

# Enhancing Professional Development in Cambridge Public Schools

Teachers in the Driver’s Seat

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## About This Project

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) contracted with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to profile three districts and one school that are leaders in the state in ensuring that all their educators have access to high quality professional development.

The purpose of this project is to help educators across Massachusetts envision how the [Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development](http://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/standards.html) can be used to plan, implement, and monitor results-oriented professional learning, including how educator evaluation data can be used to inform professional development planning and assessment.

The profiles are based on interviews with knowledgeable individuals at each site and a review of key district or school documents. Three districts and one school were profiled. Sites include Cambridge Public Schools, Lexington Public Schools, Melrose Public Schools, and Easthampton High School in Easthampton Public Schools.

Sites were selected through the following process. First, members of the statewide Teacher and Principal Advisory Cabinets were invited to nominate districts or schools that were demonstrating one of the following best practices for ensuring educators have access to high quality professional development:

* Consistently using the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development to help ensure educators receive only high quality professional learning, such as:
	+ Building internal staff capacity to facilitate high quality, results-oriented professional development in innovative or forward-thinking ways, and
	+ Doing an exceptional job coordinating/managing professional development and creating the conditions for teachers to engage in deep learning; and/or
* Thoughtfully using educator evaluation data to inform the planning and delivery of professional development.

Nominators were asked to submit a site nomination form explaining how the chosen site demonstrates one or both of the best practices. ESE, in collaboration with AIR, selected four sites from among those nominated, based on the comprehensiveness of their approach to ensuring that educators have access to high quality professional development.

AIR, in partnership with the Concord Evaluation Group, conducted up to three interviews with knowledgeable individuals at each site in November 2014, as well as follow-up interviews as needed. Interviewers followed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A for the three protocols that were used for coordinators, principals, and teacher leaders) that focused primarily on the coordination of professional development for teachers, rather than for school leaders or specialized instructional support personnel. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and data from all stakeholders interviewed at each site were used to develop each district or school profile. For each profile, key staff from the site provided feedback on a draft of the site’s profile, and AIR revised accordingly before finalizing the profile.

## Executive Summary

Since 2014, [Cambridge Public Schools’](http://www.cpsd.us/) (CPS) teachers and district administrators have been working to overhaul the professional learning system for the district’s more than 600 educators. Their goal is to ensure coherent professional learning for the educators who serve Cambridge’s roughly 6,300 students, nearly half of whom are students from low-income families.

Spurred by disappointing results on a survey of working conditions, and seeking to improve its Level 3 accountability status, a joint labor/management professional development committee was created in January 2014. In the short time since its first convening, the committee has spearheaded a move from externally provided and vendor-driven professional development to internally provided professional development driven by Cambridge educators.

CPS is in the early stages of using data to effectively match professional learning activities and resources to the needs and goals of each of its educators. It has achieved initial success in providing a broad range of internally led professional learning options designed to enhance student learning, and in empowering teachers to choose options that are relevant to them. These changes have begun to generate excitement and engagement about professional learning among CPS educators.

Besides establishing the professional development committee, CPS has also enacted the following specific changes in the past two years:

* The district carved out more time for teachers to make their own choices about the professional learning activities in which they are required to participate.
* The district developed and implemented a summer institute with more than 40 teacher- and administrator-led workshops, which received great feedback.
* The district revamped the new teacher induction program, differentiating learning opportunities for teachers based on their prior teaching experience.

As a result of these changes, teachers are beginning to take more than the required number of courses, and teachers and administrators are beginning to build their own capacity to provide high quality professional development to their colleagues.

This case profile provides additional details about this transition and describes CPS’ plans for the future of professional learning in the district.

## Building a High Quality Professional Development System in Cambridge Public Schools: Getting Started

The Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) district is located north of Boston, directly across the Charles River. (See Table 1 for a brief demographic description of the district’s student body.) Currently, a joint labor and management professional development (PD) team works with the program manager for educator development to coordinate, plan, and assess professional development for the district’s roughly 600 educators.

*Today, professional development for teachers in Cambridge Public Schools is more coordinated, more sustained, more relevant, and better matched to its teachers’ needs than at any time in recent memory. This section describes the state of professional development before district leaders began working with teachers to engage in the difficult task of professional development reform.*

### Challenges Prior to 2013

Throughout the 1990s, professional development in CPS was provided districtwide, with teachers participating in groups organized by grade level across all schools, resulting in a shared learning experience for teachers across the district. Over time, professional development became school-based, primarily because school improvement funding was provided directly to schools. While this meant that professional development became tied to school goals, the quality and consistency of professional development varied across schools in the district.

Table 1. Cambridge Public Schools Demographic Profile

|  | Cambridge Public Schools | MA Average |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Total enrollment | 6539 | 2,342.8 |
| Total instructional staff | 607.7 | 172.8 |
| Total elementary schools\* | 12 | 2.8 |
| Total middle schools | 4 | 0.8 |
| Total high schools | 1 | 1.0 |
| Percent English language learners | 8.2 | 8.5 |
| Accountability level  | 3 | -- |

*Source:* District Analysis, Review, and Assistance Tool (DART) at [*http://www.doe.mass.edu/dart/*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/dart/) *.*

\*Includes one elementary–middle school

*Furthermore, prior to 2013, the CPS teacher contract allowed for 35 hours of professional development per year, the content and format of which were determined by the principal in each building. In most schools, these hours were used for staff meetings with principals and department heads, leaving limited time for actual professional development. When professional development was offered, literacy and mathematics were typically the only areas of focus.* For example, literacy or mathematics coaches led professional development courses covering specific areas of the curriculum, and each school offered a 40-hour (approximately) course covering the [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html) (exploring, for example, literacy teaching). There was little to no variety in the professional development activities offered, and teachers had no choice regarding what types of professional development they received. Prior to 2013, according to Program Manager for Educator Development Chris Colbath-Hess, teachers would ask: “How many times in a row can I [learn about] literacy [instruction], when there are other things that my kids need and I don’t have access to it?”

*Prior to 2013, there were challenges related to communication between schools and professional development providers, as well as challenges with the use of resources. Moreover, the district lacked centralized professional development mechanisms that could help ensure that all staff had access to high quality professional development opportunities, which left some staff without access to such opportunities*. For example, in the absence of unified PD across the district and across grade levels, it was not uncommon for coaches to send teachers messages that were consistent *within* grade levels, but not *across* grade levels. The only staff development that was centralized was offered to new teachers (who received some mentoring during their first year), but this funding was discontinued. In addition, according to the program manager for educator development, special educators were being “left out of the PD loop” because they did not have opportunities for department meetings (unlike other educators). She explained further: “People [teachers and staff] were ready to broaden their horizons, but the structure was not in place to support them. PD was very decentralized, which is good because you can respond quickly, but the consistency was really shaky.” The district’s professional development approach was ripe for change.

### The Origins of a Districtwide Professional Development Strategy

*Data from the 2012 TELL Massachusetts (TELL MASS) survey—a statewide survey of educators on their working conditions—prompted district leaders to more closely examine their professional development practices.* In early spring 2013, Lori Likis, the CPS district chief planning officer, approached the Cambridge Education Association union president (who at the time was Chris Colbath-Hess, now the district’s program manager for educator development) to suggest that the TELL MASS survey data could be used to identify problem areas and design a project to improve those areas. In order to achieve this, they created a joint labor/management committee—consisting of administrators, principals, and teachers—to dive deeply into the data.

*The 2012 TELL MASS data identified a districtwide need for professional development that could support educators to manage student conduct more effectively.* The data indicated weaknesses in behavioral policies and procedures—both the extent to which students followed the rules, and the degree to which the administration and teachers consistently enforced those rules. Table 2 displays some of these findings from the 2012 survey.

Table 2: Selected Results From 2012 TELL MASS Survey

|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Students at this school follow rules of conduct.** |  |  |  |  |
| Cambridge (n=436) | 7% | 36% | 52% | 5% |
| Massachusetts (n=41848) | 6% | 24% | 58% | 11% |
| **Policies and procedures about student conduct are clearly understood by the faculty.** |  |  |  |  |
| Cambridge (n=435) | 6% | 34% | 49% | 12% |
| Massachusetts (n=41814) | 4% | 20% | 55% | 21% |
| **School administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct.** |  |  |  |  |
| Cambridge (n=433) | 15% | 33% | 40% | 11% |
| Massachusetts (n=41540) | 11% | 26% | 44% | 18% |
| **Teachers consistently enforce rules for student conduct.** |  |  |  |  |
| Cambridge (n=431) | 5% | 31% | 52% | 12% |
| Massachusetts (n=41551) | 3% | 21% | 55% | 21% |

*Source:* 2012 TELL MASS Survey Detailed Report

Although the CPS TELL MASS results showed that the district was rated above the state average for differentiating professional development, evaluating professional development, and communicating evaluation results, district leadership had been hearing (anecdotally) from teachers that they wanted and needed greater differentiation, increased evaluation, and more communication around results of professional development.

Given the mismatch between the TELL MASS data and the anecdotal feedback from teachers and administrators, the committee developed an additional survey for CPS teachers. This survey mirrored the student conduct and professional development items from the TELL MASS survey, while also delving deeper with questions about particular behavior intervention approaches and related professional development needs, as well as school discipline procedures. The survey also included questions intended to gauge teacher interest in allocating contractual hours to teachers for designing professional development, as well as questions on how professional development should be differentiated.

The joint labor/management committee analyzed the results from this new survey. One of the key observations that emerged during survey analysis was that the district’s current approach to professional development was leading to high degrees of isolation in schools, and that educators wanted to tackle that isolation and learn best practices with and from other teachers in the district. Additionally, upper schools wanted a greater share of professional development time in order to build school communities. Based on this analysis and the TELL MASS data, the program manager for educator development felt there was “a clear message” about how to address teachers’ needs through districtwide professional development. *The committee presented these findings to the superintendent, who decided to form a joint labor/management committee focused on professional development to address these challenges. (The new professional development committee includes many members of the original TELL MASS committee.)*

### The Newly Created Professional Development Committee Rolls Up Its Sleeves

Currently, the professional development committee is co-chaired by Dr. Jessica Huizenga, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, and Terry Gist, the union president, and it includes a total of 20 administrators and teachers, representing a range of grade levels and subject areas. *The purpose of the professional development committee, according to the district’s “Rationale and Charge of the Joint Labor/Management Professional Development” document, is to “come together and collaborate around a strategy and annual plan that identifies a set of required knowledge and skills for all educators of CPS.”*

The professional development committee first met in January 2014. It consisted of three subcommittees: (1) the five-year plan subcommittee, (2) the new teacher induction program subcommittee, and (3) the end-of-year planning subcommittee. The professional development committee meets as a large group once a month, and there is often time for the three subcommittees to work during this meeting. (Depending on their deadlines, subcommittees often meet more frequently.) The professional development committee aims to answer core questions, such as: What does it mean to be a professional educator in CPS? What opportunities should be afforded in order to guarantee that all educators have the proper professional development, reach their full potential, and increase the academic achievement of all children? What is the right balance between centralized and decentralized professional development opportunities districtwide?

While this work has only just begun, the sections that follow describe what the professional development committee, together with district leaders, has managed to accomplish in its short existence. According to the program manager for educator development, the collaboration between labor and management has resulted in a positive shift for professional learning:

We took every opportunity to elicit input from the teachers, to connect with the union leadership, and to follow the contract. What I’m finding is that there is enough excitement about having a choice [in their PD] that people are willing to work with us along the way.

## Professional Development in Cambridge Public Schools Today: Teacher-Driven

This section describes the kind of professional development provided in Cambridge Public Schools today, including high quality professional development (HQPD). Many of these activities seem to embody the principles described in the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development (see Figure 1), though a rigorous assessment of their alignment with the standards was not conducted.

| Figure 1. Massachusetts Standards for Professional DevelopmentHQPD has clear goals and objectives relevant to desired student outcomes.HQPD aligns with state, district, school, and/or educator goals or priorities.HQPD is designed based on analysis of data relevant to the identified goals, objectives, and audience.HQPD is assessed to ensure that it meets the targeted goals and objectives.HQPD promotes collaboration among educators to encourage the sharing of ideas and working together to achieve the identified goals and objectives.HQPD advances an educator’s ability to apply learnings from the professional development to his/her particular content or context.HQPD models good pedagogical practice and applies knowledge of adult learning theory to engage educators.HQPD makes use of relevant resources to ensure that the identified goals and objectives are met.HQPD is taught or facilitated by a professional who is knowledgeable about the identified objectives.HQPD sessions connect and build upon each other to provide a coherent and useful learning experience for educators. |
| --- |

### Creating a Vision Statement and Connected Professional Development Goals

*The first step toward creating a new professional development program involved developing professional development goals for the district.* The district’s updated vision statement for PD emphasizes CPS’ commitment to “high quality, sustained, data-driven professional learning for all educators that builds our capacity to affect student learning across our diverse population.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The vision also outlines the importance of a mutually supportive and collaborative environment.

Currently, CPS leaders are working toward four related goals for professional development:

1. To improve student achievement by building the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of school-based and non-school-based staff;
2. To provide learning resources that enhance the basic knowledge, professional development, and personal growth of all personnel;
3. To recruit, train, and deploy a cadre of instructional coaches, teacher leaders, mentors, and facilitators to deliver professional development and instructional services; and
4. To promote collaborative relationships among all CPS staff, colleges, universities, businesses, and community members that broker resources, expand services, and enrich the work of the Office of Teaching & Learning.

### Using Professional Development Time Differently

*One of the first major changes to professional development involved reallocating the 35 hours of professional development provided to teachers under the CPS contract.* Under the old system, CPS teachers had no control over how their professional development time was spent. Under the new professional development framework, staff spend 10 hours working with their department chairs (at the middle and high school level, including special education) and 15 hours working with the principals (25 hours at the elementary school level, where there are no department chairs), and 10 hours are designated as “teacher’s choice.”

The time used by department chairs and principals varies depending on school needs. For example, one school is using its time to help teachers learn how to establish “critical friends groups.” Another school is learning about ways to manage student behavior positively, and one school gives kindergarten teachers time to learn about the state’s new kindergarten assessment.

An elementary school principal explained the importance of this reallocation of hours:

I could never quite tell when I was going to have everybody at a meeting, when some people are going to be pulled to a department meeting, or when I should let these people not come because I know they have a department meeting next week. Knowing for sure I have 15 hours where I have everybody, then I have 10 hours where it’s just the classroom teachers … I’ve been really much more thoughtful this year with the change in schedule about which are the things that I want to do together as a whole staff [and which] are just for classroom teachers.

The remaining 10 professional development hours are now “teacher’s choice,” meaning that teachers can choose how to use those hours to develop professionally. According to CPS planning documents, offering teachers a choice allows educators from “all job categories access to relevant, high quality professional learning.” All educators—regardless of their subject, grade, or status (e.g., paraprofessional, new, licensed)—can choose from a variety of courses that fulfill their professional needs, thus allowing for differentiation. These courses are provided almost entirely by the district’s own instructional coaches and school and district administrators.[[2]](#footnote-2) Dan Monahan, an instructional coach and member of the professional development committee, explained that this is “because they wanted everyone to be doing professional development, not just sitting there having a staff meeting.”

With the reallocation of the 35 hours, the district had to create a complex schedule to accommodate district, department, building, and course meetings. This resulted in a schedule that accommodated PD activities several times per week, which was a big change. Previously, staff had become accustomed to PD always being offered on the same day of the week, week after week. Staff had arranged their personal lives (including childcare needs, for example) around the PD day, and when the district changed the schedule and PD was offered on multiple days of the week, union members initially did not unanimously support the change. Union involvement on the professional development committee helped to reduce pushback from its members, however, and the district has worked hard to adjust schedules so that educators can participate in all required meetings and their preferred courses, while maintaining an acceptable work–life balance.

The reallocation of professional development time has also allowed principals to put more thought into how they use their PD time, causing them to look deeper into the PD needs of their staff. One principal described how this reallocation of time has impacted her:

I think for all of us as administrators, the shift to having more professional development and less administrative time has really required us to think carefully about what is necessary, what do we have to do in front of a whole staff, and what can we actually do online. There are things that don’t need to be done in a whole-staff meeting. I think that really encourages all of us to say: “Let’s be really mindful about what we are doing with this time we have with teachers. Are we actually offering professional development?”

### Providing Choices for Teachers

*CPS has organized a wide array of in-house and rigorous offerings for its teachers, about a quarter of which are taught or co-taught by teachers themselves.* *Many of these offerings were proposed and developed by CPS staff.* For example, in summer 2014, the district offered its first annual [Educational Excellence Summer Institute](https://secure2.cpsd.us/eei/CPS_Educational_Excellence_Institute_Program_2014.pdf).[[3]](#footnote-3) The institute consisted of more than 40 CPS teacher-developed and teacher-led workshops, in addition to a keynote speaker and various external speakers. The staff-led workshops included such offerings as *Mindfulness Practice for Educators*,[[4]](#footnote-4) led by an assistant principal, a session called *Move It or Lose It*,[[5]](#footnote-5) led by health and physical education teachers, and an interactive workshop on *Fractions Through the Common Core*, taught by a special educator. These workshops lasted an hour and educators were able to attend three workshops each. To promote a sense of community, there was also time for teachers to enjoy a student performance, as well as an opportunity for a book signing by the keynote speaker.

According to the PD course catalog for the current school year, the district offers teachers approximately 60 open-choice courses after school (in addition to summer offerings), covering topics ranging from *Understanding the Ins and Outs of Symphony Math*, to *Classroom Assessment and Data Analysis*, to *Mental Health First Aid*. The courses are led by a variety of educators, including district instructional coaches, school and district leaders, outside providers (including faculty from local universities), and teacher leaders.

According to the program manager for educator development:

What is really amazing to me is that the types of courses that teachers have proposed are incredibly rigorous. An English teacher proposed a course for any of the high school teachers about teaching our kids to analyze text. [Because they are getting so much out of it], they are meeting longer than the 10 hours required. It is courses like that that are in abundance.

The principal of Cambridgeport School described the importance of providing teachers with more options:

I definitely have a staff full of ongoing learners … They’re always looking at their own practice and saying, “What do I want next?” but I wasn’t always able to provide [options].

Susie Van Blaricum, the current dean of students at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, thought back to when she was a history teacher in the district and reflected:

The biggest change is, just two years ago, if you had said what PD are you doing, I would say, “Uh, I do these cool summer things,” but it was all external. Now I know that *internally* I can take courses during the school year that fit my schedule.

Staff are reportedly excited that there are so many courses they want to take, and administrators have found that teachers are signing up for more than their required professional development hours. Additionally, according to CPS planning documents, “faculty [within the district] feel that their expertise at leading professional learning is being acknowledged” through the creation of a more collaborative environment that allows them to share with each other.

According to the program manager for educator development’s analysis of course evaluation survey data, most CPS teachers (80 percent) feel that the courses they took directly impact their students’ learning and nearly as many say the courses aligned with their goals for learning. In open-ended responses, teachers also described some of the ways they plan to use the knowledge or skills they learned in their classrooms. Below are excerpts from three of these responses:

Not only did we think about ways to use formative assessment effectively to inform our teaching, but we thought about ways to plan it, organize it, track it, and implement it efficiently. There was theoretical background in the work we did but there was also ample time to think of and address the practical implications of incorporating more formative assessment into our practice. I will use these ideas as I adjust my unit plans for the upcoming units and year.

I know that I will make an effort to use more interim formative assessments to help me gauge student understanding along the way during units and projects. I am looking for ways before the final draft of a project to check in and reteach or give feedback to students who are falling behind or missing key ideas. …

[I will be] reframing the way I give students feedback about their work, stretching my understanding of the relationship between assessment and instruction, and experimenting with and revising different systems for record-keeping and logging my notes about student learning and opportunities for instruction.

This survey feedback provided CPS leaders evidence that the course likely met its objectives and should perhaps be offered again to more educators.

### Professional Development Is Teacher-Driven and More Collaborative

*Within the new professional development framework, most of the professional development (approximately 85 percent) is provided by internal staff, leading to PD experiences that are more collaborative and, as a result, more meaningful to teachers.*

Offering PD internally enables the district to foster more time for teacher collaboration and the kind of cross-pollination that was missing under the old, fragmented system. According to the program manager for educator development: “At the [summer] institute, we saw teachers sharing their practice openly. There was no opportunity for that type of collaboration before. At the institute, they could share their thinking and skills and learn from each other.”

The dean of students at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School explained that her history colleagues all signed up for the same choice course, and this time felt that it was “very much to them about collaborating and working together.”

The program manager for educator development explained that “there is a lot of cross-pollination, too, because instead of just being with your own building, for at least 10 hours of your year you are with people from other buildings and other disciplines.” The program manager for educator development and the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction both believe that homegrown professional development “comes [with] a sense of internal accountability to one another,” which they hope will continue to grow over time.

In another example, English teachers in the high school proposed and led a course on best practices in literary analysis. They wanted to propose a course because they felt they did not have enough time during their regular department meetings to discuss what they do with their students and their subject matter. As one of the teachers explained:

The most exciting thing is the opportunity to actually collaborate with and listen to my colleagues because we’re not in each other’s rooms. We just hear about what happens in the other rooms. Having the opportunity and the time to do that kind of work was really important to me and to all the people who signed up.

According to one of the principals, some educators were initially unsure about teaching a course, but once they had done it, they realized the impact they could have. For example, an educator at this principal’s school reflected:

Wow, I really do have a lot to offer, and I do have this real toolkit that I’ve been using and honing for the last five or six years. It was really exciting to get to share that with other people. It was great.

*It is worth reiterating that CPS has been able to make the changes described earlier without bargaining for any additional time from teachers. They did not increase the number of hours for teacher professional development; they simply specified that those hours should be used differently.* In this way, CPS has begun to build a strong foundation for a sound and effective professional learning system for its educators.

It is also worth noting that offering in-house PD allows the district to conserve resources by relying on fewer external vendors.

### Revamped New Teacher Induction

*Another aspect of the new professional development framework launched by the professional development committee involved revamping their approach to new teacher induction, which now has greater differentiation than before*. The CPS contract specifies that all teachers who are new to the district must spend up to 25 additional hours in orientation seminars. This year, CPS hired more than 100 new teachers. These teachers were placed into three distinct groups: (1) new, licensed teachers who needed mentoring; (2) teachers who did not have their professional license yet, but also did not need mentoring (having already received mentoring from another district); and (3) teachers who were new to the district but had at least four years of teaching experience.

The first group has been meeting monthly since September 2014, and will continue to do so until the end of the academic year. Together, members of this group look at students’ work, discuss behavioral issues, and learn how to talk to parents, among other things. The second group started meeting in January 2015 and will meet five times before the end of the school year. This group will focus on specific CPS issues, including technology and student services. The group will also focus on the “growth mindset” work conducted by Carol Dweck—a leading researcher in the field of motivation. (Focusing on a growth mindset has also just begun in the district.) The third group will participate in a skillful teacher course, funded by the district.

The new teacher training starts with a two-day session in the summer and continues throughout the year. The goal is to build the training into a three-year program, starting with this current year as Year 1.

### Embedded Support

In addition to offering courses, coaches play a support role for professional development. A science instructional coach, for example, explained that he supports the principal when help is needed around their school improvement plan, he supports individual teacher teams in planning common lessons, and he works with individual teachers in reaching their learning goals:

[Coaches] allow teachers to have just-in-time support and to have support in their specific context, because a lot of times, we have—there are different contexts in the schools … This is a way to really help them see how it works in their particular place ... It’s also a way to follow up on the professional development, because a lot of times people take a course, and then they don’t really do anything after that with it, or they aren’t really sure what to do with it, or they have some more follow-up questions. It helps with that.

### Early Feedback From Teachers Has Been Positive

*The professional development committee has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from teachers on the new professional development framework and course offerings. According to the program manager for educator development, teachers have reported that:*

They feel valued as professionals. We let them be in the driver’s seat as far as their own PD is concerned. This is an important shift—the thinking is to let teachers and paraprofessionals use their own voice and say what’s important to them professionally.

## Using Data to Match Teacher Goals With High Quality Professional Development in Cambridge Public Schools

This section describes the different ways in which the professional development committee and district leaders are using myriad information sources to manage the new professional development framework. Putting teachers in the driver’s seat empowers the professional development committee and teachers to use evidence to select, design, and evaluate courses that meet their development needs.

### Revised Course Selection Process

During the 2014–15 school year, teachers were able to enroll in any course that matched their professional growth needs. The program manager for educator development explained: “We [the professional development committee] didn’t have criteria. We wanted to let people experiment; we wanted to let people see what the possibilities were.” In future years, however, the professional development committee expects principals to provide teachers with “guided choice”—that is, to provide teachers with four different courses to choose from, based on school goals as well as the professional practice goals of teachers within the school.

### Guidelines for Course Topics, Course Design, and Salary Credits

CPS offers educators the option of creating and delivering their own professional development choice courses. However, at this point, educators are somewhat unclear about how to go about creating a course, and the dean of students at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School noted: “Many people, once they’ve learned [they] could be teaching that course, wanted to know what the procedure is, and I don’t think we’ve clarified exactly what that is.”

During the first year of implementing the PD system, there were no criteria for selecting which courses to offer. Courses were allowed to run if they had sufficient enrollment. Going forward, CPS has just finalized formal guidelines that describe what needs to be included in a course proposal (an online form that any educator at CPS can complete). This includes general course information (name, description, sponsor, facilitator, and contact information); remuneration options (for example, stipend, professional development points [PDPs]); scheduling; and participants. The proposal form also requires applicants to check the educator evaluation standards and indicators with which the course is expected to align. The professional development committee will review these forms to ensure that they align with the district’s or school’s professional development goals.

| Figure 2. CPS Course Credit RequirementsA course eligible for Masters Plus credit:* Must be at least 10 contact hours in length (one Masters Plus credit for every 10 hours, up to a maximum of three credits.)
* Must be rigorous in content and include supplemental assignments.
* Must include completion of a high-level paper, project, or product that documents an impact on the educator’s professional practice and includes reflection and analysis of that impact.
* Must include evaluative criteria for final project expectations (rubric, exemplars, etc.), as well as a clear deadline for completion.
* Must not receive other compensation from CPS for that time. It cannot be during the school day or during any other contractually required time outside the school day, nor can a teacher receive a stipend or hourly compensation.
* Must be pre-approved by the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction (or designee).

*Source: Cambridge Public Schools Guidelines for Masters Plus Determination for CPS Professional Learning Courses* |
| --- |

CPS has also formalized guidelines that outline what a course must include to qualify for Masters Plus credit (see Figure 2). Educators will soon be able to reference the course catalog to see whether a course offers Masters Plus credit before signing up. An instructional coach and member of the professional development committee also explained that the committee will “start to compile a list of the characteristics of high quality professional development (starting with the Massachusetts Professional Development Standards) in order to have some criteria on which to base decisions.”

### Assessing the Quality of Professional Development

The program manager for educator development is working with a graduate student from Boston University to design a program evaluation for choice courses in order to collect feedback from all stakeholders on what worked, what needs adjusting, and what is missing. The aim is to answer questions such as:

* How does the current set of choice courses align with a school’s and district’s improvement plans and initiatives?
* Are there too many options?
* How can the professional development committee further support school-based professional learning communities?

So far, the professional development committee has gathered data from online surveys of administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals. The program manager for educator development has also conducted meetings with principals and focus groups with teachers, and has consulted previous course evaluations. The plan is to combine these data and draw up “next steps” for evaluating the effectiveness of the program with the help of the Boston University researcher.

## Connections Between Educator Evaluation and Professional Development in Cambridge Public Schools

Throughout the [5-Step Cycle](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/QRG-5StepCycle.pdf) of evaluation, CPS educators learn about the elements of effective practice in conversation with their supervisors. The professional development coordinator would like to see this process lead to teams of educators designing their own courses that stretch their work in areas identified in their [Educator Plan](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/QRG-EducatorPlans.pdf) goals.

*Educator evaluation in CPS will become more tightly coupled with professional development courses in the coming years through the “guided choice” process described earlier.*

*Moreover, CPS plans to create courses that explicitly address particular elements of effective practice that have been identified as in need of improvement among CPS educators, based on aggregated evaluation results.* This means that educator evaluation performance ratings, along with school goals, will factor into the “guided choice” process. As the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction explained: “Evaluators can discuss with teachers that specific PD courses were created because educator evaluation data showed that *X* amount of educators need to improve in that specific area.”

*District leaders believe that using educator evaluation data in this way will foster team building, and perhaps more openness to learning among faculty, because it does not target or single out particular educators.* One elementary school faculty, for example, has identified creating a systematic response to students with traumatic backgrounds as one of their professional development goals for next year, based on their student learning S.M.A.R.T goals. These educators will use their 10 hours of school-based professional development for a book study of *The Behavior Code*.

## Plans for Continuous Improvement

There has been a spark to make change, and it’s early and it’s ongoing, and to me that’s the exciting thing. It’s not perfect yet, but I think there’s hope that we’re going in the right direction.

Dean of Students, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School

CPS is in the early stages of implementing the new professional development framework and it has several plans for the next couple of years, including those outlined below.

### Collaboratively Develop a Robust Professional Development Vision

The five-year plan subcommittee has worked to create a vision statement that will help to focus the professional development framework. The goal of this longer term plan is to ensure that any change benefits the students. As an update from the five-year plan subcommittee explained: “Having a more cohesive professional development system will benefit students by creating a more cohesive education program for all students.” The five-year plan will have projected goals for each year and will be revised annually (allowing for feedback from educators and administrators), and any revisions will be based on data. The plan will be tied to the district’s and school’s improvement plans, as well as the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development. This is not without its challenges, as the dean of students at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School noted:

With so much choice, how do you then implement districtwide and state goals, and how do you make those coexist? I don’t think it’s impossible, I just think it’s going to be an ongoing challenge in terms of getting articulation of what those goals are, and getting agreement on [what] we all believe … are important goals.

### Develop Coherent and Ongoing Professional Development

At this point, CPS has a wide span of professional development choice course offerings, but it ultimately plans to create a series of courses that build upon each other, based on specific goals and a pool of district data (e.g., aggregate educator evaluation data, student data, and so on). The series will include refreshers, updates, and new lessons, and its goal will be to keep educators moving forward in a way that continues to benefit students.

### Expand the Role of Mentors

The district currently has funding for mentors to work with brand new teachers, but there is no funding for mentors in Years 2 or 3 of the new teacher program. The program manager for educator development is seeking additional funding so that more mentors may be added to the program.

## Appendix A: Interview Protocols

* Interview Protocol for District Professional Development Coordinators
* Interview Protocol for Principals
* Interview Protocol for Teacher Leaders With Role in Professional Development Management

**District Profiles:**

**Interview Protocol for District Professional Development Coordinators**

**October 2014**

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me today. As you know, American Institutes for Research (AIR) is working with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to better understand how leading schools and districts select, plan, manage, and implement high-quality professional development (PD). DESE also intends to share this information with other educators around the state, through a set of Web-based resources, including site profiles, PowerPoint presentations of cross-cutting findings, and video vignettes.

We understand that your time is limited, and we will keep this conversation to no more than 45 minutes [one hour for a group interview].

If you don’t mind, we would like to record this interview simply for note-taking purposes only. No one outside of our research team will have access to or will hear the recording; the recording would be for the AIR team’s reference only. If you would like me to turn off the recorder at any point, just let me know. Is that okay with you?

**Questions for District-Level Professional Development Coordinators**

1. To get started, tell me about your role in professional development planning at [site].

Probe for details if a professional development committee is mentioned. If a committee is not mentioned, ask if there is one, who participates, what they do, who coordinates the committee, and so forth.

1. Please walk me through the PD planning process from your perspective. What time of year does the process start?

Probe for details about the timeline, as follows:

When does [site] identify PD needs?

When does PD selection take place?

When does the PD committee meet?

Is the timeline pretty much the same every year, or does the timeline change?

How is the quality of PD monitored at [site] so that you know what PD to engage in again?

1. Are you familiar with the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development (or HQPD standards for short)? [If so] How did you first learn about the HQPD standards?
2. To what extent are the HQPD standards informing your PD–related work, including planning for PD?

How are you making use of the standards at your district?

Probe for how, if at all, the standards have been shared with other teachers, PD vendors, mentors, coaches, and other staff.

 [If not mentioned] How are the HQPD standards informing how you or other staff at your district assess or monitor the quality of the PD teachers at your district receive?

[If the standards have not had an impact] How has how the way you track the quality of your PD changed during the past year or two?

1. Here is a list of the HQPD standards [handout—see Protocol Appendix]. Which standard or standards would you say [site] excels at? How so? Was that always the case?

Do you have any data or other evidence you can point to or share that demonstrates this?

Which standard is the biggest challenge to implement? Why? How has [site] addressed, or planned to address, that challenge?

1. How does [site] ensure *coherent* and *ongoing* PD for teachers? What supports are available for coherent PD? What are the challenges?
2. What are the barriers to using the HQPD standards in your planning, coordinating, or monitoring of PD at your district?

What are the barriers to aligning the PD that your educators engage in to the standards? What have you done to overcome those barriers?

1. How does [site] use (or plan to use) educator evaluation data to plan PD?

Probe for how the district uses the data to plan PD for individual teachers or for department- or grade-level or schoolwide PD.

Are they able to drill down to the *element* level to determine PD needs across grades, schools, and so forth? Do they do this systematically?

Do they use a particular software package to allow them to analyze the data this way? If so, which software package?

Probe for how or whether they use evaluation data to identify teachers exemplary in different areas to lead PD.

1. What are the challenges in using educator evaluation data to plan PD?

How is [site] staff overcoming these challenges? What supports or resources are in place to help overcome those challenges?

1. What other connections have you made between educator evaluation data and PD planning, coordination, or evaluation?
2. How many PD days do teachers have throughout the school year, and how much dedicated time do they have during the school day?

Was that always the case, or is that amount of time a recent change? If so, why?

Are teachers able to observe other teachers from time-to-time?

Work with coaches?

Engage in professional learning communities?

1. [If not already discussed] To what extent is the teachers union involved in PD planning or implementation? How do negotiations related to PD for teachers play out at [site]?
2. Are there any documents that speak to any of the questions we just discussed that would be useful for us to better understand your PD planning processes and impact? Would you be willing to share the documents with us (for example, strategic PD planning documents, participant surveys, facilitator surveys)?
3. Is there anything else we should know about PD planning or the connection between educator evaluation data and PD at [site]?

Thank you for your time and insight today. During the next few weeks, we will be developing written site profiles for each of the districts we visit. As we draft the profiles, we may find that we have additional follow-up questions for you. Would it be okay if we contacted you again for a brief phone conversation? We plan to share drafts of these profiles with you or someone at [site] to make sure we captured your story correctly.

Also, as you know, we will likely be returning this spring to film educators engaged in professional development. I look forward to talking with you again then!

**Protocol Appendix:**

**Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development**

1. **Has SMART goals relevant to student outcomes.** High quality professional development (HQPD) has clear goals and objectives relevant to desired student outcomes.
2. **Aligned with goals and priorities.** HQPD aligns with state, district, school, and/or educator goals or priorities.
3. **Designed based on analysis of data.** HQPD is designed based on the analysis of data relevant to the identified goals, objectives, and audience.
4. **Assessed to ensure goals are met.** HQPD is assessed to ensure that it is meeting the targeted goals and objectives.
5. **Promotes collaboration.** HQPD promotes collaboration among educators to encourage sharing of ideas and working together to achieve the identified goals and objectives.
6. **Advances an educator’s ability to apply learnings.** HQPD advances an educator's ability to apply learnings from the professional development to his/her particular content and/or context.
7. **Models good pedagogical practice.** HQPD models good pedagogical practice and applies knowledge of adult learning theory to engage educators.
8. **Makes use of relevant resources to meet goals.** HQPD makes use of relevant resources to ensure that the identified goals and objectives are met.
9. **Facilitated by knowledgeable professionals.** HQPD is taught or facilitated by a professional who is knowledgeable about the identified objectives.
10. **Is coherent and connected.** HQPD sessions connect and build upon each other to provide a coherent and useful learning experience for educators.

**District Profiles:**

**Interview Protocol for Principals**

**October 2014**

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me today. As you know, American Institutes for Research (AIR) is working with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to better understand how leading schools and districts select, plan, manage, and implement high-quality professional development (PD). DESE also intends to share this information with other educators around the state, through a set of Web-based resources, including site profiles, PowerPoint presentations of cross-cutting findings, and video vignettes.

We understand that your time is limited, and we will keep this conversation to no more than 45 minutes [one hour for a group interview].

If you don’t mind, we would like to record this interview simply for note-taking purposes only. No one outside of our research team will have access to or will hear the recording; the recording would be for the AIR team’s reference only. If you would like me to turn off the recorder at any point, just let me know. Is this okay with you?

**Questions for Principals**

1. To get started, tell me about your role in the professional development of the teachers at your school.

Probe for details if a professional development committee is mentioned. If a committee is not mentioned, ask if there is one, who participates, what they do, who coordinates it, and so forth.

1. How much influence would you say you have over the quality of the PD that your teachers engage in at [site].
2. Please walk me through the PD planning process from your perspective. What time of year does process start?

Probe for details about the timeline, as follows:

When does [site] identify PD needs?

When does PD selection take place?

When does the PD committee meet?

Is the timeline pretty much the same every year, or does the timeline change?

How is the quality of PD monitored at [site] so that you know what PD to engage in again?

1. Are you familiar with the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development (or HQPD standards for short)? [If so] How did you first learn about the HQPD standards?
2. To what extent are the HQPD standards informing your professional development–related work?

How are you making use of the standards at your school?

Probe for how, if at all, the standards have been shared with other teachers, PD vendors, mentors, coaches, and other staff.

[If not mentioned] How are the standards informing how you or other staff at your school assess or monitor the quality of the PD teachers at your school receive?

 [If the standards have not had an impact] How has the way you track the quality of your PD changed during the past year or two?

1. Here is a list of the HQPD standards [handout—see Protocol Appendix]. Which standard or standards would you say [site] excels at? How so? Was that always the case?

Do you have any data or other evidence you can point to or share that demonstrates this?

Which standard is the biggest challenge to implement? Why? How has [site] addressed, or planned to address, that challenge?

1. How does [site] ensure *coherent* and *ongoing* PD for teachers? What supports are available for coherent professional development? What are the challenges?
2. What are the barriers to using the HQPD standards in your planning, coordinating, or monitoring of PD at your school?

What are the barriers to aligning the PD that your educators engage in to the standards? What have you done to overcome those barriers?

1. How do you use educator evaluation data to plan PD?

Probe for how the principal uses the data to plan PD for individual teachers or for department- or grade-level or schoolwide PD. Does the principal analyze the data using software or plan according to what he or she learns during evaluation conferences with teachers?

Probe for how or whether the principal uses evaluation data to identify teachers exemplary in different areas to lead PD.

1. What are the challenges in using educator evaluation data to plan PD?

How is [site] staff overcoming these challenges? What supports or resources are in place to help overcome those challenges?

1. I understand that there are [number] early-release days for PD and [number] full days, and I understand that teachers get [amount of time] during the school day. How is that time used? How do you know how that time is used?
2. How do you coordinate what happens during districtwide PD days with what happens during school-based PD?
3. Are there any documents that speak to any of questions we just discussed that would be useful for us to better understand your PD planning processes and impact? Would you be willing to share the documents with us (for example, strategic PD planning documents, participant surveys, facilitator surveys)?
4. Is there anything else we should know about professional development planning or the connection between educator evaluation data and professional development at [site]?

Thank you for your time and insight today. During the next few weeks, we will be developing written site profiles for each of the districts we visit. As we draft the profiles, we may find that we have additional follow-up questions for you. Would it be okay if we contacted you again for a brief phone conversation? We plan to share drafts of these profiles with you or someone at [site] to make sure we captured your story correctly.

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7. **Models good pedagogical practice.** HQPD models good pedagogical practice and applies knowledge of adult learning theory to engage educators.
8. **Makes use of relevant resources to meet goals.** HQPD makes use of relevant resources to ensure that the identified goals and objectives are met.
9. **Facilitated by knowledgeable professionals.** HQPD is taught or facilitated by a professional who is knowledgeable about the identified objectives.
10. **Is coherent and connected.** HQPD sessions connect and build upon each other to provide a coherent and useful learning experience for educators.

**District Profiles:**

**Interview Protocol for Teacher Leaders With Role in Professional Development Management**

**October 2014**

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We understand that your time is limited, and we will keep this conversation to no more than 45 minutes [one hour for a group interview].

If you don’t mind, we would like to record this interview simply for note-taking purposes only. No one outside of our research team will have access to or will hear the recording; the recording would be for the AIR team’s reference only. If you would like me to turn off the recorder at any point, just let me know. Is that okay with you?

**Questions for Teacher Leaders**

1. Before we get started, can you briefly describe your role at the school and your specific role and responsibilities as they pertain to planning or implementing professional development?

Probe for details if a PD committee is mentioned. If a committee is not mentioned, ask if there is one, who participates, what they do, who coordinates it, and so forth.

1. How much influence would you say you have over your own PD? How about in terms of the *quality* of the PD you engage in?

In your role as [a teacher leader], how much influence would you say you have over your colleagues’ PD? In terms of type of offerings or the quality?

1. How has PD changed from your perspective since you began teaching in this district?
	1. Probe for how it has changed in terms of delivery method, quality, and impact.
2. Could you walk me through the PD planning process from your perspective? What time of year does the process start?

Probe for details about the timeline, as follows:

When does [site] identify PD needs?

When does PD selection take place?

When does the PD committee meet?

Is the timeline pretty much the same every year, or does the timeline change?

How is the quality of PD monitored at [site] so that you know what PD to engage in again?

1. Are you familiar with the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development (or HQPD standards for short)? [If so] How did you first learn about the HQPD standards?
2. To what extent are the HQPD standards informing your professional development–related work, including PD planning?

How are you making use of the standards at your school?

Probe for how, if at all, the standards have been shared with other teachers.

 [If not mentioned] How are the standards informing how you or other staff at your school assess or monitor the quality of the PD teachers at your school receive?

 [If the standards have not had an impact] How has the way you track the quality of your PD changed during the past year or two?

1. Here is a list of the HQPD standards [handout—see Protocol Appendix]. Which standard or standards would you say [site] excels at? How so? Was that always the case?

Do you have any data or other evidence you can point to or share that demonstrates this?

Which standard is the biggest challenge to implement? Why? How has [site] addressed, or planned to address, that challenge?

1. How does [site] ensure *coherent* and *ongoing* PD for teachers?
2. What are the barriers to using the HQPD standards in your planning, coordinating, or monitoring of PD at your school?

What are the barriers to aligning the PD that your educators engage in to the standards? What have you done to overcome those barriers?

1. How does [site] use educator evaluation data to plan PD?

Probe for how the PD committee or administrators use the data to plan PD for individual teachers or for department- or grade-level or schoolwide PD.

Probe for how or whether they use evaluation data to identify teachers exemplary in different areas to lead PD.

1. What are the challenges in using educator evaluation data to plan PD?

How is [site] staff overcoming these challenges? What supports or resources are in place to help overcome those challenges?

1. I understand that there are [number] early-release days for PD and [number] full days, and I understand that teachers get [amount of time] during the school day. How is that time used?

Was that always the case, or is that amount of time a recent change? If so, why?

Are teachers able to observe other teachers from time-to-time?

Work with coaches?

Engage in professional learning communities?

1. Are there any documents that speak to any of questions we just discussed that would be useful for us to better understand your PD planning processes and impact? Would you be willing to share the documents with us (for example, strategic PD planning documents, participant surveys, facilitator surveys)?
2. Is there anything else we should know about PD planning or the connection between educator evaluation data and PD at [site]?

Thank you for your time and insight today. During the next few weeks, we will be developing written site profiles for each of the districts we visit. As we draft the profiles, we may find that we have additional follow-up questions for you. Would it be okay if we contacted you again for a brief phone conversation? We plan to share drafts of these profiles with you or someone at [site] to make sure we captured your story correctly.

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1. As noted on the CPS website:

http://www.cpsd.us/departments/professional\_development/professional\_development\_\_overview/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The district provides school-based mathematics and literacy coaches for teachers in grades K–8. The district also has social studies and science coaches who work districtwide. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In future years, the professional development committee will choose a theme for each institute. For 2015, the theme is differentiation, and the professional development committee is currently working to solicit workshops broadly around this theme. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A workshop designed to help educators realize the positive benefit of mindful practice for adults and children, and to provide them with resources to assist in developing their own mindful practice and incorporating mindfulness interventions into their classrooms/schools. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A presentation focused on the positive benefits of movement and physical activity on the adolescent brain. Topics include concentration, behavior management, and academic performance. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)