



NATIONAL
DROPOUT
PREVENTION
CENTER/NETWORK

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 26 NUMBER 4

ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

TEACHERS OFTEN REMIND STUDENTS THAT LEARNING IS LIFELONG. TO STOP LEARNING, THEY ADMONISH, IS TO STOP LIVING. THOSE SAME TEACHERS—AND OTHER EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS—ARE WISEST WHEN HEEDING THEIR OWN ADVICE. TOO OFTEN, HOWEVER, THE CONSTRAINTS OF TIME AND TOO MANY TASKS TO ACCOMPLISH OVERSHADOW EVEN THE BEST OF INTENTIONS TO STAY ABREAST OF INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL TRENDS AND BEST PRACTICES. THE QUESTION THEN BECOMES: HOW CAN EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS BEST CONTINUE TO LEARN IN THE FACE OF LIFE'S DEMANDS?

Professional development (PD) is not only best practice, its characteristics, audience, and purpose are also mandated by the recently enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The overview article on the ESSA and its applicability for PD written by education PhD student Michelle Popham is an effective introduction to PD in general. When professional development is structured and targeted, it offers educators an opportunity to continue to learn, develop innovative skills, and stay abreast of the latest innovations in their fields. Delivered through a variety of methods, including in-services, classroom instruction, seminars, conferences, and coursework, no one delivery method is superior to any other and no matter the form of delivery, the requirements that the ESSA sets forth remain the same. This newsletter focuses on the value, convenience, and applicability of one kind of PD—that delivered through online learning.

Online PD offers a number of positives for educators with perhaps the most often cited being its convenience. Many reputable and established companies offer online PD for educators to access, whether at home, at work, or on the go. More online professional development courses for educators that fulfill the ESSA's requirements are being developed every day. In fact, NDPC/N recently developed our own suite of online courses covering the major elements of our *15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention*.

Online PD courses are undeniably cost effective, a fact welcomed by

administrators responsible for stretching school budgets. They allow larger

enrollment while decreasing overhead, both factors in lowering the costs of PD so that more staff are able to access the PD. Further cost effectiveness is realized when the cost of travel associated with face-to-face PD is removed via access to PD online.

PD in general becomes more equitable through online courses, meaning because online courses offer PD at lower costs, more educators have access to the limited PD funds available for a school or district—a definite win for practitioners and their students who in turn benefit from the PD. As a rule, online courses are less expensive than PD delivered in person and often of higher quality. In an article on page 5 Martha Green, an experienced online course developer, shares her knowledge and insights for online course evaluation. She notes that a well-designed online course offers the opportunity to interact with other professionals, immediate applicability of concepts, and access to a wealth of supplemental resources. These and other characteristics are vital parts of effective online PD courses.

A further important consideration that increases the value of online PD is that it can be an exceptionally effective option for use as an in-service. Imagine how a staff can benefit from completing a course (or courses) online and then participating in an open



and collaborative conversation that further stimulates thought and applicability. On page 6, John McGee, Principal of KASE in Sheldon, TX, discusses the benefits of adapting online PD to in-services as he guides his school in adopting online PD. A second Program Profile on page 4, written by Pamela Wilson, Principal of James R. Bilhartz Elementary in Dallas, TX, follows her staff through their successful transition to online PD and its positive effects on teacher morale and increased use of technology in classrooms.

You will not want to miss this newsletter's book review of the ASCD publication *Professional Development That Sticks* that provides school leaders and others with a how-to methodology for increasing the effectiveness of PD, whether delivered online or through other methods. Thanks to Michael Ojeda, Principal of Thomas Jefferson Arts Academy, Elizabeth, NJ, for this book review. And finally, *Viewpoint* is authored by Dr. Pamela Bruening who is not only an online PD developer, but also is currently President of the National Alternative Education Association. This piece highlights the value of personalizing PD. After all, the convenience, low cost, and increased access offered by online PD courses lose value if the information is not relevant to the learner.

ESSA and Professional Development

by Michelle Popham

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Act, was passed. ESSA includes provisions to promote success for students and schools, including a redefinition and increased emphasis on professional development (PD). As a result of ESSA, states and schools that receive funding must specify plans for incorporating professional development. Additionally, professional development should be available to all educators, including school leaders and paraprofessionals.

What Is ESSA's Definition of PD?

A key change in ESSA in relation to PD is the definition. ESSA defines PD as activities that are “an integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet the challenging State academic standards and are sustained, intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 8 U.S.C. § 8101).

As ESSA defines PD, it should not be delivered through stand-alone, one-day, or short-term workshops. Additionally, PD

should be aligned with, and directly related to, academic goals of the school or local educational agency and developed with extensive participation of teachers, principals, other school leaders, parents, representatives of Indian tribes (as applicable), and administrators of schools to be served under this Act (Every Student Succeeds Act, 8 U.S.C. § 8101).

What Is Considered PD?

Section 8101 of the ESSA provides an extensive list of activities that are appropriate for the focus of PD. One example is that PD activities should be used to “improve and increase teachers’ knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach, understanding of how students learn, ability to analyze student work and achievement from multiple sources, including how to adjust instructional strategies, assessments, and materials based on such analysis.”

Another example is that PD can be used to “provide training for teachers, principals, and other school leaders in the use of technology, so that technology and technology applications are effectively used in the classroom to improve teaching and learning in the curricula and academic subjects in which the teachers teach.”

Who Benefits From PD?

The ESSA is clear that PD is not just for teachers or educational leaders. PD should be available to a range of educators, including early childhood educators, teachers, principals, other school leaders, paraprofessionals, specialized instructional support personnel, instructional leaders, literacy coaches, literacy specialists, English as a second language specialists, librarians, and program staff. Furthermore, PD may be used to support the recruitment, hiring, and training of effective teachers, including teachers who became certified through state and local alternative routes to certification.

Responsibilities for PD

The ESSA (1 U.S.C. § 1111) outlines requirements of state and local education agencies to improve basic programs operated by local education agencies. The requirements that are related to PD include that

“the State educational agency will work with other agencies, including educational service agencies or other local consortia, and institutions to provide technical assistance to local educational agencies and schools.” Technical assistance includes assistance in providing PD. Where educational agencies that can provide PD and technical assistance exist, the use of those agencies should be considered; however, if such agencies do not exist, considerations of providing PD through other cooperative agreements such as through a consortium of local educational agencies should be made.

Responsibilities for schools in providing PD are also outlined in ESSA (1 U.S.C. § 1114). For example, schools receiving funding under the Schoolwide Program Plan must develop a comprehensive plan that includes a description of the strategies that the school will be implementing to address school needs. The plan should include a description of how such strategies will address the needs of all children in the school, but particularly the needs of those at risk of not meeting the challenging state academic standards. Activities may include PD for teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school personnel to improve instruction and use of data from academic assessments, and to recruit and retain effective teachers, particularly in critical-need subjects.

Professional development is one of the 15 *Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention* that have formed the core of the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network’s work for over 30 years. Staying abreast of changes in legislature related to PD assures that the organization continues to provide policy-supported professional development focused on students in schools to increase student engagement and staff competencies.

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Reference

ESSA (2015). Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-95 § 114 Stat. 1177 (2015-2016)

Meet Our Guest Editor

■ Dr. Sandy Addis, Director of NDPC/N, holds an EdD in Educational Leadership and has over 45 years of experience in public education.



He has designed and administered a variety of dropout prevention initiatives that include after-school programming, counseling, and service-learning. Dr. Addis has served as an alternative school principal and authored numerous grant proposals that funded summer programs, professional learning, family engagement, and character education. He trained local school boards, and consulted with local school systems on policy and leadership development. He has led educator teams in the development and distribution of student achievement measures and online systems for delivery of educator training.

Webcast Wins National Award

■ Produced and edited by Clemson Broadcast Productions, a recent episode of NDPC/N's long-running *Solutions to the Dropout Crisis* series that focused on emotional and physical trauma's impact on high school dropout received a silver award, the Telly Awards' highest honor. Telly Awards are national honors acknowledging the best productions on TV, cable, and the web. View the award-winning webcast at www.dropoutprevention.org/webcast/introducing-solutions-magazine.

NDPC/N Expands Rural Dropout Prevention Resources

■ NDPC/N is pleased to offer a collection of films, tools, webinars, slide presentations, and articles on our website designed specifically to assist practitioners who work to improve graduation rates in rural schools and communities. New to the website are resources that focus on training local school leaders and decisionmakers, assisting them with dropout recovery, and supporting the work of graduation coaches in rural schools. These resources include *The Rural Principal's Guide to Dropout Prevention*, a conceptual framework that specifically addresses the unique needs of rural schools; *The Local School Board's Role in Dropout Prevention*, a

facilitated presentation for school superintendents' use in guiding informed policy decisions relative to dropout prevention; *Recovery and Reengagement Initiatives in Rural Contexts*, a self-assessment instrument that rural school districts can use to score and improve their dropout recovery efforts; *Rural Dropout Prevention Issues & Solutions*, a 36-page guidebook on designing and implementing successful dropout prevention initiatives in rural settings; and *A Guide for Rural High School Graduation Coach Implementation*, a guide that assists rural high schools to consider, design, and implement a graduation coach program as a dropout prevention measure. We invite you to review all the resources at www.dropoutprevention.org/rural-dropout-prevention-resources and to utilize them in dropout prevention.

Scholastic Joins NDPN as Innovation Partner

■ We are pleased to announce that Scholastic, Inc., has joined the NDPN's Innovation Partner program, a service partnership committed to reducing the nation's dropout rate. Operating in countries around the world, Scholastic is a leading provider of comprehensive literacy solutions reinforcing student achievement through instructional reading and writing, professional learning for teacher effectiveness, and family and community engagement. For more information about Scholastic and its mission to encourage the intellectual and personal growth of all children, visit www.scholastic.com. Scholastic joins a dynamic and growing

partnership that includes BrightBytes, Catapult Learning, DeeperDive Learning, and WIN Learning. NDPN continues to welcome partners whose resources significantly enhance our mission of dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery.

Singleton Awarded 2017 Riley Award

■ Jerome Singleton, Commissioner of the South Carolina High School League, is the 2017 recipient of the annual NDPC/N's Governor and Mrs. Richard W. Riley Award of Excellence in Dropout Prevention. The Riley Award recognizes a South Carolinian who has made a significant contribution to improving high school graduation rates. Singleton was recognized for his long-time support of interscholastic athletics that provide the framework for relationships that are a driving force in keeping students on track for high school graduation.

EdisonLearning Sponsors Database

■ NDPC/N announces EdisonLearning as the sponsor for its model programs database, a major national resource of searchable research-based programs for educators and others who work with at-risk youth. To review the database for opportunities to implement specific model programs, to enhance existing programs, or for inspiration in creating new dropout prevention initiatives, visit www.dropoutprevention.org/mpdb/web/search. EdisonLearning's sponsorship allows for growth of the database from the current 357 programs to a projected 500 in a year.

NDPC/N offers 16 online self-paced Professional Development courses to increase graduation rates!

Visit: dropoutprevention.org/15-effective-strategies-online-courses

Getting to GREAT

by Pamela Wilson

Located in Dallas, TX, James R. Bilhartz Jr. Elementary School is part of the Duncanville ISD with just over 600 students enrolled in Pre-K through fourth grade. Over 78% of the school's students are economically disadvantaged and slightly over 41% are English Language Learners. Further, 63.5% of the student population is considered at risk. Though the school has faced challenges in the past, today we call it the Great James R. Bilhartz Jr. Elementary School for a reason. Our school has made tremendous strides in the past two years alone, in part by changing our approach to professional development and focusing on applying the information learned in our classrooms.

As little as three years ago, the school's professional development offerings consisted mainly of on-campus staff development where teacher leaders with expertise in a particular area prepared and presented the staff development. Teachers were also sent to various consultant trainings at an extended cost. However, the information did not always readily translate into classroom application.

We knew we needed a way to make access to professional development equitable, in line with teachers' schedules, and applicable to our students' needs. We began our search for a way to do staff development for all of our teachers so that they could all have a common knowledge base to build upon during the new school year. Online professional development met our needs. The online platform itself

along with the social media environment and interactive activities that teachers could practice during training and then use in their classrooms were the reasons that we ultimately decided to utilize online professional development. We chose a provider that could offer all of these things.

Our goals were high. We had 95% of our school instructional staff participate in online professional development. Initially, teachers had mixed opinions about completing the courses. However, most teachers appreciated that they could do the coursework at their own pace without having to travel and sit in a traditional workshop for long periods of time. Also, once teachers recognized that the material was something that they could readily replicate in their classrooms because they were able to actually experience the activities as a part of their courses, their enthusiasm increased even more.

As a principal, I graded our online professional development program an unqualified success. Online professional development clearly fit within the model that we were pushing teachers toward in regards to using technology in their classrooms. We were constantly looking for different ways to encourage teachers to do more than just have students do low-level work on laptops and iPads.

One of our school's professional development courses involved learning about and utilizing computer applications in the classroom. Now our teachers have not only the knowledge they need, but through practice and application, they also have the confidence to actually implement their new learning. With this new confidence, I have seen teachers continue to explore even more ways to engage students with technology. This is a major plus that has had a positive effect on instructional practices that makes learning fun for students



on our campus. Our levels of student engagement have gone through the roof.

We found definite advantages to utilizing online professional development beyond immediate application of content in the classroom. The online, self-paced training was extremely cost effective. Normally, our school would either hire a consultant or send teachers to workshops across the region. Either way, we would end up paying thousands of dollars for a workshop that we could not afford for every teacher to attend. We would then have to send a few teachers and do a trainer of trainers with the expectation that the few teachers trained would be able to replicate their learning for the rest of the staff. However, this model never gives teachers the full firsthand experience that they would receive when completing the actual workshop.

Jamie Brown, a third-grade teacher at the Great James R. Bilhartz Jr. Elementary School, sums up our school's experience with the online professional development model well: "I learned how to do several things that I never thought about using in my classroom. I am now ready to start implementing higher level technology-related activities than I was capable of doing before."

—Pamela Wilson, MEd, MBA
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Structuring Online Courses for Professional Development

by Martha Green

With the expansion of blended and online courses, a quick look at the components and structure of quality online courses, especially those written for professional development in education, is warranted. Reflect on the online training with which you have been involved. Did the experience engage you in the learning process? Did it translate to your classroom or work environment? Why or why not?

Effective online professional development mirrors effective classroom teaching in some ways. Just as in the traditional classroom, quality content is critical in online learning, but it goes much further than that. As quoted by Jack Leigh, according to Bernard Bull, Chief Innovation Officer at Concordia University, “to create an engaging online learning experience, the role of the instructor is optional, but the role of the learner is essential.” In designing online learning experiences and courses it is critical that the learner is at the center of every activity. The goal of the instructional designer for online courses for professional development is to craft a rich experience that guides the acquisition of skills and practices that are immediately transferrable to the classroom, school, or district.

Below are some key elements that will be present in effective online professional development experiences.

- **Relevant Content**—Content should be presented in a visually appealing format and presented in manageable size chunks of information.
 - **Scaffolded Learning**—Learning activities should provide multiple layers of support and should build one on another.
 - **Engaging High Interest Activities**—Activities should provide variety and address multiple modes of learning. The inclusion of variety in activities will increase interest and help to propel participants toward completion.
 - **Actionable and Scalable Steps**—Professional Development that leads to action and translates to the classroom is highly effective. Look for embedded opportunities to immediately put your
- learning into action, and then to report and reflect on the actions you took, as well as make any needed corrective action. Additionally, activities should be strategy based and structured in such a way as to allow implementation at any grade level or in any subject.
 - **Built-In Rewards**—Rewards can range from points for activities completed, to confirmations that a job is well done, to statements that lead students into the next activity or level of learning. Rewards and/or gamification will increase interest and help to motivate participants toward completion.
 - **Growth Mindset**—The content and the activities should foster a growth mindset, one that leads to a cycle of self-reflection, ongoing self-improvement, and perpetual honing of the skills of the professional.
 - **Personalization**—A component of choice and/or activities that allow the participant to pursue an avenue of particular interest within the given topic is a plus.
 - **Interaction With Peers**—We live in a very social society. Social media is pervasive in our lives. Consequently, online professional development should allow for the interaction of peers. Included in these opportunities should be a forum for posing questions and the sharing of ideas and best practices. The ability to contact and interact with the instructor is also a necessary function.



- **Additional Resources**—Inclusion of an area with links to or information for obtaining additional information is a huge plus.
- **Activities Leading to a Plan for Further Action or Additional Learning**—Effective online learning will include planning for further action and growth. This may include the writing of goals, setting of timelines, investigating opportunities for further learning, etc.
- **Employment of 21st Century Technology and Skills**—Today’s online professional development needs to be delivered 24/7 for the convenience of the participant, and available on all devices, whether they be a computer, tablet, or phone. Today’s students expect nothing less in their education, and neither should today’s professional educators.

In conclusion, there are many options available for online professional development. Instructional design that includes the majority, if not all, of these components in an online course places the student at the center of learning, just as they should be.

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Reference

Leigh, Jack. (2015, November). *Interactive Video and the Changing Face of Training*. Digital Training Solutions. Retrieved from www.dtslimited.net/tag/training/

A Principal's "KASE" for Online PD

by John F. McGee

Sheldon Independent School District (ISD), a relatively small district in Texas, serves around 8,000 students, and King Academic School of Excellence (KASE) is Sheldon ISD's school of choice. Students choose to attend KASE for a number of reasons. Some feel they need a smaller learning environment. Some have fallen behind on their credits and need to accelerate their coursework to graduate on time. Others have found themselves in situations that require a more flexible schedule, like becoming a parent or having to work to help their family. Flexible schedules allow students the ability to better manage the challenges of life. Students are required to attend either morning or afternoon sessions five days a week, but also have the option to stay for the entire day, which allows them to finish courses faster and graduate sooner. Another option that KASE offers students is the ability to complete high school courses in the morning and take dual credit courses at San Jacinto College in the afternoons or evenings. This allows students to graduate from high school with an industry certification and to start working in a well-paying job straight out of high school. By and large, students attend KASE for the same reasons they choose to attend schools of choice in every other area of the country—we offer flexibility.

At KASE, we've been able to extend that same flexibility to teachers through online professional development. KASE has an amazing veteran staff who truly care about the success of every student. Our average years of teaching experience is around 25 and includes full- and part-time teachers. As principal, I am starting my fifth year at KASE and with 11 of my 18 years as an educator in leadership positions both at KASE and as a comprehensive high school principal, I have facilitated my fair share of PD.

Traditionally, professional development in our district has been delivered through sessions offered throughout the year that teachers can choose to attend. The district also sets aside funds for travel to conferences and out-of-district sessions.

As an administrator, what I have struggled with is finding PD that is relevant to what we do in the alternative education setting. It is also difficult for teachers to be off campus during the school year because the population of students we serve needs the consistency of the same teacher in the room every day. KASE teachers prefer to be in their classrooms and it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a substitute who can come into the classroom and manage all of the responsibilities our teachers manage on a daily basis.

In an effort to meet staff's PD needs, for the last few years I have utilized book studies for the majority of PD. While these are successful, I welcomed a different approach. Online professional development gives me the option to offer staff training that is specific to my campus needs and allows us to complete it on our own time so that we are not losing valuable time with our students.

The reasons PD delivered online has worked at KASE are numerous. With online PD, each participant has to interact with the material that is covered. With traditional sit-and-get professional development, teachers can be present without really interacting with the material covered. Once again, the best aspect of online PD is the ability to choose professional development that suits a staff's needs without having to spend time and money traveling to conferences and trainings. When the benefit of not losing time in the classroom with the students is added in, it is even more of a win-win situation.

While the courses are valuable in themselves, I think the real value is going to be seen when the conversations among my superstar veteran teachers begin and we are able to transform the knowledge gained from the courses into plans and actions that will make a real difference for our alternative campus and nontraditional students.

A bonus for us is that, through PD delivered online, we as educators understand the challenges that our students face as they attempt to navigate online learning. As we move forward and



work to truly personalize our student's learning, a goal is to take bits and pieces of strategies that we have learned and create courses of our own.

Again, the flexibility of the online PD is great for us. We have students in our building nine hours a day so it is difficult to plan time for staff meetings and PD on a normal school day. Being able to assign a couple of lessons and having conversations with individual teachers, or even through a Google Classroom chat, makes it so much easier to fit PD into a busy schedule.

Our goal is to work through the courses together as a team. I see the strength of this process will be the conversations about how the additional knowledge from the courses can help our campus improve. Moving forward with online PD throughout the year, I can utilize courses as a flipped classroom type component. I can require the teachers to work through pieces of the course and we can get together for conversations about the information covered in each section. We could also facilitate the conversations through Google Classroom message board posts to save valuable time.

The move to PD delivered online for KASE has been successful thus far and there is no doubt that, in the future, I will continue to utilize online PD because of the convenience, collaboration opportunities, and the ability to choose relevant topics for my staff who serve in a nontraditional school setting.

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BOOK REVIEW



Professional Development That Sticks: How Do I Create Meaningful Learning Experiences for Educators? (ASCD Arias). (2016).

F. Ende. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 66 pages [ISBN: 978-1-4166-2193-5 (pbk.)]

Published as part of ASCD's Arias series, *Professional Development That Sticks* provides school leaders with a how-to methodology for avoiding one of the most common pitfalls of professional development (PD) in schools: the disconnect between what is offered in PD sessions and the extent to which it influences—or fails to influence—teacher practice. Ende's title draws inspiration from Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*, wherein he describes the stickiness factor as the quality by which ideas and products become interwoven with our daily lives. To Ende, good professional development for learning (PDL) is not only sticky, but clearly defies the negative stereotypes of disconnected, one-and-done, consultant-driven presentations that draw ire from practitioners everywhere.

Ende sets forth the TAR Method as a framework for PDL planning and execution. TAR not only conjures up mental images of stickiness, but also highlights the method's three components: Think, Act, and Review. This method provides an iterative framework to be used through each phase of PDL: planning, providing, and following up. The author poses that adhering to such a method increases the likelihood that a PDL session is not only successful for the audience, but equally serves to provide a meaningful experience for the facilitator and the end-user of the learning (e.g., students).

The book sets forth a detailed set of guiding questions and descriptions for applying the TAR Method to each phase of the PDL. Each guiding question and accompanying narrative serves to highlight the nuances of each phase and help facilitators avoid missteps. The book concludes with an equally helpful "Do's and Don'ts" for creating sticky PDL, which serves to provide reminders of best practices and a handy summary of the ideas previously presented.

Professional Development That Sticks is a practical, concise guide for leaders who want to organize effective professional development, whether online, face-to-face, or blended. The TAR Method and the clearly organized descriptions serve to provide facilitators with a set of tools to help avoid common PD pitfalls. The book provides a simple model that aims to make professional development more meaningful, less detached, and, as the author reminds us, "lasting and incredibly sticky."

-Michael Ojeda, Principal
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RESOURCES

U.S. Department of Education *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) provides information about the federal law passed in 2015 that governs U.S. K-12 public education policy. www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn

Education Week offers a tabbed overview of key elements of the Every Student Succeeds Act. www.edweek.org/ew/issues/every-student-succeeds-act/

Solutions to the Dropout Crisis webcast provides free professional development opportunities for educators. www.dropoutprevention.org/webcast

Open Education Database's listing of 101 Web 2.0 teaching software programs contains a section on collaborative applications useful for schools and districts. www.oedb.org/ilibrarian/101-web-20-teaching-tools/

Learning Forward outlines characteristics of professional learning that lead to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results. www.learningforward.org/standards/

The *eLearning Industry's Network* blog contains adult learner-related posts organized by topic. www.elearningindustry.com/

Slide presentation from a Sussex-Wantage Regional School District director of curriculum and professional development sharing his perspective on learner-based connectivity and professional development for teachers and administrators to facilitate change within the school system. www.patrickjhiggins.wordpress.com/video-and-audio-resources/

15 effective strategies for dropout prevention online courses offer self-paced and interactive professional development learning opportunities. www.dropoutprevention.org/15-effective-strategies-online-courses

EVENTS

October 22–25, 2017 Palm Springs, CA
National Dropout Prevention Network Conference 2017, *A New Vision for Dropout Prevention*
www.dropoutprevention.org/conferences/2017-national-dropout-prevention-network-conference

February 18–21, 2018 Myrtle Beach, SC
National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, 2018 At-Risk Youth National FORUM
www.dropoutprevention.org/conferences/2018-at-risk-youth-national-forum

VIEWPOINT

Many districts scramble to find the perfect personalized professional development (PD) for their staff without considering online options. In fact, online PD has a number of points in its favor. It adds the sought-after elements of choice, personalization to individual teacher needs, access 24/7, and collaboration to meet the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) professional development guidelines. In addition, administrators desire flexibility and the ability to utilize a digital professional development product to flip PD and to meet specific teacher needs with coaching support.

Effective online PD can stand alone or can be utilized as a complement to traditional PD. One question, then, is what constitutes effective online PD. Like every well-planned initiative, it requires putting the infrastructure in place to meet and maintain its effectiveness. First, a school or district must determine professional development needs based on a variety of data and available human resources, looking beyond content areas to determine the “why” behind the data. This is

generally where the need for specific strategies courses hides. Then, the decision whether an online PD strategy will be a complement or a substitute for traditional PD must be made. A complementary strategy can support an existing professional development team by filling in gaps and specific niche areas while a substitute can provide a different approach.

The online PD itself should be delivered through a flexible product. It should be easily flipped and blended at the school level and require minimal previewing and preparation. Further, it must include ESSA’s job-embedded application strategies throughout, providing teachers with challenges, support, direct application in their classrooms, evidence of learning, and classroom application. Further, online PD must be approached with the future in mind. It must be predesigned to make sure it is a cost-effective option and a supportive fit.

A perhaps less obvious but no less important criterion is that the product used to deliver the PD must have the options to be personalized on several levels so that a

kindergarten teacher and an 11th-grade teacher can take the same course and experience something unique in their own classrooms as they apply their learning. Effective online PD is delivered through a product that can be adapted to respond to a school’s or district’s specific needs and includes on-demand specific courses for staff.

Last, since some online PD courses offer the important option of earning graduate course credit, teachers can take online courses for graduate credit, adding credibility to the experience as well as an option for teachers to further their education.

School budgets are often limited for professional development, particularly when access to the PD requires travel and overnight stays. Online PD offers a cost-effective option to help ensure equity of professional development opportunities for all staff.

—Pamela L. Bruening, EdD
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