

# Enhancing Professional Development in Lexington Public Schools

Continuous Learning for Every Educator, Every Day

Lauren E. Clymer, *American Institutes for Research*

Jane G. Coggshall, Ph.D., *American Institutes for Research*

May 2015

Contents

[About This Project 1](#_Toc419988852)

[Executive Summary 2](#_Toc419988853)

[Building a High Quality Professional Development System in Lexington Public Schools: Getting Started 5](#_Toc419988854)

[Forming a Professional Development Committee 6](#_Toc419988855)

[Professional Development Management Structure 6](#_Toc419988856)

[Establishing a Vision for Learning at LPS 7](#_Toc419988857)

[Professional Development in Lexington Public Schools Today: Increased Collaboration and Multiple Teacher-Driven Pathways to Learning 9](#_Toc419988858)

[Establishing Professional Learning Communities 9](#_Toc419988859)

[Teacher-Led Professional Development Courses 10](#_Toc419988860)

[Lexington Learns Together Conference 12](#_Toc419988861)

[Coaching 12](#_Toc419988862)

[New Teacher Induction Program 13](#_Toc419988863)

[Using Data to Plan and Assess High Quality Professional Development in Lexington Public Schools 14](#_Toc419988864)

[Data Sources Used in Professional Development Decisions 14](#_Toc419988865)

[Collecting and Using Educator Feedback to Inform Professional Learning 16](#_Toc419988866)

[Connections Between Educator Evaluation and Professional Development in Lexington Public Schools 17](#_Toc419988867)

[Evaluating the Impact of the Professional Learning System Using Student Learning Outcomes 19](#_Toc419988868)

[Plans for Continuous Improvement 21](#_Toc419988869)

[Appendix A: Interview Protocols A-1](#_Toc419988870)

[Appendix B: Lexington Public Schools Professional Learning Call for Course Proposals B-1](#_Toc419988871)

[Appendix C: Lexington Public Schools Professional Learning Sample Course Proposal C-1](#_Toc419988872)

## 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

The Lexington Public School (LPS) District serves more than 6,750 students and is located approximately 15 miles outside of Boston. A professional staff of nearly 780 teach in this Level 2 district, which includes six elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Seven percent of the students in the district are from low-income families, 6 percent are identified as English language learners (ELLs), and roughly 30 percent are from non-English-speaking families.

LPS district officials have been working to design and implement a high quality system of professional learning in the district for the better part of a decade. Through “perseverance, patience, and redundancy,” in the words of Carol Pilarski, the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and professional development, LPS educators have increasing access to high quality professional development aligned with their professional practice goals, as well as school and district goals for student learning. District professional development (PD) leaders have come close to achieving Superintendent Paul Ash’s vision of “teachers learning every day, every place, continuously.”

### A Shared Vision: Ensuring High Achievement for All Students

The current professional development system in Lexington took shape over a decade ago, when Superintendent Paul Ash identified significant and consistent gaps in student achievement. For example, in 2006, 50 percent of LPS’s African-American students were in special education. Digging into this statistic, the superintendent found that these students were not placed in special education because they had learning disabilities, but because they had trouble reading. He concluded that LPS educators were not meeting the needs of all students, and individual teachers were running out of new ideas. Superintendent Ash believed that if teachers and administrators could work together to transform the school system into “a learning organization,” all students were better served. In order to do this, he and his leadership team decided that they would “have to raise the knowledge and skills and mindsets of the people who are in the district,” and to do that, they would need to build a better professional learning system.

### A Framework for A Better Professional Learning System

Given that LPS’s guiding mission is high achievement for all students, the district wanted to ensure that this professional development would have an impact on student outcomes. Professional learning became the foundation for the four pillars on which LPS’s mission rests: 1) curriculum, 2) instruction, 3) assessment, and 4) interventions and extensions (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Visual Used to Describe the Role of Professional Learning in LPS’s Mission

****

With this mission in mind, LPS staff developed a through-line from the district goals to curriculum, instruction, assessment, interventions, and extensions, to professional learning, to site-based goals, to the classroom, to the teacher, to the students, and all the way to the community.

Sandra Trach, an elementary school principal on LPS’s professional development committee, explained that the clear line from the district vision through the four pillars guide all school improvement plans. This line helps to provide “common ground” for all staff, allowing them to see the connections between the district’s mission and curriculum, instruction, assessments, interventions, extensions, and professional learning. Professional learning is no longer seen as a separate entity or add-on, but rather as an integral aspect of Lexington schools’ work to close achievement gaps and ensure high achievement for all students. Today, professional development at LPS consists of the following key components:

(1) common planning and learning time, including professional learning communities (PLCs);

(2) teacher-created courses and workshops focused on specific topics, many of which have a follow-up component;

(3) coaching;

(4) lesson studies, which include a video and coaching component;

(5) comprehensive new teacher induction; and

(6) external consultants, who conduct in-class modeling and teaching and provide coaching for more specialized professional development, such as adaptive physical education.

A professional development committee helps district leaders rely heavily on multiple forms of data to plan and assess these activities.

LPS’s efforts to strengthen curriculum, instruction, assessment, and interventions through a coherent professional learning system correlate with narrowing achievement gaps between students of color and students from low-income families and the overall population of students, which have now almost completely closed. District leaders consider the professional development system to be an essential component of this change. Building a high quality professional development system remains an ongoing process, and while LPS has already seen many improved student outcomes, it still strives to continuously improve.

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

Lexington Public Schools is a district in the greater Boston area that consists of six elementary schools, two middle schools, and a high school. (See Table 1 for a brief demographic description of the school’s student body). Currently, the assistant superintendent and the professional learning coordinator work together to create a system of professional learning for the nearly 780 professional staff in the district.

At the helm is Superintendent Dr. Paul Ash, who joined the district in 2005. From his first day onward, his “mantra” has been: “We want to see teachers learning, every day, every place, continuously.” He aims to make professional learning a hallmark of his leadership.

The superintendent’s vision of continuous learning was far from a reality when he started. In 2006, 50 percent of LPS’s African-American students were in special education. Digging into this statistic, the superintendent found that these students were not placed in special education because they had learning disabilities, but because they had trouble reading. From this, he concluded that LPS educators were not meeting the needs of all students. Individual teachers were running out of new ideas, but he believed teachers and administrators could work together to transform the school system into “a learning organization” where all students were better served. In order to do this, he and his leadership team decided that they would “have to raise the knowledge and skills and mindsets of the people who are in the district,” and to do that, they would need to build a better professional learning system.

In 2008, with the help of Carol Pilarski, assistant superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and professional development, a formalized system for professional development was put in place. Using American Recovery & Reinvestment Act funds (which districts commonly used to hire new teachers), the district launched a new professional learning program. The superintendent wanted to create a program that did not necessarily bring in outside expertise, but instead aimed to create expertise from within. As he explained: “What’s different here than you’ll find probably most any place else is that the professional learning program is designed to raise the skills and the capacity of people who achieve the district schools goals.” He sought to establish a system that would allow educators’ knowledge to “defuse to their [professional learning communities], to their departments, to their schools, to the entire school system.”

Table 1. Lexington Public Schools Demographic Profile

|  | Lexington Public Schools |  State Average |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Total enrollment | 6,785 | 2,343 |
| Total instructional staff | 545.6 | 172.8 |
| Total elementary schools | 6 | -- |
| Total middle schools | 2 | -- |
| Total high schools | 1 | -- |
| Percent low income | 7.1 | 38.3 |
| Percent English language learners | 6.1 | 8.5 |
| Accountability level  | 2 | -- |

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

The superintendent—assisted by Carol Pilarski, the assistant superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and professional development, and Leonard Swanton, the coordinator of professional learning and special projects— pushed to implement targeted professional learning so that the district could, in his words, “demonstrate over the course of *X* number of years that what [our team is] doing in the way of professional development is actually making a difference.” This work is described in detail below.

It should be noted that the district has not renegotiated dedicated contractual time for professional development. For the past 15 years, staff have received one full day and four half days for professional development.

### Forming a Professional Development Committee

*In 2009, the superintendent organized a professional development committee of administrators and teachers, with the purpose of “identifying the short- and long-term ways in which, together, we can create a self-sustaining, job-embedded professional development program that supports the ongoing needs of teachers and students.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

The PD committee is open to all LPS educators and consists of representatives from all schools in the district. The committee’s first responsibility was to review the research literature on professional development, both nationally and internationally, and identify the most promising types of professional development for impacting student outcomes. After this initial step, surveys were sent out to all LPS teachers to develop a better understanding of teachers’ needs, in terms of skills, subject matter, and what they needed to effectively collaborate with each other. The committee examined the survey data to ensure that the district’s optional PD courses aligned with teachers’ needs *and* were likely to be effective, based on the relevant research.

Since its inception, the professional development committee—which is led by the assistant superintendent and the professional learning coordinator—has served as “the eyes and ears in the schools of what’s going on in terms of professional learning.” Committee members participate in PD themselves, engage in conversations with colleagues about PD, and are able to observe and communicate staff feedback about PD offerings to the district leadership. Educators across the district can informally discuss their ideas and feedback with committee members or send a formal email to a committee member.

Monthly committee meeting time is also used to review course proposals and discuss the backgrounds of those offering courses. These discussions provide information to the assistant superintendent and the professional learning coordinator, who take the feedback into account and make the final decision about the district’s professional development offerings.

### Professional Development Management Structure

LPS’s professional development leadership team is responsible for clearly articulating the connections between curriculum, instruction, and professional development. To that end, the superintendent decided to create a single position (the assistant superintendent position) to oversee all three components. As the assistant superintendent explained:

If I am going to articulate what the curriculum is supposed to look like with my colleagues, what the instructional practices have to be, then I’d better be able to understand what the professional learning is that needs to accompany the success of curriculum and instruction.

The professional development coordinator agreed that it is critically important to have somebody who has a “30,000 foot view of the entire district” and prioritizes professional learning.

*As a team working in tandem with the professional development committee, the assistant superintendent and the professional learning coordinator strive to consistently communicate that professional development plays an important role in meeting the district’s mission of high achievement for all students.*

The assistant superintendent strongly believes that “professional development takes a long time and the work is never truly finished. But the important thing is consistency.” Improvement comes from looking at what did and did not work well, and from understanding how to learn from that.

### Establishing a Vision for Learning at LPS

As the professional learning coordinator explained: “In 2009, we, as a district, began formally systemizing how professional development would take place across all areas of the district.” Given that LPS’s guiding mission is high achievement for all students, the district wanted to ensure that this professional development would have an impact on student outcomes.

In 2009, the assistant superintendent developed a visual (Figure 1) to illustrate that professional learning is the foundation for the four pillars on which LPS’s mission rests: 1) curriculum, 2) instruction, 3) assessment, and 4) interventions and extensions.

*The purpose of this visual was to provide educators with a shared vision and understanding of how their work to advance the LPS mission is interrelated.*

At the top of this visual is the following mission: “High achievement for all students.” LPS educators’ work is driven by continuous exploration of the four essential questions that appear below the mission (adopted from Richard DuFour; see <http://www.solution-tree.com/presenters/plc-at-work>):

* What do we want all students to know and be able to do?
* How will we teach so that all students learn?
* How will we know when they have learned it?
* What do we do if they have not learned it or if they have already learned it?

School and district leaders ask these questions whenever they plan changes or monitor curriculum, instruction, assessments, interventions, and extensions. The assistant superintendent described this as “a recursive cycle” that applies not only to students, but also to the professional learning of the teaching staff.

Figure 1: Visual Used to Describe the Role of Professional Learning in LPS’s Mission

****

*With this mission in mind, LPS staff developed a through-line from the district goals to curriculum, instruction, assessment, interventions, and extensions, to professional learning, to site-based goals, to the classroom, to the teacher, to the students, and all the way to the community.*

Sandra Trach, an elementary school principal on the professional development committee, explained that there is a clear line from the district vision through the visual, and that the four essential questions guide all school improvement plans. This line helps to provide “common ground” for all staff, allowing them to see the connections between the district’s mission and curriculum, instruction, assessments, interventions, extensions, and professional learning.

The director of the early childhood program explained that “when we got the mission statement, a lot of things started falling into place.” Staff saw the connections between different initiatives, and district leaders continually emphasized the connections between professional learning and the mission. For example, they made connections in conversation and when writing course descriptions, “connecting the dots however possible.” *As the superintendent reiterated: “Professional learning doesn’t work independent of other parts of the district working well.”*

*Both the assistant superintendent and the professional learning coordinator constantly emphasized that professional development is a “system” that is related to everything the district takes on*.

Ensuring that all educators in the district understand the mission and the role of professional learning has helped ensure commitment to continuous improvement. As a professional development committee member explained: “Folks will bend over backwards to do anything to increase their own professional learning to support their students.”

## Professional Development in Lexington Public Schools Today: Increased Collaboration and Multiple Teacher-Driven Pathways to Learning

As described earlier, the management of professional development underwent a number of changes in the last eight years, as did the professional learning activities and resources. This section describes the kind of professional learning formats and events provided at LPS today. Many of these activities embody the principles described in the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development (see Figure 2), although 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. |
| --- |

### Establishing Professional Learning Communities

*According to LPS leaders, collaboration and professional learning communities are a hallmark of LPS’s approach to professional learning.*

Prior to 2009, LPS educators were not provided with much opportunity to work with one another. When the professional learning coordinator was a teacher in the district, for example, he remembers collaborating with other educators in a variety of ways, but recalls that “the district [had not] set aside time for us to be able to work together as educators, to talk about student learning, to talk about our own learning, to ask questions of one another professionally when we struggle with challenges in our classrooms.”

After 2009,the district’s intensified focus on professional learning and the increased availability of detailed student learning data led to the establishment of professional learning communities (PLCs). Over the past five years, LPS staff have embraced PLCs, and members of the professional development committee agree that working as a team has become the normal way of working.

However, like many other districts, LPS initially faced teacher pushback when PLCs were first introduced. The assistant superintendent explained that a common sentiment among educators was: “I can do my work in my classroom, and I can do it alone, and I don’t need to collaborate.” Initially, it was difficult for staff to collaborate without feeling judged by their colleagues. Teachers were not used to talking about student progress or sharing their strengths and weaknesses with other staff. However, after participating in the PLCs, teachers began to realize they could be more effective and efficient if they looked at student data, and ways to improve their teaching practices, as a team.

*According to district leaders, educators’ attitudes toward collaboration and mutual responsibility began to shift when they gained a better understanding of the data they could access, and what those data could reveal about teaching and learning in their classroom and districtwide.* The professional learning coordinator believes that educators began to realize that they could benefit from looking at these data as a team and building a stronger understanding of the students in their classroom, as well as students in their grades, schools, and the district. This contributed to the notion that *students were no longer “my students” or “your students” but “our students.”*

While professional learning at LPS became more collaborative over this period, teachers have also been given greater control over the kinds of opportunities they engage in. The next section describes this shift, beginning with the activities that are now open to, and often led by, LPS educators.

### Teacher-Led Professional Development Courses

*LPS currently offers approximately 60 afterschool professional development courses, workshops, seminars, and trainings over the course of the year. These offerings are all optional and are all free to LPS staff. Of these 60 course offerings, approximately half are proposed, designed, and taught by LPS staff.*

The large number of offerings provides teachers with the flexibility to select professional development activities that meet their individual needs. Their course choices are informed by their self-assessment and goal setting during the [5-Step Cycle](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/QRG-5StepCycle.pdf) of evaluation, as well as any changes to the curriculum or technology that they feel they need to keep up with. The courses allow LPS staff to learn graduate-level content and are designed to provide them with the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues and reflect upon their daily practices in the classroom. They may sign up individually, in groups, or in teams.

Prior to 2009, most of the district-sponsored courses were taught by outside experts. However, as LPS educators’ knowledge and expertise grew (as a result of the greater emphasis on professional learning in the district), LPS leaders began to encourage educators to share that knowledge with their colleagues. Now, there is a formal process in place that allows LPS teachers and administrators to submit one-page concept papers or proposals outlining the course they would like to lead (see Appendix B for the Call for Spring & Summer 2015 Course Proposals).

In the proposals, teachers and administrators are asked to detail what the course would include, how it would relate to professional practice, and how it would impact student learning in the district. On one form, for example, an instructor wrote: “It is a goal at Clarke to involve classroom teachers and share a common language along with strategies that can be used throughout the day to promote the students as well as staff ... Given the results of the Youth Risk Behavior survey, it is clear that students need to build skills to help them deal with stress in a more healthy way.” See Appendix C for another example of a course proposal, together with a letter of support.

The professional development committee reviews the proposals to select which ones the district should sponsor. During the meetings, members discuss potential interest in a course, whether the course relates to educators’ professional learning goals, and whether it will help the district meet its professional learning and student learning goals. Members also discuss the instructor and his or her knowledge, and whether the course relates to the standards of effective practice for [teaching](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr35.html?section=03) or [administrative leadership](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr35.html?section=04). After these discussions, the professional learning coordinator provides the instructor with the committee’s feedback, editing the course description accordingly if the course is to be offered.

For example, Bonnie O’Connor, a special education teacher and member of the professional development committee, created a very popular (and internally led) professional learning course on executive functioning. Her interest in the topic stemmed from the fact that it was directly relevant to her students and the challenges they faced. Wanting to learn more about supporting executive functioning among her students, she applied for a grant from the Lexington Education Foundation (a local community- and business-supported foundation) and found a guest speaker to offer a workshop for interested teachers. Although it was originally offered as a 25-person summer workshop, interest in the course prompted district leaders to expand the workshop size to 60, and many more remained on a waiting list. (The professional learning coordinator suggested that the popularity of this workshop highlights that teachers are increasingly recognizing that skills such as organization and other executive functions are critical for student learning, and that teachers are interested in PD that spans multiple subjects and fields, not just the subjects that they teach.)

As a result of the interest among LPS teachers, O’Connor and two other LPS educators submitted a proposal to the professional learning committee to teach a full graduate course on executive functioning. They offered this course last summer as a single, 15-hour, in-house credit course, with an external graduate credit through Endicott College. There have been many requests for the course to be offered again next summer.

The assistant superintendent explained that internally taught professional development courses are “high leverage and powerful professional learning experiences that don’t have a high cost factor.” However, she emphasized that their greatest benefit is that they are taught through the “Lexington lens,” reflecting the district’s mission, vision, and guiding principles. Even if districts have the money to bring in external experts, “you can’t pay an outside consultant to come in with that view.”

*A member of the professional learning committee also explained that internally facilitated and instructed courses promote collaboration and provide an opportunity for application and follow-up*:

You can take [what you learn] right back to your classroom immediately and then you can also have the opportunity to go back and speak to your instructors, ask questions, and email them. You’re building trust. You’re building collegiality. You’re building teamwork. It all just kind of builds, and the support system is right in front of you.

The assistant superintendent emphasized the importance of offering courses during the summer months in addition to those offered during the school year. This is especially important for educators who do not have time during the school year for professional learning courses. As she explained: “They want to work during the summertime when they’re not concerned about their students and lesson planning and they’re free to think creatively and work together.” LPS staff have ongoing opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues in the fall, spring, and summer.

At present, LPS does not have the capacity to offer courses for all specialties within the district. The professional learning coordinator explained that there are teaching cohorts, for example, that only have six members, and the district does not have the resources to provide a course for six or fewer educators. However, the district tries to overcome this challenge by offering tuition reimbursement instead. Once district administrators have approved a course, staff are reimbursed as long as they can show that the course is related to the district’s and school’s goals, as well as their professional practice goals.

### Lexington Learns Together Conference

*On November 4, 2014, LPS held its first* [*Lexington Learns Together*](http://lps.lexingtonma.org/Page/5328) *professional learning day, described as a “day for teachers, designed by teachers.”* Approximately 780 LPS educators attended, choosing among 133 sessions, including 86 individual workshop topics. Over 120 LPS educators presented or facilitated workshops during the event.

The assistant superintendent first conceptualized the event when reflecting upon all the professional learning that had occurred in Lexington over the last five years. Excited that LPS teachers had so much knowledge to share with one another, she felt she needed to create an opportunity where educators could have a full day to celebrate this knowledge and learn from each other.

The assistant superintendent explained that hosting such an event provides a multitude of benefits: “We’ve learned so much from consultants, but we have learned so much more from each other” because LPS allows educators to “share their curricular ideas, their instructional practices, and the things that they personally are passionate about.” The professional learning coordinator and assistant superintendent received great verbal feedback on this event. For example, one educator reported the following to the professional learning coordinator: “On Wednesday [after the event], I emailed three other people from different elementary schools who were in my session. We’re all getting together on Friday afternoon after school to discuss what we learned.” The professional learning coordinator and the assistant superintendent also heard reports of educators using what they had learned within one week of the event.

LPS leaders asked participants and facilitators to complete a survey to assess the quality of the professional learning day, and, overall, feedback was quite positive. (Results from this survey, as well as many of the survey items, are included in this [feedback memo](http://lps.lexingtonma.org/cms/lib2/MA01001631/Centricity/Domain/565/16Dec15LLT.pdf) from the superintendent.) For example, the survey asked: “In terms of providing LPS educators with an innovative way to share and learn from one another, what was your overall impression of the day?” In response, nearly all participants gave the day a rating of 5 (the average was 4.73) on a scale from 1 to 5—least to most valuable.

Members of the professional development committee also felt that it was useful for staff to host the workshops and have their colleagues teach workshops. Instructors felt honored that their hard work was shared with a large audience, and this helped build commitment to the mission as a shared enterprise. The professional learning coordinator also noted that there was a lot of vertical representation: “It was so satisfying to see high school teachers sign up for sessions that were given by elementary school teachers, and vice versa, and not think for a moment that it was not pertinent to their high school practice as secondary teachers.”

Site leaders also viewed the professional learning day as a cost-effective event because there were no external vendors to pay, the instructors were all in-district volunteers, and the event took place at the high school. Site leaders plan to repeat this event format in future years.

### Coaching

*In addition to having full-time coaches in each school building, LPS emphasized the importance of distributed leadership. It considers the district to be full of coaches that other staff members can turn to.*

LPS has content coaches at all levels—some of them serve as the main content coach, while others serve as intervention specialists. LPS teachers also provide support to each other through informal discussions. LPS refers to this as “distributed leadership,” emphasizing that any educator with expertise in a particular topic can serve as a coach to another educator in the district. This attitude embodies collaboration and creates an environment of teaching and learning internally.

LPS is also experimenting with a new format to further professional learning: follow-up coaching. After a course has been completed, a follow-up session is organized, during which the instructor works with teachers in the classroom and answers any questions that may have come up since the original course took place. This in-class coaching adds a layer of collaboration, with teams of teachers going into classrooms to co-teach lessons, observe lessons, and check their practice with one another. The professional learning coordinator explained that “[this component] makes a big difference in terms of continuing the learning from a course.”

Finally, coaches also support lesson study[[2]](#footnote-2) in several Lexington schools. For example, a group of grade-level teachers might come together to plan a lesson, and then each will teach part of that lesson with support from a literacy coach. During the lesson, the literacy coach might lean in and make a suggestion. All lessons are videotaped (usually by the coach), and afterward the team reviews the videos, discusses them, and then each team member enacts the lesson, or a version of it, in his or her own classroom and shares how it went.

### New Teacher Induction Program

*The New Teacher Induction Program is a three-year program designed for all teachers who are new to the LPS district. It is designed, in part, to acclimate new teachers to the district, including its mission and vision for ongoing professional learning, and it has been continually revised over the seven years since it was first implemented.*

In the first year of this program, all new teachers start in Better Beginnings, which is designed to help new teachers adjust to the procedures, beliefs, and guiding principles of the district. Teachers are matched with a mentor who is an experienced or retired teacher, and they start meeting with their mentors before school starts in August and then continue to meet with them throughout the school year. During this first year, new teachers also participate in a series of workshops and seminars to familiarize themselves with the district. The second year is structured to support teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge, as the teachers have been in the district for a full year by this stage. During the last year of the program, teachers take an effective teaching course. LPS offers one of these courses through the district, but teachers in the program also have an opportunity to select (with their supervisor) a course offered outside the district that fulfills this requirement.

The district has worked hard to help ensure new teachers have the skills and knowledge they need to perform at a high level without overwhelming them. The professional learning coordinator described the challenge as “trying to support beginning teachers in whatever ways you can, and [to] provide a structure for it without overwhelming them with 14 additional meetings to go to every year [on top of other duties and faculty meetings].” To overcome this challenge, LPS recently restructured the program to include one mandatory course that meets five times a year (each time for an hour and a half), instead of multiple courses throughout the year. In addition, teachers can choose seminars that directly relate to their practice and goals from a list of seminar options.

## Using Data to Plan and Assess High Quality Professional Development in Lexington Public Schools

The examination of student data is a key aspect of professional learning for educators in LPS. For example, teachers review student learning information in nearly every weekly PLC meeting to inform their instruction. As the superintendent explained:

If you come here, you see teachers every day who are talking about teaching and learning, sharing best practices, implementing them, getting support from their administrators, collecting data, and actually looking at whether it made a difference.

This section describes the data that are used in the coordination of professional development at the district level to set goals for, plan, and assess professional development at LPS.

### Data Sources Used in Professional Development Decisions

Table 2 lists the different sources of information that are taken into account when making professional learning decisions in the district. As described above, these decisions are not made in isolation from considerations about curriculum, instruction, assessments, interventions, and extensions.

Table 2. Data Sources That Lexington PS Leaders Use to Make Decisions Concerning Professional Development

|  | Set Goals for Professional Development |  | Plan Professional Development |  | Assess & Reflect on Professional Development |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data and Information Sources Used in Professional Development Decisions | For Individuals | District-wide | For Individuals | District-wide | Individual Offerings, Initiatives, and Courses | Overall System Check |
| **School and District Needs** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| District and school strategic goals | • | — | • | • | • | • |
| Changes in curriculum, assessments, interventions, or technologies  | • | • |  | • | • | • |
| **Student Outcome Data** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Student achievement data from large scale and districtwide assessments  | • | • | • |  |  | • |
| Reviews of student work | • |  |  |  | • |  |
| **Educator Evaluation Data** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Educator professional practice S.M.A.R.T. goals | • | • | • | • |  |  |
| Educator student learning S.M.A.R.T. goals | • | • | • | • |  |  |
| Educator performance ratings by standard or element |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Educator student impact ratings  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Educator Self-Reports/ Feedback** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Educator surveys (e.g., TELL MASS, district surveys) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Professional development entrance or exit surveys |  | • |  | • | • |  |
| Ad hoc educator feedback provided in professional development committee meetings or other formal or informal settings | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| **Other data** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Learning walk-throughs  |  | • |  | • |  | • |
| **Professional Development Standards** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development  | N/A | N/A |  |  |  | • |
| Learning Forward Standards | N/A | N/A | • | • |  | • |

\* 2014–15 is the first year of data collection; student impact ratings should be available for each educator in 2015–16.

\*\* Educators are reviewing student work continually in their practice and in their professional learning.

*LPS uses data to inform the optional courses that are offered.* In addition to discussions with teachers about what they believe should be offered, the assistant superintendent spends much of her days in meetings with administrators. Here, she has the opportunity to hear from the principals of the nine schools what the data show and how the principals believe they can match the district’s goals to their building goals, to individual teachers’ goals, and to the student learning goals. Based on these data, courses and workshops are planned to make sure that these goals are met in all nine school buildings.

*Data meetings.* Teachers meet amongst themselves in PLCs, but approximately every six weeks they also meet in grade-level groups with the principal, special educators, and ELL teachers to look at student data and determine which students might need additional attention in some areas. This time is spent looking at attendance data, ELL data, number of discipline referrals, and data around standards-based report cards, and this information is then used to come up with a plan to help struggling students. During these meetings, teachers may identify an issue that three or four students are experiencing, and they would then turn to the professional learning coordinator to see what professional development is available in that area, so that they are better prepared to serve these students.

According to the professional learning coordinator:

When we have data that we can use to support our next steps and to inform what our next plans might be, we have a focus of attention on student learning. I would say that, throughout the district, there has been a super sharp laser focus on looking at student learning and using the data that we have in order to make decisions that make the most sense for our students.

### Collecting and Using Educator Feedback to Inform Professional Learning

*Pre- and post-course feedback forms.* LPS leaders assess the courses they offer and ensure that courses directly relate to the district’s mission. In order to do this, course participants have to fill out two forms for each course: a preassessment form, which measures how much participants knew about the topic before the course; and a final feedback (postcourse) form, which collects feedback on the course as a whole and whether participants found it valuable to their learning.

*Event feedback forms.* An educator survey is also used to assess the quality of the *Lexington Learns Together* conference to inform planning for the next year.

*Open lines of communication through the professional development committee.* The professional development committee plays a large role in monitoring the success and failure of professional learning in the district. The teachers and principals on the committee are often the ones taking the courses, and they are based in schools where other educators discuss their experiences with these courses. These committee members report course feedback to the assistant superintendent and the professional learning coordinator and suggest areas where they believe courses need to be added. In addition, supervisors bring any professional development needs uncovered during the educator evaluation cycle to district professional development leaders and the professional development committee. Lastly, the professional learning coordinator keeps an open line of communication with the PD committee and uses it as a sounding board for the administration’s ideas, as well as to review professional development course proposals.

*All LPS meetings at least touch upon data that are used to inform professional learning*. PLCs meet once a week and are constantly looking at student work. Data meetings happen approximately every six weeks in grade-level groups, joined by the principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, special education coordinator, and occasionally a coach. During these meetings, the group identifies struggling students and determines practices that can be put in place to help these students. Discussions that take place in department meetings, leadership team meetings, joint council meetings, and administrative council meetings, among others, also examine data to determine professional development needs.

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

The educator evaluation cycle intersects with LPS’s professional learning systems and supports. These intersections are described in the following sections.

**Educator Plans Are Used to Identify Professional Development Needs for Individuals and Groups**

Through self-assessment, goal setting, and the formative and summative evaluation components of the educator evaluation cycle, teachers—in conversation and collaboration with their evaluators—determine their individual needs for professional learning.

These needs are listed in their Educator Plans, as part of their professional practice and student learning (S.M.A.R.T.) goals.

**Educator Evaluation Performance Ratings Are Used to Assess Professional Development Needs for Individuals in Collaboration with Evaluators**

Individual teachers who receive low performance ratings on particular Standards or Indicators, or who do not meet their goals, are provided opportunities for additional professional development. For example, if—through discussions with a supervisor—an individual need for professional development is identified, this would be managed at the school building level and a growth plan would be put in place for that teacher. As the assistant superintendent explained: “It’s really more about the conversations that occur with that teacher, recommendations that are made, the kind of coaching that can be provided to assist that teacher with any particular need that they have.”

**Educator Evaluation Is Used to Link Teachers With Professional Development Activities**

At times, educators work with their supervisors to select courses that might be particularly pertinent to them. A principal who serves on the professional development committee explained that these conversations are often positive. Supervisors ask educators what they believe they need to improve on (and where they see their students struggling) and then suggest courses that might help. If there are no courses in the relevant areas, supervisors often encourage staff to bring their needs to the attention of the professional learning coordinator and the assistant superintendent. At this point, this remains an informal process—the staff member writes an email to the professional learning coordinator and assistant superintendent explaining what they think should be offered and why they think it is important. For example, one middle school teacher had a student who was going through traumatic events at home, prompting her to do some research on professional development in this area. She found a program offered through Lesley College and wrote to the professional learning coordinator and assistant superintendent to ask if they could bring this four-course program to LPS, explaining that she thought it would be very beneficial for teachers, given the needs of many of their students.

**Artifacts From Professional Learning Are Used as Evidence of Educator Performance**

Through Baseline Edge (a software product), teachers can upload artifacts as evidence of practice for their evaluators and supervisors, who then offer feedback. These artifacts, often gathered during professional learning activities, relate directly to their professional practice goals. Teachers upload pictures and descriptions, explaining which Standards the artifact applies to and why they are submitting this artifact. This software also allows teachers to document some of the professional learning in which they have participated.

As an educator on the professional development committee explained:

When we’re uploading evidence, it’s not about ‘I’ve got to get all this evidence in to prove to you that I’m doing my job.’ It’s more about you now take that weight off the shoulders and just showcase the things you’re really proud of.

LPS leaders have leveraged the educator evaluation cycle to support educator learning by being thoughtful about the kind of evidence teachers use to demonstrate they are achieving their professional practice (S.M.A.R.T.) goals. For example, LPS leaders have decided that teachers are no longer required to report percentage increases on particular assessments as evidence of their progress toward the student learning and professional practice (S.M.A.R.T.) goals. The assistant superintendent explained that while it is important that teachers indicate that they have successfully worked toward their goals, a focus on achieving a certain percentage increase seemed to distract teachers from ensuring deep learning, encouraged a focus on compliance over improvement, and possibly deterred teachers from taking risks. One professional development committee member described how many of his peers experience the evaluation process now: “There’s an understanding that you’re already doing your job and you’re doing it well. Now’s your chance to really kind of have fun with this, and shine, and pull the best of what you’re doing out.”

## Evaluating the Impact of the Professional Learning System Using Student Learning Outcomes

*Although district leaders struggle to draw direct lines between particular professional development courses or initiatives and increases in student learning, they believe that improvements in students’ Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores in recent years are connected with the district’s systematic approach to providing teachers with high quality professional development.* Figures 3 and 4 show trends in MCAS scores from 2008 (when the work to develop a professional learning system began) to 2014. Although the percentage of students scoring *proficient* or above was always quite high in LPS, improvements among students from low-income families and African-American students have measurably improved. Now, nearly *all* students are scoring proficient or above. The superintendent explained that this comes with creating a learning organization: “It is not about the course and how you structure a course,” but about “continually raising the skill and knowledge and beliefs that all kids can learn.”

Figure 3: Trends in Grade 10 Mathematics MCAS Scores for Student Subgroup Populations in LPS

Figure 4: Trends in Grade 10 English Language Arts MCAS Scores for Student Subgroup Populations in LPS

## Plans for Continuous Improvement

Going forward, the district anticipates that it will need to find and put in place the right technology that will allow staff to track their own professional development. While LPS does have technology that allows educators to sign up for professional development online, and that keeps track of the rosters, LPS educators are not able to track their own professional development. In addition, there is no easy way for administrators and evaluators to track staff professional development at this time. LPS leaders are currently encouraging teachers to keep track of their own professional learning, and the district hopes to find a tracking system that fulfills its needs soon.

*For district professional development leaders, the improvement process never ends.* As the assistant superintendent explained: “I view professional learning very much like I view curriculum. And that it’s ever-changing, ever-evolving, you’re never done with your work. It’s a recursive cycle.” She concluded that while the district’s current position is the result of a seven-year process, they still have a lot more work to do.

## 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.

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 Teacher Leaders With Role in Professional Development Management**

**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. 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 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.

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.

## Appendix B: Lexington Public Schools Professional Learning Call for Course Proposals





## Appendix C: Lexington Public Schools Professional Learning Sample Course Proposal

**The proposed course title:** Exploring Standards Based Assessment

**Instructor:** Dr. Avon Lewis

**Target Audience:** 6-12 classroom teachers – teachers who share a prep are encouraged to do this as a team

**Number of sessions/hours:** 15 hours – 2 5 hour sessions during the summer; 2 2.5 hour sessions in the fall

**Course objectives and rationale:** Conventional grading allows students to average skills they are very good at with skills that are poor. It also allows them to combine “participation” based assignments that do not actually demonstrate what they know with assignments that do show what they know. This allows students to get “good” grades, even when they do not know the material.

Students need to master all the skills a course is teaching in order to be prepared for future coursework. Standards based assessment gives students and teachers a much more precise understanding of what students have learned and what they are struggling with and it allows teachers to target interventions and support appropriately.

Standards based assessment becomes an even more powerful tool when combined with mastery grading. In mastery grading, students who fail to demonstrate proficiency on a standard on the first pass are given more chances to demonstrate their proficiency.

This course will introduce teachers to the reasons for standards based assessment, especially when combined with a mastery grading model. We will discuss the creation of standards for assessment. We will explore some different methods of implementing standards based assessment and then teachers will have time to work on developing some standards based assessments of their own, for us in their classes.

**General outline of proposed syllabus:**

Day 1 – 5 hours – Background. Reading from Hattie, Dweck, Grant Wiggins, and others about mindset, feedback, standards based assessment, etc. Probably do a mix of short lecture, excerpted readings, small group discussions I have not selected the readings yet, but if I find enough good ones I will spread these out and do a few on each of the subsequent days.

Day 2 – 5 hours – Models of assessment – I will present things that I and others have done and intersperse it with work time/discussion time for them to start to create an assessment or assignment for use in their class. Readings from O’Shea, Schmoker and others.

Day 3 – 2.5 hours – Small group coaching/discussions/project development – Participants will discuss their projects with other participants and work on their projects. I will help them and suggest resources for them to use.

Day 4 – 2.5 hours – Presentations – each participant will present what they tried and discuss the pros and cons of that approach.



*Jacalyn Crowe, Ph.D., Science Department Head* *jcrowe@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us*

 *781-861-2320 ext. 3040*

March 10, 2015

To: Len Swanton
Carol Pilarski

From: Jackie Crowe

Re: Letter in support of Avon Lewis’ course proposal

Dear Len and Carol,

I was excited to hear that Avon Lewis will be developing a professional learning course related to her work in Standards Based Assessment. Avon has been developing and adapting her method of assessment over the past several years and she has much to offer in terms of considering the practical application of this method of assessment.

Avon’s presentation during the “Lexington Learns Together” event was well-received and I know that there is interest among the LHS Science faculty to learn more. Avon has generously offered to share her experience with us in an upcoming department meeting. A course in the Professional Learning catalog would provide a wider audience that sharing.

I enthusiastically support this offering for the Professional Learning catalog. Please contact me if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Jacalyn Crowe



1000 Thomas Jefferson Street NW
Washington, DC 20007-2835
202.403.5000 | TTY: 877.334.3499
www.air.org



PO Box 694

Concord, MA 01742-0694

Phone: (978) 369-3519

Toll-free: (888) 683-2826

Fax: (978) 405-0016

concordevaluation.com

1. Lexington Public Schools. (2009). [*Professional development overview*](http://lps.lexingtonma.org/cms/lib2/MA01001631/Centricity/Domain/565/LPSProfessionalDevelopmentPlan.pdf)*.* Lexington, MA: Author. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lesson study is a teaching improvement process that originates in Japanese elementary education. Working in a small group, teachers collaborate with one another, meet to discuss learning goals, plan an actual classroom lesson, observe how it works in practice, and then revise and report on the results for the benefit of other teachers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)