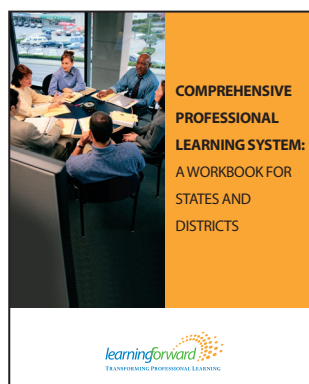


Developing a Comprehensive Professional Learning System

The *Comprehensive Professional Learning System: A Workbook for States and Districts* guides teams through the process of developing a comprehensive professional learning system and includes a wealth of detailed tools and resources for each step of the work.

Just as an engine propels a vehicle, professional learning drives and sustains change within education systems. Education reforms succeed only when educators have the capacity to fully implement them. A comprehensive professional learning system provides a framework and operations that ensure all educators can engage in effective professional learning to enhance their effectiveness and advance student learning.

Today, initiatives such as college- and career-ready standards, new student assessments, and educator effectiveness measures demand professional learning that drives teaching and leadership for deeper student learning. Most districts, states, and provinces have components of a professional learning system in place, yet few are comprehensive systems. Rather than continue to address new initiatives with fragmented professional learning systems, education leaders need to review, remodel, revise, or replace them. The result will be purposeful and coherent systems responsive to individual, team, school,



and district career-long professional learning needs.

Based on lessons learned from its multi-state initiative, *Transforming Professional Learning to Prepare College- and Career-Ready Students: Implementing the Common Core*, Learning Forward developed a resource, *Comprehensive Professional Learning System: A Workbook*

for States and Districts (<http://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/commoncore/comprehensive-professional-learning-system.pdf>), to guide teams in creating professional learning systems that facilitate educator learning.

This brief highlights the process and tools presented within the workbook. Using them, education leaders may analyze and revise their professional learning systems to ensure that they support every educator in gaining the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions necessary to contribute to student learning. Leaders in non-education organizations that provide professional learning may also use the process to refine their professional learning systems to meet the dynamic needs of educators and students.

Defining a Comprehensive Professional Learning System

A comprehensive professional learning system is the infrastructure for developing individual, school, team, and school system capacities needed to ensure success for all educators and their students. It is best described as “the way professional learning works” and includes minimally six core components: vision of professional learning system as a part of the education system; definition of professional learning; Standards for Professional Learning to guide quality; ongoing assessment and evaluation; clearly defined and articulated stakeholder roles and responsibility; and resources including staff, time, funds, and facilities.

Core policy elements	Description
Vision/function of professional learning as a part of education system	Articulates a vision, mission, and beliefs for effective professional learning and its relationship to educator effectiveness and student achievement.
Definition of professional learning to establish common understanding and practice	Defines professional learning as a comprehensive system of continuous improvement. It engages educators in collaborative learning primarily at their worksite with additional opportunities outside their worksite.
Standards for Professional Learning to establish quality indicators	Delineates research-based standards used to monitor and measure effectiveness, efficiency, and equity in the professional learning.
Ongoing assessment and evaluation with data	Ensures accountability and improvement through formative and summative evaluation of the equity, effectiveness, and efficiency of professional learning.
Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, including teachers, principals, central office, regional agencies, state agency, etc.	Delineates roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders and other contributors to effective professional learning.
Resources (e.g. time, staff, technology, funding, and materials) for ensuring effective professional learning	Requires set-aside or adequate funding to achieve full implementation and secure resources such as staff, technology, and materials to increase access to, efficiency, and effectiveness of professional learning.

Comprehensive professional learning systems operate across state, district or local, and school building levels. While the components are the same at all levels, how they operate may vary. Typically, at the state level, comprehensive professional learning systems establish a framework for the design and development of a school district’s professional learning system; the local district or school system shapes how professional learning happens within the schools. In that way, the infrastructure provides for continuous educator learning to occur throughout an educator’s career.

Such a system also links professional learning to other education subsystems such as licensure, human capital management, school improvement, data and assessment, and others necessary for student success. A comprehensive professional learning system ensures that

policies, practices, resources, and management align to provide equity, efficiency, and effectiveness, and to achieve identified results for educators and students. Within comprehensive professional learning systems, educators develop single or multi-year individual, team, school or programmatic professional learning plans to achieve their goals. Each plan specifies expected outcomes, the instructional design for professional learning necessary to achieve the outcomes, the benchmarks to monitor and assess progress toward the goals, and the resources required for full implementation of the learning to achieve intended outcomes. A professional learning plan serves as the map to guide educator learning while the comprehensive professional learning system ensures that the infrastructure is in place to support the learner and the learning.

How to Develop a Comprehensive Professional Learning System

The steps below recommend a process for developing or redesigning a state or district comprehensive professional learning system. The work is complex, yet when done well it can build broad-based understanding of research and transform practice in professional learning. Knowledge of effective professional learning, in turn, strengthens support for professional learning that builds educator and student success. *Comprehensive Professional Learning System: A Workbook for States and Districts* guides teams through the process and includes numerous detailed tools and resources for each step.

Step 1: Launch the work.

- Determine purpose and desired results.
- Assemble the team.
- Collect data and research.
- Hold introductory meeting.
- Clarify expectations during and between meetings.
- Determine communication and reporting process.
- Clarify timeframe, work process, roles and responsibilities of team members, benchmarks for progress monitoring, etc.

Step 2: Examine data and research.

- Study research, data, and standards.
- Determine current state to identify strengths, areas for growth, needs, challenges.
- Summarize findings, strengths, needs, challenges, expectations.

Step 3: Establish vision, assumptions, purpose, definition, goals.

- Write vision with purpose.
- Write assumptions/beliefs.
- Develop overall theory of change.
- Define professional learning.
- Develop goals and plan of action.
- Vet draft work.
- Revise as necessary.

Step 4: Design operations of system.

- Determine processes, decision-making flow, lines of authority and roles and responsibilities.
- Establish student, educator, information, and recordkeeping data system interface.
- Determine appropriate resource investments.
- Develop technology and implement supports.
- Assess feasibility of operations.
- Design evaluation of processes, inputs, outputs, and outcomes.
- Vet work to date with constituents and experts.
- Revise as necessary.

Step 5: Revise or develop policies.

- Review existing policies for alignment with revised/replaced system.
- Submit the comprehensive professional learning system to decision-making authority for adoption/approval.
- Adopt new policies.
- Develop guidance to support policy implementation.

Step 6: Develop long- and short-term professional plans to guide professional learning.

- Implement plan.
- Evaluate plan.

Step 7: Provide professional learning for full implementation.

- Develop professional learning for leaders and decision makers to support implementation of the revised/replaced system.
- Provide ongoing support for educators, decision makers, and leaders to refine and improve implementation.

Step 8: Conduct ongoing assessment and evaluation, adjust routinely based on data, and replace periodically.

- Plan evaluation.
- Conduct evaluation.
- Report results.
- Recommend and make improvements through responsible, informed investments in professional learning.

Take the first step: Transform professional learning

As state and district leaders redesign their professional learning systems, they can use tools such as this one adapted from the *Comprehensive Professional Learning System: A Workbook for States and Districts* (see Tool 1.1, p. 55). Decision makers may consider the following questions to choose appropriate processes to support the development of a comprehensive professional learning system and concomitant professional learning plans. The tool is one of 43 included in the workbook.

1. Does a comprehensive professional learning system currently exist?
2. If such a system does exist, what evidence shows that it is effective?
3. If a comprehensive system does not exist, is capacity available within the school system or state to facilitate a representative team in developing one? What qualifications do the potential facilitators bring to this work?
4. Who is the ultimate decision maker in the development of the comprehensive professional learning system?
5. What is driving the desire to develop a new or revamp the existing professional learning system?
6. Who is advocating a comprehensive professional learning system?
7. What resources, including personnel and time, can be devoted to this work?
8. In the state or school system, do the potential representatives have background knowledge about effective, research-based professional learning they can contribute to development work?
9. When an initiative such as this one has occurred in the past, how was it accomplished?
10. What are the anticipated benefits of a successful system?
11. What are the potential challenges if one does not exist?
12. What are the greatest barriers to completing this work?
13. How can those barriers be mitigated?
14. What will need to happen to ensure success with this work?
15. Who needs to be involved in the decision to proceed and be notified of the outcome of that decision, the process that will be used, the timeline for completion, etc.?



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