

## RECOMMENDATION 5: Plan Professional Learning Opportunities

### Overall summary

*It is critical to build the capacity of school staff to use and integrate technology by fostering a school culture that supports continuous learning. Giving staff concrete strategies to integrate technology into instruction—and the confidence and knowledge to use those strategies—supports student learning and gives students the opportunity to achieve higher academic outcomes. Professional learning opportunities should be offered to both administrators and teachers, and should be provided in a variety of formats, both face to face and online. Research highlights the importance of offering “just in time” and well-planned professional learning opportunities to ensure that teachers have the skills they need to be successful in the digital classroom.*

*“If school improvement is to make a difference for children, it has to be in fundamental ways about improving teaching and learning. Improving instructional capacity has to be the central target of school improvement initiatives.”*

Spillane & Louis (2005)

### Recommendations from the literature and practice

Providing professional learning opportunities for administrators and teachers has been the most frequently neglected component of technology integration since schools began using technology. However, professional learning is critical to building the collective capacity of staff and stakeholders and creating the school change required to transform learning and teaching through the power of technology.

Ongoing professional learning that builds internal capacity and increases the instructional expertise of staff requires time and planning, but it is well worth the investment. Research findings on districts across the country suggest that school leaders who provide time for teacher professional learning and collaboration at least monthly have higher rates of success when integrating school change and implementing technology (Project RED). Teachers will benefit from consistent, ongoing professional learning opportunities that are aligned with school initiatives and goals and that focus on (1) technology logistics, such as the technical skills required to use the new devices and/or software and establishing routines for student use; and (2) pedagogy, best practices, and integrating technology throughout the curriculum to support goals and personalize instruction.

Principals and administrators also need to take time to participate in professional learning opportunities

in order to enhance their skills in garnering teacher buy-in and their knowledge of best practices and technology-transformed learning. Training in change management (for principals and the broader leadership team) has been shown to be one of the most critical aspects of effective technology adoption. Through these professional learning opportunities, your leadership team will enhance their skills in advancing school change initiatives and developing the infrastructure to support the initiative.

### Types of Professional Learning to Consider

- ▶ Coplanning
- ▶ Teacher collaboration
- ▶ Coaching and mentoring
- ▶ Faculty departmental training
- ▶ Online professional learning
- ▶ Summer workshops

When developing a plan for professional learning, leadership teams should ensure that the opportunities are frequent, aligned with school initiatives and goals, and provided in a variety of formats and settings (i.e., workshops, all-day seminars, peer coaching and mentoring, collaborating, coplanning, and online learning). Opportunities for professional learning can be incorporated into a teacher’s daily or weekly schedule by using creative scheduling. Blending online and face-to-face professional development can be cost-effective because virtual experiences eliminate the



## ACTION STEPS FOR RECOMMENDATION 5

### Plan Professional Learning Opportunities

- ▶ Use our **Current Status** and **Integrating PowerUp in PD** worksheets to refine PD goals and set a focus for PD efforts
- ▶ Define modes of professional learning activities
- ▶ Determine frequency of professional learning opportunities
- ▶ Set concrete, actionable goals and use the **PowerUp Professional Development Facilitator Guide** to support your planning
- ▶ Reflect and refine professional learning plan

Start planning your professional learning today by using the materials in **Module 4: Supporting Your Teachers** in the Support Modules.

costs of travel and substitutes, and this approach is generally acknowledged to be the most efficient practice. Two important responsibilities of your leadership team are to create ongoing opportunities for professional learning in your district and/or school and to model the expectations around professional learning.

As a leadership team, you will develop a plan for professional learning in your district and/or school. This plan should include initial workshops to launch the initiative, as well as targeted opportunities to support ongoing learning and growth. When

designing these professional learning activities, it is helpful to start with a clearly defined objective that relates to specific action steps for the teacher to implement in his/her classroom. For example, were you to be conducting a series of short, one-hour workshops with reading specialists during their weekly team meetings, you could include a workshop on using technology to enhance student summarizing skills. Participants could be asked to design, implement, and share at least one lesson or activity using technology with the evidence-based strategy of summarizing prior to the next weekly meeting. During the following meeting, teachers

could report out and reflect on how they used the technology, share successes, and troubleshoot issues with their colleagues. Ideally, these actionable objectives should be observable in classrooms so that administrators can keep track of whether they are being implemented effectively.

Generally, it is more effective to provide targeted, bite-size workshops than to try to accomplish all your objectives and goals in a onetime professional learning day. Leadership teams should aim to offer weekly or even biweekly professional learning opportunities to provide the support needed to foster change in practice and to build the confidence in staff to implement the new skills. Teachers will benefit from multiple opportunities to practice their new skills, get feedback on their progress, and reflect on their performance.

**A CASE STORY** “Big D”—a nickname commonly used to describe Dallas, Texas—can also apply to its school district. The 230 campuses in the Dallas Independent School District are spread out over an area of 348 square miles. The district’s special education department’s portfolio is also sizeable, and one component involves itinerant special education teachers traveling to assigned schools to work with inclusion teachers. The work of the “itinerants,” and their own professional development, is guided by Meg, an elementary inclusion specialist.

Meg has been a strong advocate of PowerUp WHAT WORKS since the earliest days of field testing and has described it as “a wonderful resource to add to our toolkit of resources.” She is particularly interested in the sections that focus on reading comprehension and vocabulary—a direct match with the district’s emphasis on having students develop academic vocabulary.

On May 25, 2013, the five itinerant special educator teachers participated in a 2.5-hour workshop that provided the opportunity to delve into and interact with the reading materials, resources, and tools on PowerUp.

Having this group become familiar with the PowerUp reading materials was only a first step. Next, the group would introduce PowerUp to teachers at the schools.

As a trial run, Meg and Carl, one of the itinerant teachers, visited an elementary school to meet with Fran, a new special education inclusion teacher.

The conversation began by getting straight to the heart of the matter:

- ▶ What challenges did Fran face in providing interventions and instructional support to the mostly fifth graders in her caseload?
- ▶ What were the particular needs of the students she saw?

They discussed the strategies Fran used, many of which she gleaned from Google searches. This was a perfect segue to introducing her to PowerUp.

Meg and Carl described what PowerUp offered (especially in reading) and outlined a pathway to follow for finding valuable resources. “Start at the [home page](#), click on [PowerUp Your Classroom](#), then check out the content,” they suggested. Fran expressed interest in following up.

Besides school visits such as this, Meg has future plans for integrating PowerUp into the ongoing support to her itinerant teachers and, in turn, to special education inclusion teachers. She is responsible for designing training for late summer. Part of the agenda will include “Updates,” with a focus on vetted resources, which is the perfect niche for PowerUp. Meg will highlight the reading content because comprehension and vocabulary development impacts success across the curriculum. Strategies for teaching [context clues](#), [word analysis](#), and [semantic mapping](#) can directly improve vocabulary knowledge and use in science, social studies, and other content areas.