Seven Levers for Establishing High Quality Professional Development

Findings From Interviews With Massachusetts Educators

May 2015

Massachusetts Department of ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION
Background

- The purpose of this set of three presentations is to convey key findings from a study conducted by the American Institutes for Research and the Concord Evaluation Group on behalf of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

- These presentations are one component of a larger project to help Massachusetts educators envision what it takes to ensure that all educators have access to high quality professional development (HQPD).

- The focus of this presentation is on how educators in four nominated sites in Massachusetts have used five key levers to establish HQPD.
About This Project

What is it?

Case profiles of four sites engaged in building systems to support HQPD. The case profiles are based on interviews and collected documents.

What are the goals of the project?

To highlight for professional learning leaders across the Commonwealth how some Massachusetts educators are working to establish HQPD in their schools and districts.

Which sites participated?

- Cambridge Public Schools
- Easthampton High School of Easthampton Public Schools
- Lexington Public Schools
- Melrose Public Schools

Please see ESE’s Resources for PD Leaders and Educators page for relevant PD resources, including the full case studies.
About the Project

How were sites selected?
Teacher and Principal Advisory Cabinet members nominated districts or schools that were making consistent use of the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development to inform professional learning by doing things such as:

- Building internal staff capacity to facilitate high quality, results-oriented professional development in creative ways
- Doing an exceptional job coordinating/managing professional development and creating the conditions for educators to engage in deep learning
- Thoughtfully using educator evaluation data to inform planning and delivery of professional development

ESE, in collaboration with AIR, selected four sites from among the many nominated based on the comprehensiveness of their approach.

What were the key themes observed across the sites?
Seven key themes were identified as important levers in ensuring HQPD; they are listed on the next slide.
Seven Key Levers

1. Instilling a “growth mindset” among educators
2. Collaborating for change using data
3. Making time for learning
4. Embedding professional learning in educators’ daily work
5. Empowering teachers to choose their own path toward growth
6. Using data (including goals, evidence, and standards) to plan HQPD
7. Using data to assess HQPD
About This Presentation

★ Some useful definitions (Slides 7–13)
★ How the profiled sites are establishing HQPD:
  o Lever 1 (Slides 15–21)
  o Lever 2 (Slides 22–25)
  o Lever 3 (Slides 26–27)
  o Lever 4 (Slides 28–32)
  o Lever 5 (Slides 33–37)
★ Levers 6 and 7 are discussed in related presentations:
  o Lever 6: “Using Data to Plan High Quality Professional Development”
  o Lever 7: “Using Data to Assess High Quality Professional Development”
First, Some Definitions
What Is HQPD?

High Quality Professional Development (HQPD) is a set of coherent learning experiences that is systematic, purposeful, and structured over a sustained period of time with the goal of improving educator practice and student outcomes.

Source:
http://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/standards.html
What Are the Massachusetts HQPD Standards?

- Released in 2013, the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development describe the research-based features of HQPD.

- For more information visit: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/standards.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/standards.html)

**Massachusetts Standards for High Quality Professional Development (HQPD)**

- Characteristics of High Quality PD:
  1. Has SMART goals relevant to student outcomes
  2. Aligned with goals and priorities
  3. Designed based on the analysis of data
  4. Assessed to ensure goals met
  5. Promotes collaboration
  6. Advances an educator’s ability to apply learnings
  7. Models good pedagogical practice
  8. Makes use of relevant resources to meet goals
  9. Facilitated by knowledgeable professionals
  10. Is coherent and connected
What Is the HQPD Planning and Assessment Process?

The HQPD Planning & Assessment Process

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Lesson Study
☆ Lesson study is a teaching improvement process that has origins in Japanese elementary education. Collaborating in small groups, teachers set learning goals, plan a classroom lesson together, observe how it works in practice, and then revise the lesson and report on the results so that other teachers can benefit from the group’s learning.


Action Research
☆ Action research is a disciplined inquiry process conducted by those taking a particular action or set of actions for the purpose of improving or refining those actions.

What Is a “Growth Mindset”?  

Dr. Carol Dweck, a Stanford psychologist, describes a continuum of beliefs about success, from a fixed to a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Mindset</th>
<th>Growth Mindset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talent and intelligence are innate and unchangeable</td>
<td>Talent and intelligence are just a starting point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure is a negative statement on basic abilities</td>
<td>Learning comes from failure (performance can be improved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger for approval, avoid challenges and obstacles</td>
<td>Passion for learning, embrace challenges and pursuit of obstacles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The success of others is threatening</td>
<td>Find lessons and inspiration in success of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implications of a Growth Mindset for Educators

★ In a growth mindset, educators believe that:

- All students can learn and meet high standards, no matter their seeming innate ability or other challenges
- Low student achievement is something that teachers and leaders and their colleagues can change (both individually and collectively)
- Teachers can become better at teaching through hard work, practice, study, and coaching
- School leaders can become better at leading through hard work, practice, study, and coaching
- Even the best teachers and leaders can always get better! (Dweck, 2006)
How are the profiled sites ensuring HQPD?
Lever 1. Instilling a “Growth Mindset” Among Educators

All four sites profiled sought to instill a “growth mindset” among their educators, and believed that this shift was necessary for the successful implementation of high quality professional development.
1. How Are the Profiled Sites Cultivating a Growth Mindset Among Educators?

1. Constantly communicating about and focusing on student learning to galvanize and sustain an orientation toward continuous improvement

2. Collaboratively reviewing data to see the need for change, as well as its impact

3. Discussing books, articles, or videos on the concept of mindset

4. Leveraging the new model educator evaluation framework to encourage teacher engagement in professional learning

5. Providing teachers with options for professional development that address their individual goals
1.1 Constantly communicating about and focusing on student learning

Examples:

★ The Lexington Public Schools (LPS) mission of “high achievement for all students” and related theory of action to achieve that mission is revisited at almost every meeting, including faculty meetings, school committee meetings, professional learning community meetings, etc. This consistent message helps reinforce a growth mindset among faculty.

★ At Easthampton High School (EHS), educators use the “Inquiry Cycle” model (Love, Stiles, Mundry, & DiRanna, 2008) as a basis for their action research approach. Throughout the cycle, educators meet multiple times to examine and discuss student learning data, and work in small inquiry groups to generate solutions for learning challenges. As the groups see the success of their efforts reflected in the data, the focus on student learning helps create a growth mindset.
1.2 Collaboratively reviewing data to see the need for change, as well as its impact

Examples:

★ EHS staff regularly engage in Learning Walks and discuss the findings of the walks with teachers to gather their input on how to interpret the data and identify student and educator learning needs.

★ LPS holds bimonthly school-level data meetings to collaboratively identify and share where instruction, curriculum, assessments, interventions, and extensions can be strengthened.

★ Melrose Public Schools (MPS) has staff bring student work to faculty meetings, where they identify opportunities to enhance student learning through changes in teaching practice.
1.3 Discussing books, articles, or videos on the concept of mindset

Examples:

- MPS requires all new teachers to read *Mindset: The new psychology of success* (Dweck, 2006) during their first year.

- CPS sponsored a workshop during the summer CPS Educator Excellence Institute titled *Mindset: Transforming Student Math Experiences*, in which participants watched a video on mindset and applied the concept during learning activities.
1.4 Leveraging the new model educator evaluation framework to encourage teacher engagement in PD

Examples:

- As they worked to implement the 5-Step Cycle of evaluation, EHS leaders said to staff, “We want to spread best practice the best way we can, and this is a great platform from which to do it.” So they used educator evaluation processes to extend their collaborative inquiry work.

- LPS educators upload artifacts to their Supervision and Evaluation database aligned to the Educator Evaluation Model System to exemplify and describe the standards of effective practice they have been able to excel at. Educators upload pictures and descriptions of evidence (e.g., a product they produced in a PD course, or a lesson plan they developed) related to their professional practice goals. Evaluators and supervisors can offer feedback to educators based on this evidence.
1.5 Providing teachers with options for professional development that address their individual goals

Example:

★ Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) gives its teachers choice in the professional development courses they take, allowing them to decide what topics they feel they most need to improve on.

★ LPS sponsored over 35 courses just in the spring of 2015.
Lever 2: Collaborating for Change
Using Data

Two of the sites created a joint labor-and-management PD committee that reviews data and policies on professional learning; both of the committees play an integral role in school and district decision making about professional learning. The other two sites also involve teachers and administrators in HQPD planning and assessment.
2. How Are the Profiled Sites Collaborating for Change?

- Teachers and administrators have been working together in all four sites to enhance professional development.

- CPS and MPS established and empowered joint labor-and-management professional development committees; LPS has an established professional development committee not specifically associated with employee or management associations/union; and EHS has a school-based PD team. The committees in all four sites are composed of teachers and administrators.

- Standing professional development committees enhance communication between district leaders, PD coordinators, and PD participants; this helps ensure that PD meets educators’ goals because it ensures that conversations about PD using evidence take place.

- PD committees were viewed by all four sites as helping facilitate changes in professional learning (such as reallocated time for learning).
# PD Committee Composition and Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Year Formed</th>
<th>Size &amp; Makeup</th>
<th>First Step</th>
<th>Current Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge Public Schools</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>20 teachers and administrators; co-chaired by the assistant superintendent for</td>
<td>Created three subcommittees: (1) the five-year plan subcommittee, (2) the new teacher induction program subcommittee, and (3) the end-of-year planning subcommittee</td>
<td>Creating criteria for professional development offerings and ways to monitor professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>curriculum and instruction and the Cambridge Education Association president</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melrose Public Schools</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>12 teachers and administrators, co-chaired by a member of the teachers</td>
<td>Created a <a href="#">professional development handbook</a> that outlines goals and procedures for professional learning.</td>
<td>Working with the data team and school leadership committee to review student and teacher data to identify professional development needs and assess progress toward meeting goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>association and an administrator. The director of curriculum, a school principal,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and representatives from each level and discipline area sit on the committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lexington Public Schools</strong></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Teachers and administrators, led by the assistant superintendent and the professional learning coordinator</td>
<td>Completed extensive literature review on professional development nationally and internationally to learn which types of professional development directly impact student outcomes (including collecting survey data from LPS educators on what they believe they need professional development in)</td>
<td>Review professional development offerings and proposed courses; come up with ideas to get more educators involved in professional learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Easthampton High School</strong></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>School-level PD Team includes about 15 members, including the principal, vice principal, professional development coordinator, members of a Data Team, and a Learning Walk team</td>
<td>After establishing the PD Team, the team met to consider the district student learning goals in its own planning while simultaneously making sure that the school’s goals are relevant to the teachers at EHS</td>
<td>Coordinate all professional learning activities at the school; collaborate with educators to collect and review any and all data available on student and professional learning, including Learning Walk data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lever 3: Leveraging Existing Time for Learning

★ None of the districts renegotiated the amount of protected time for teacher professional development in employee contracts; all sought to use the time they did have better.
3. How Are the Profiled Sites Making Time for HQPD?

★ Using faculty meeting time for learning
  - **Example:** EHS & LPS take care of administrative items over email rather than in faculty meetings so teachers can use their required PD time to learn.

★ Reducing administrative duties
  - **Example:** MPS has prioritized common planning and learning time over administrative duties, creatively covering non-teaching duty assignments with either fewer staff or other workarounds.

★ Giving teachers more control over contracted PD hours
  - **Example:** CPS reallocated the 35 contractual PD hours to ensure teachers could choose to engage in relevant professional development. Now, 10 hours are designated as “teacher’s choice,” while the remaining hours are spent working with their principal or department chair on learning activities relevant to school or department goals.

★ Providing optional HQPD in the summertime
  - **Example:** LPS has increased summer offerings for educators who want to be more involved in PD courses but do not have time during the school year to take part in more than the required PD hours.
Lever 4: Embedding Professional Learning in Educators’ Daily Work

- Across the sites, HQPD was not seen as a separate activity, but something educators do every day as part of their jobs.
4. How Did the Profiled Sites Embed HQPD in Educators’ Daily Work?

1. Reframing the task of professional development as improving student learning
2. Focusing on inquiry-based professional learning activities
3. Tapping internal expertise
4.1 Reframing Professional Development

★ PD leaders in several sites saw HQPD not as something separate from the work of teaching, but rather the foundation for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and interventions.

★ For example, LPS created a visual to describe their vision of the foundational role of HQPD:

★ Also, districts moving to inquiry-based learning (described in the next slide) focus not just on the skills and knowledge that teachers will gain through HQPD but what students will.
4.2 Focusing on Inquiry-Based Professional Learning

 Sites were beginning to embrace inquiry-based HQPD, in which educators learn through asking questions and collecting evidence to address real problems of practice.

Examples:

- EHS focuses on action research, which is explicitly tied to district, school, professional, and student goals. EHS staff work in small, differentiated groups throughout the school year to research specific aspects of a problem, identify solutions (best practices in teaching to address the problem), test various solutions, review data generated during the process, and share findings with each other.

- MPS incorporates lesson studies into the New Teacher Induction Program, where new teachers teach lessons repeatedly while being observed by each other and experienced teachers. Following the lesson, student work is reviewed. The data gleaned from the lesson studies have helped teachers improve their practice and look at student work differently.
4.3 Tapping Internal Expertise

All four sites encouraged teachers and building leaders to lead professional development courses and other activities.

Examples:
- CPS and LPS both held professional development institutes filled with workshops that were proposed and led by teachers and school leaders from within the district.
- MPS relies on in-house expertise for most of its professional development. The district recently hired instructional coaches to provide HQPD to teachers in the content areas as well.
Lever 5: Empowering Teachers to Choose Their Own Path Toward Growth

- All four sites gave teachers a choice in which courses to take, often guided by data and professional conversations.
5. How Did the Profiled Sites Empower and Support Teachers’ Choice?

1. Providing multiple options for professional learning and allowing teachers to choose among them
2. Discussing HQPD goals during the 5-Step Cycle of evaluation
3. Providing teachers with learning resources
5.1 Providing Teachers With Multiple Options for Professional Learning

- Instead of mandating one-size-fits-all workshops or inviting guest speakers to speak to everyone, sites are working to provide a wide range of district-sponsored, educator-driven options to ensure relevance and appropriate differentiation.

Examples:

- At CPS, teachers can decide what course they want to select (through conversation with their evaluators). As a result of this, educators are signing up for more course hours than required. Teachers are currently able to choose whatever course they want, but in the future, teachers will work with their evaluators to select courses tied more specifically to school goals as well as their own student learning and professional practice S.M.A.R.T. goals.

- The Lexington Learns Together PD day allowed teachers the option to participate in three of 141 possible workshop sessions. This opportunity also allowed educators who were passionate about a topic to host a workshop, sharing their knowledge with other educators in the district.

- Educators in each site are encouraged to propose professional development courses that are relevant to their and their colleagues’ learning goals.
5.2 Discussing Educators’ HQPD Goals During the 5-Step Cycle of Evaluation

Examples:

- At each site, professional conversations during the 5-Step Cycle of evaluation helped crystalize educators’ understanding of their own goals for their learning and practice.

- At LPS, supervisors focus primarily on educators’ accomplishments during collaborative evaluation meetings, asking them to cite artifacts of their work as examples.
5.3 Providing Teachers With Learning Resources

Examples:

★ MPS has a set of resources related to curriculum and instruction posted on a wikispace platform so educators can access them at all times. This platform is designed to extend the learning that teachers are receiving and to help reinforce best practices.

★ EHS created a Professional Development Plan and crosswalk document that articulates the vision, the theory of action, the schoolwide student learning problems on which they will focus, and the overarching schoolwide goal.
References


For More Information About This Project and to Read the Site Profiles:

★ Please see ESE’s [Resources for PD Leaders and Educators](mailto:Profdev@doe.mass.edu) page for relevant PD resources, including the full case studies.

★ Email: [Profdev@doe.mass.edu](mailto:Profdev@doe.mass.edu)