet the needs of teachers.

The TDOE is providing training on the implementation of TEAM. School districts indicate that they have aligned professional development with the model. (For more information on the new teacher evaluations, see the OREA Legislative Brief *Teacher Evaluations: Recent Teacher Policy Changes in Tennessee* at <http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/OREA/>.)

As part of the evaluation system, teachers are observed two to six times per year, with pre- and post-conferences for each observation. One of the main goals of the post-conference is for teachers to reflect on their practice.³⁰ During the post-conference, teachers and evaluators jointly create a list of specific professional development opportunities tied to each area identified for improvement.³¹ Since teacher professional development is primarily provided at the local level, it is the responsibility of school districts to align professional development with TEAM.³²

Evaluators also meet with each teacher in an end-of-year conference. During this conference, teachers are evaluated on the degree to which they are “growing and

developing professionally,” based on the following performance standards:³³

- The educator is prompt, prepared, and participates in professional development opportunities;
- The educator appropriately attempts to implement new strategies;
- The educator develops and works on a personal learning plan based on analysis of school improvement plans and goals, self-assessment, and feedback from observations.

Scores on these performance standards are factored into the 50 percent qualitative portion of the overall evaluation score. TEAM has three components: qualitative (i.e., observation of teachers, 50 percent of the total score), measures of student achievement (e.g., TCAP or other locally selected achievement measures, 15 percent), and student growth (i.e., TVAAS, 35 percent).³⁴

The new evaluation system also addresses teacher leadership. Classroom teachers demonstrate leadership by mentoring and guiding other teachers. They engage in leadership roles in the learning community, and collaborate with school administrators to improve the educational quality of the school.³⁵ Teacher leaders must be practicing teachers, must lead by example, and must be considered by their peers to be expert teachers. The Department recommends that school districts assign high-performing teachers to work with low-performing teachers to improve their instructional practices. Teachers identified by TEAM as high performing can also be used as TEAM evaluators (as long as they have attended the Department's TEAM training and passed the evaluator certification test).³⁶ Some districts are using Lead Teachers to evaluate and provide professional development to teachers.^E

The TDOE recommends that high-performing teachers identified by TEAM should work with low-performing teachers to improve their instructional practice.

^F Lead Teacher: A teacher who is considered to be an expert teacher and who is highly effective. Lead teachers usually coach and/or mentor other teachers, evaluate teachers, lead professional development, assist the school principal with creating and implementing the school improvement plan, and lead Professional Learning Communities.

The Department provides free training for TEAM evaluators, who must annually attend four days of training and pass a certification test.³⁷ The Department has also created webinars and launched the TEAM website to provide information to districts, school administrators, and teachers.³⁸

School districts can use a different teacher evaluation model if approved by the State Board of Education (SBOE or State Board).³⁹ In June 2011, the State Board approved three alternative teacher evaluation models, each of which is aligned with professional development and measures teachers' professional growth.⁴⁰

- The Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM, Memphis City) – contains a “Teacher Knowledge” section, which counts for five percent of the total TEM score and measures teachers' knowledge of pedagogy and their content area.⁴¹
- The Teacher Instructional Growth for Effectiveness and Results (TIGER, Association of Independent and Municipal Schools - AIMS) – aligned with targeted professional growth plans for each teacher and utilizes peer evaluators, coaches, and professional learning communities in addition to professional development training sessions (provided online and in a classroom setting) to provide the tools and resources needed for teachers to improve their instructional practices.⁴²
- Project Coach (Hamilton County) – developed using Hamilton County's professional development curriculum.⁴³

All three alternative teacher evaluation models approved by the SBOE are aligned with professional development and measure teachers' professional growth.

Local-level Teacher Professional Development Programs and Practices

School districts hold the primary responsibility for developing, implementing, and funding professional development. Statewide information on district-level professional development offerings, administration, and funding is not collected. Most information on local-level teacher professional development programs and

practices comes from data collected as part of certain federal grant programs, such as Race to the Top. Another source of information is a teaching and learning conditions survey administered to principals, teachers, and other licensed educators: the Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Tennessee Survey.⁴⁴ Tennessee administered its first TELL Survey in February 2011; 77 percent of educators in the state responded.⁴⁵ Results from the TELL Survey indicate that:

- 1. Educators believe that teacher professional development is important:** 85 percent of educators believe that professional development enhances a teacher's ability to improve student learning and 73 percent believe that “professional development deepens teachers' content knowledge”; however, only one percent believe that teacher professional development is the *most* important teaching condition that affects their willingness to keep teaching at their school and only three percent believe it is the *most* important teaching condition that promotes student learning.
- 2. School administrators and school district personnel decide the professional development that is offered to teachers:** the majority of educators believe that teachers play either a small role or no role at all in deciding the in-service training that is provided (57 percent), and school administrators play either a moderate or large role (87 percent).
- 3. Most educators believe that professional development is aligned with data and school improvement plans, but less than two-thirds believe that professional development is targeted to meet the needs of individual teachers:** 86 percent of educators believe that “professional development offerings are data driven,” and 89 percent believe that “professional learning opportunities are aligned with their school's improvement plan”; however, only 63 percent believe that “professional development is differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers.”

4. **Most educators believe that enough resources are provided for professional development:** 80 percent believe that sufficient resources are available for professional development at their school.
5. **Most educators believe that the professional development they receive fosters teacher collaboration:** 80 percent of survey respondents indicated that teachers in their school participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and 68 percent of beginning teachers reported that they had access to a PLC; 75 percent of educators believe that “professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices.”
6. **Educators believe that enough time is allocated for professional development:** 81 percent of educators believe that “an appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development,” and 67 percent reported that they spend less than or equal to one hour per week on professional development (see Exhibit 1); 66 percent reported that they spent two to seven days on professional development in the 2010–11 school year (see Exhibit 2).
7. **Educators believe they need more professional development:** When asked about specific professional development content, on average, 41 percent of teachers stated that they received 10 hours or more of professional development over the past two years on 10 specific topics (e.g., closing the achievement gap); on average, 52 percent stated that they need more professional development on these topics (see Exhibit 3).
8. **Educators are mixed on whether professional development is evaluated, but believe teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice:** 59 percent of educators believe that “professional development is evaluated and results are communicated to teachers,” and 69 percent

believe that “follow-up is provided for professional development”; 78 percent believe that “school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about professional development,” and 90 percent believe that “teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice.”

District-Level Race to the Top Teacher Professional Development

Districts are allocating a significant portion (32 percent) of their RTTT funds to professional development.⁴⁶ Detailed funding allocations are difficult to determine because school districts have combined many of their professional development initiatives with other First to the Top initiatives. Districts are using RTTT funding to

Exhibit 1: Number of Hours in an Average Week that Educators Spend on Professional Development

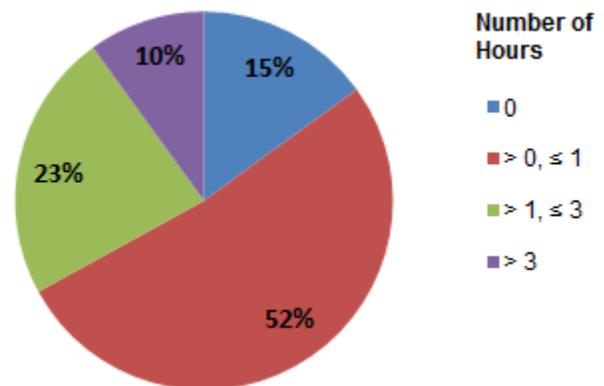
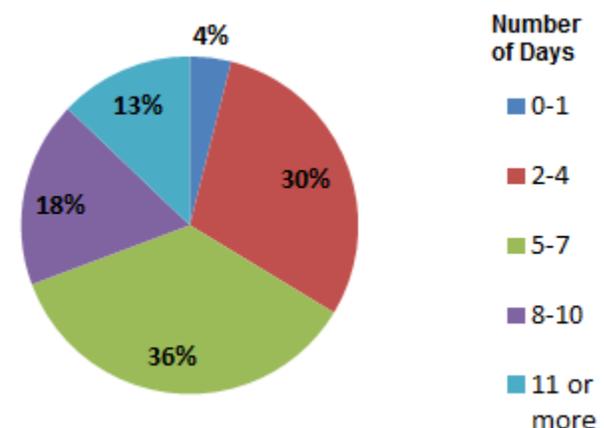


Exhibit 2: Number of Days Educators Attended Professional Development in the 2010-11 School Year



Source: TELL Tennessee Survey, “Survey Results: Questions 2.2(h) and 8.5,” 2011, <http://telltennessee.org/> (accessed Jul. 28, 2011).

provide professional development in a number of areas including the new teacher evaluation system, CCSS, data systems, formative assessments, TCAP, TVAAS, technology, differentiated instruction, research-based instructional strategies, Response to Intervention, STEM, core subject area content and pedagogy, college readiness programs, school improvement, and teacher leadership.⁴⁷ School districts are also using First to the Top funds to provide professional development for new and low-performing teachers, and to provide or expand teachers' access to online professional development. (See the OREA legislative brief *Teacher Professional Development in Tennessee – Part 1* for more information.) The performance goals school districts have set for the professional development initiatives include increased student achievement, increased teacher effectiveness, and increased teacher participation in professional development.

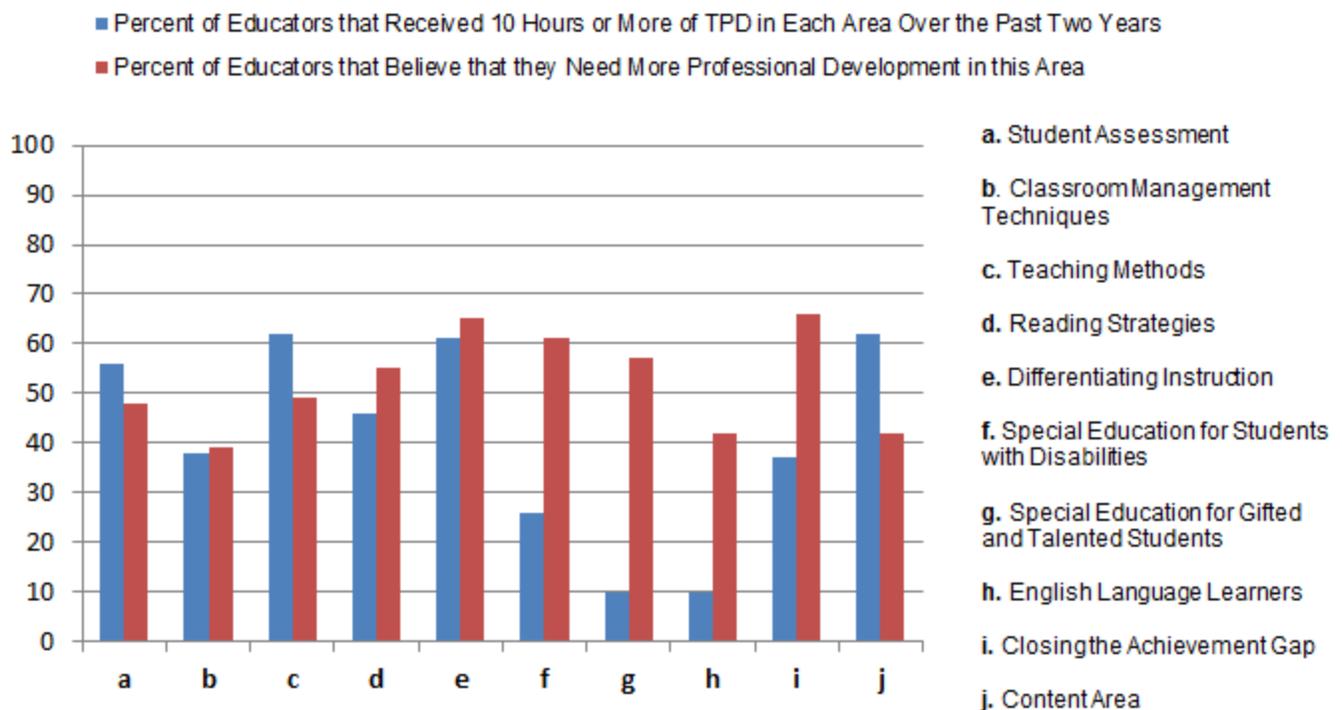
Under the Race to the Top grant, school districts were required to document their professional development offerings and the extent to which those offerings align with research-based best practices. (See the box titled "Best Practices for Teacher Professional Development.") Some of the professional development best practices

evident in school districts' documentation (referred to as Scopes of Work) include:

- professional development is
 - o based on federal, state, and/ or school district education standards
 - o aligned with federal, state, and/ or school district goals and initiatives
 - o provided over a period of time
 - o concentrates on content knowledge and imparts content pedagogy to teachers
 - o imparts pedagogical best practices "grounded" in research on recognized instructional practices and learning methodologies
- School districts are providing time and stipends for teachers to attend training
- Schools and districts provide teachers with any help or assistance they may need in order to master the knowledge/ skills/strategies imparted in the training and use them effectively in the classroom

Districts are allocating a significant amount (32 percent) of their RTTT funding to professional development.

Exhibit 3: Type and Amount of Professional Development Teachers Received in 2009-2011



Source: TELL Tennessee Survey, "Survey Results: Questions 8.2 and 8.3," 2011, <http://telltennessee.org/> (accessed May 3, 2011).

School districts are also supposed to be using student achievement data and teacher evaluation ratings to determine what professional development teachers need. Some of the best practices that are not prevalent in school districts' documentation are:

- Districts and schools
 - o encourage and provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate and influence decisions regarding professional development curriculum and topics, and other school policies, procedures, and programs
 - o target professional development to meet the needs of each individual teacher
 - o develop professional development in accordance with the current programs and operating conditions at the school/district level
 - o develop a system of inducements to encourage teachers to enroll in and undertake training sessions/activities
 - o sustain professional development over time (past the four years of the First to the Top grant)
 - o recognize and reward teachers who have completed professional development and effectively incorporated it in the classroom
 - o evaluate professional development repeatedly: the school/district measures teaching practices and links them to student achievement outcomes as evidenced through data; encourage and prepare educators to identify the training they need, determine whether they have successfully implemented what they learned in their classrooms, and evaluate their student achievement data to ascertain if those practices have had a positive impact on student achievement

In addition, while school districts have set performance goals for teacher professional development initiatives, it is not clear how the effectiveness of professional development is being evaluated.

Teacher Professional Development in Teacher Bonus Programs and Alternative Salary Schedules

Some school districts have received federal grants that have further enhanced professional development offerings through the creation and implementation of alternative salary schedules and/or performance-based compensation systems. Teachers in these districts may receive a bonus or a higher salary for attending more professional development or for training other teachers.⁴⁸

1. **Teacher Incentive Fund** – Some of the 12 school districts in Tennessee that received grants to develop performance-based compensation systems are paying teachers to attend professional development. (The districts are Bradford, Hamilton, Hollow-Rock Bruceton, Johnson County, Knox, Lebanon, Lexington City, Memphis, McMinn, MNPS, Putnam, Shelby, and Tipton.)⁴⁹ For example, Lebanon Special School District and Shelby County Schools are paying teachers \$25 per hour up to 10 hours for attending additional professional development beyond the required courses.⁵⁰
2. **Innovation Acceleration Fund** – Four school districts in Tennessee (Putnam County, Trousdale County, Lexington City, and Knox County) received grants to plan and implement alternative district-wide salary schedules.⁵¹ All school districts that are implementing the alternative salary schedules are linking teacher professional development to data and evaluations.⁵²
3. **Competitive Supplemental Fund** – Five school districts in Tennessee (Bradford SSD, Hollow-Rock Bruceton SSD, Lexington City Schools, South Carroll County SSD, and Trousdale County) received \$50,000 grants to develop alternative salary schedules and two districts (Bradford and Williamson) received \$30,000 grants to turn around low-performing schools.⁵³ Most school districts that received a grant are using the funds to provide targeted professional development for teachers.⁵⁴

Best Practices for Teacher Professional Development

OREA compiled the following list of best practices in teacher professional development based on the work of researchers at universities and research institutions. (See the *Teacher Professional Development in Tennessee – Part 1* report for a complete list with references.) There is a consensus among these researchers that quality professional development:

- 1. Imparts pedagogical best practices that are grounded in research on recognized instructional practices and learning methodologies.** This includes instructional strategies tailored to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners.
- 2. Focuses on content knowledge and imparts content knowledge to teachers.** Content knowledge refers to subject area knowledge (social studies, math, science, etc.) and can refer to knowledge pertaining to how to teach a specific subject area.
- 3. Has student learning as a focal point.**
- 4. Is provided over a period of time during which teachers can accumulate a “high number of contact hours.”**
- 5. Is sustained over time.** Professional development lessons must be incorporated continually at the school and classroom level and the teachers must have access to ongoing in-service training related to those specific lessons.
- 6. Is supported by school administrators.** It is essential that school administrators provide teachers with the help or assistance they may need to master the knowledge, skills, and strategies imparted in the training, and use them effectively in the classroom. In addition, it is essential that school administrators receive or be familiar with the same training. This will allow administrators to work with teachers at the school and classroom level to ensure that the concepts and lessons are being implemented. Administrators need to accept and acknowledge the merit of the training and promote the use of the content of its lessons in order to promote teacher buy-in.
- 7. Affords “extended, in-depth learning opportunities for teachers.”** This includes providing active, as opposed to passive, learning and collective participation among teachers and school administrators. Teachers sitting in a training session listening to a lecture are far less likely to learn and apply the lesson than if they are engaged in the lesson, completing activities, practicing the techniques and skills presented, and interacting with each other.
- 8. Is continuously evaluated to determine its effectiveness.** School districts should measure teaching practices and link them to student achievement outcomes as evidenced through data (student test scores, portfolios, classroom observations, and peer evaluations). There is some debate among researchers as to what measures should be used to evaluate teacher professional development: some researchers place strong emphasis on using student achievement data while others caution the use of that data because most districts do not have the capacity or resources to analyze and compute this data in a systematic and rigorous way. Instead, these researchers place more emphasis on determining both the quality of the professional development activity and the affect the activity has on teaching practice.
- 9. Is developed to meet the individual needs of teachers.** School districts should also encourage and prepare educators to identify the professional development they require, determine whether they have successfully implemented the professional development in their classrooms, and evaluate the data to determine if those practices have had a positive impact on student learning and achievement.

Conclusion and Policy Considerations

Research shows that quality professional development has a positive impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement. In Tennessee, teacher professional development is primarily provided for and funded at the local level—the state’s education funding formula, the BEP, does not include a professional development funding component. Based on the limited data and information that is available (primarily from the TELL Survey), the development, content, quality, and implementation of teacher professional development varies from district to district. Results from the TELL Survey indicate that teachers believe that professional development is aligned with school improvement plans and student data, but is not targeted to meet the individual needs of teachers, and that there is a gap between the professional development that teachers believe they need and the training they are currently receiving. This may be an indication that school improvement plans are not aligned with the needs of teachers. Professional development is undergoing significant changes through Race to the Top grant initiatives that are designed to improve professional development and expand policymakers’ knowledge of teacher training; however, data remains limited on the impact of these initiatives.

Tennessee data is limited for various aspects of teacher professional development, including:

- alignment with research-based practices
- school district funding
- providers
- quality of offerings
- content of offerings
- support for classroom implementation

More research is needed to assess the quality of professional development, how closely it targets individual teacher needs, and its effectiveness in improving teachers’ instructional practices.

Endnotes

- ¹ U.S. Department of Education, *Race to the Top Application for Initial Funding CDFR Number: 84.395A* [Tennessee], p. 57, <http://www.tn.gov/education/> (accessed Nov. 24, 2010).
- ² Emily Barton, Assistant Commissioner, Curriculum and Instruction, Tennessee Department of Education, interview, Feb. 2, 2012.
- ³ Tennessee Department of Education, “*First to the Top Monthly Update: December 2010*,” p. 1, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/> (accessed Jul. 20, 2011).
- ⁴ Tennessee Department of Education, “*Teacher and Principal Residency Invests in Talent*,” Jan. 5, 2011, <http://news.tn.gov/> (accessed Jul. 25, 2011).
- ⁵ Meghan Curran, Director, First to the Top, Tennessee Department of Education, telephone interview, Apr. 13, 2012.
- ⁶ Tennessee Commissioner of Education, “*Commissioner’s Memo – August 10, 2011*,” e-mail attachment, “*TVAAS Resources Available for Tennessee Educators*,” p. 1, Aug. 10, 2011.
- ⁷ Meghan Curran, Director, First to the Top, Tennessee Department of Education, e-mail, Feb. 15, 2012.
- ⁸ Emily Barton, Assistant Commissioner, Curriculum and Instruction, Tennessee Department of Education, e-mail, Apr. 16, 2012.
- ⁹ Tennessee Department of Education, “*First to the Top Monthly Update: May 2011*,” p. 1, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/> (accessed Dec. 20, 2011); Tennessee Department of Education, “*ESEA Flexibility Request*,” sent to U.S. Department of Education, Nov. 14, 2011, pp. 18, 19, <http://www.tn.gov/education/> (accessed on Jan. 20, 2012).
- ¹⁰ Kevin Huffman, Commissioner of Education, Tennessee Department of Education, “*Attachment A – Common Core Leadership Council*,” e-mail attachment, p. 1, “*Commissioner’s Memo*,” e-mail, Jan. 20, 2012.
- ¹¹ Tennessee Department of Education, “*Education News Release: Tennessee Announces Common Core Leadership Council*,” e-mail, Feb. 15, 2012.
- ¹² Kevin Huffman, Commissioner of Education, Tennessee Department of Education, “*Attachment B – Summer 2012 Training Plan*,” e-mail attachment, p. 2, “*Commissioner’s Memo*,” e-mail, Jan. 20, 2012; Emily Barton, Assistant Commissioner, Curriculum and Instruction, Tennessee Department of Education, interview, Feb. 2, 2012; Tennessee Department of Education, “*ESEA Flexibility Request*,” sent to U.S. Department of Education, Nov. 14, 2011, pp. A-5 and A-6, <http://www.tn.gov/> (accessed on Jan. 20, 2012).
- ¹³ Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Electronic Learning Center, webpage, <http://www.tnelc.org/> (accessed Dec. 20, 2011).
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