

Teacher Learning

“We have to think about accountability in a very different way... We have done a splendid job of holding nine-year olds accountable. Let me suggest as a moral principle that we dare not hold kids any more accountable than we expect to hold ourselves.”

— Douglas B. Reeves¹²

Every student deserves an effective teacher, and local accountability systems should take into account this critical dimension of education. Teachers know their preparation and skill is at the heart of the educational process. Research also has shown that “good teaching matters.”¹³ It is true that other factors beyond the classroom walls are important, but no factor approaches the impact that a high quality teacher can have on student learning.

Teachers in California are called upon to integrate knowledge of the content standards with an array of instructional strategies while meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Expanding content knowledge, learning the most effective instructional strategies, adapting to standards-based curriculum materials, acquiring an understanding of students’ individual and cultural learning needs, inquiring into one’s own practice, creating collaborative communities based on common practices — all are at the heart of effective professional development and improving teaching and learning. The profession of teaching takes years to reach mastery and requires lifelong learning to remain current and to increase effectiveness with all students.

California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP)

Although districts are not required to adopt the CSTP or to align personnel evaluation to these teaching standards, it is highly recommended that the CSTP be used to plan professional development, guide personnel evaluation of teachers, and structure teachers’ self-assessments. Just as student content standards provide a basis for aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment, the teaching standards provide a basis for aligning professional development, support, and supervision.

According to the CSTP, teachers play a critical role in implementing local accountability systems. Among other competencies described in the CSTP, teachers must:

- establish and communicate learning goals for all students,
- collect and use multiple sources of information to assess student learning,
- use the results of assessments to guide instruction,
- communicate with students, families, and other audiences about student progress,
- reflect on teaching practice and plan professional development,
- establish professional goals and pursue opportunities to grow professionally, and
- work with colleagues, families, and the community to improve professional practice.

Some districts may go beyond the CSTP to the mastery standards for teaching defined by the **National Board for Professional Teaching Standards** (www.nbpts.org or www.cde.ca.gov/pd/nbpts/index.html for National Board Certification in California). These standards describe exemplary teaching practice within specific subject areas and grade spans.

The key steps in developing a system of accountability for teacher learning are:

1. Develop goals for professional development based on student learning needs.
2. Identify areas of teacher need based on the California Standards for the Teaching Profession.
3. Ensure that professional development is of high quality.
4. Evaluate the success of implementation.
5. Make continuous improvement decisions.
6. Report results.

Each of these steps is explained below.

1. Develop goals for professional development based on student learning needs.

Once the goals for student learning have been identified, the next step is to discover how to design professional development that will support teachers in reaching those goals. Professional development based solely on personal interest is

not strategic or focused enough. A local accountability system requires — and can help foster — alignment of goals.

2. Identify areas of teacher need based on the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP)

(www.btsa.ca.gov/ba/pubs/pdf/cstpreport.pdf)

Early in a school year, teachers should assess their own practice in relation to criteria in the CSTP. These self-perception ratings should be corroborated with external observation ratings from the principal or school coach. The teacher self-reflection builds internal accountability and personal mastery.¹⁴ The external ratings add reliability to the results. Professional development goals should be refined based on these results and the identified student learning needs in order to take into account different levels of experience and skill (e.g., the needs of an emergency permit teacher will obviously vary dramatically from the needs of a 15-year veteran).

For teachers to make progress on the CSTP, the district must have a comprehensive plan to support teacher learning. This professional development plan — based on the idea of continuous learning — may be thought of as a “continuum” from recruitment, to pre-service, to induction, to ongoing professional development for mid-career teachers, including teacher leadership roles, and finally to instructional leadership for those whose careers lead into administration. A commitment to professional standards, coaching, and collegial reflection and inquiry should be consistent throughout all stages of the continuum.¹⁵

3. Ensure that professional development is of high quality.

One research study showed that only 10 percent of teachers implement practices that were introduced by the traditional approach of a full-day awareness workshop with no follow-up support or accountability.¹⁶ Many educators will recall their frustration with these one-shot in-services, isolation in the classroom, inadequate time for collaboration, and few opportunities for teacher leadership.

California has published *Designs for Learning*, a research-based framework,¹⁷ to provide guidance in developing a learning organization that improves student achievement. *Designs for Learning* (www.cde.ca.gov/pd/pdf/designsintro.pdf) is organized around ten “Design Elements,” or interlocking qualities of effective professional development. These design elements are contrasted with less effective practices in the chart on the next page.¹⁸

Design elements for high quality professional development	Less effective practices
1. Student Data. Uses student performance and achievement data, including student feedback, teacher observation, analysis of student work and test scores, as part of the process for individual and organizational learning.	There are few opportunities to collectively analyze student work or other data. Schools receive no technical assistance in using and understanding data. Someone outside of the school makes decisions about teachers' professional development needs.
2. Planning. Uses a coherent, long-term professional development planning process connected to the school plan, which reflects both site-based priorities and individual learning needs.	There are multiple school plans and planning processes. Teachers' professional development is not related to long-range learning goals but is based on perceived needs, demands, or opportunities.
3. Time. Provides time for professional learning to occur in a meaningful manner.	Professional development takes place on teachers' own time. Other than three to five districtwide days, teachers' professional time is limited to brief logistical meetings before, during, or after school.
4. Leadership. Respects and encourages the leadership development of teachers.	Few rewards or incentives demonstrate to teachers that the district or school values their leadership. Leadership roles are an add-on to full-time teaching responsibilities. Taking a leadership role may mean "breaking rank."
5. Content and Pedagogy. Develops, refines, and expands teachers' pedagogical repertoire, content knowledge, and the skill to integrate both.	Teacher in-service is limited to training presentations by outside experts and focuses on topics those experts have chosen. Professional development in the content area changes yearly. No system for coaching and peer collaboration about classroom practice exists. Teachers' observing one another is valued, but no resources or support are provided.
6. Inquiry. Provides for and promotes continuous inquiry and reflection.	Professional development is episodic and not sustained over time. Inquiry, whether it is action research or data collection and analysis, is considered a private matter. Inquiry is not built into any regular process at the school.
7. Collaboration. Provides for collaboration and collegial work, balanced with opportunities for individual learning.	Teaching is still viewed as an isolated activity. Teachers have to defend their time working together to the administration, the community, and policymakers. When they do have time to develop a vision and goals, staff may not have time to integrate these goals into teaching practice or to address possible conflicts, biases, or assumptions that may negatively affect student learning.
8. Adult Learning. Follows the principles of good teaching and learning, including providing comfortable, respectful environments conducive to adult learning.	Professional development is organized without staff input and according to a single learning model. Often, the intended outcomes are unclear. Teachers and administrators are expected to apply the material presented without examples or follow-up support. These settings are often uncomfortable for adults.
9. Support. Creates broad-based support of professional development from all sectors of the organization and community through reciprocal processes for providing information and soliciting feedback.	The community is not informed about the professional development goals or involved in planning. Sessions are held with one or two days notice. Stakeholders are notified, but no other contact is made.
10. Accountability. Builds in accountability practices and evaluation of professional development programs to provide a foundation for future planning.	Professional development is evaluated on teacher satisfaction instead of its impact upon student achievement. Professional development resources are allocated based on policy priorities or state testing with little formal evaluation or local input.

The design elements provide ideas for how to develop a comprehensive professional development program that will increase teacher efficacy and improve student learning.

4. Evaluate the success of implementation.

To gather evidence on what participants have learned as a result of professional development, identify the indicators of successful learning (i.e., the knowledge and understanding, skills, or attitudes and beliefs being taught), design a tool or process by which participants can demonstrate their learning, and collect the information.¹⁹ Tools or processes may include questionnaires, oral or written reflections, portfolios, simulations, and/or demonstrations. The evaluation forms and criteria should be based on the CSTP.

The real test comes later, when teachers try to apply new learning in the classroom. This is the most important time to evaluate teacher progress. The best information may be gained through direct and unobtrusive observations by principals and coaches in the weeks and months following a professional development session or series. These observations also may be used to assign follow-up coaching for teachers who need additional implementation support.

Other strategies include follow-up questionnaires, teacher self-assessments of change, structured interviews, videotapes, portfolios, or written reflections. Evaluation forms can combine quantitative ratings with places for more open-ended responses. To show improvement, use pre-post measures, select comparison groups, or generate results over a number of years.

Implementing new classroom strategies may be dependent on support from within an organization and an ability to change old practices and programs that may be out of alignment with new goals. If barriers to implementation exist within a district and school, it may be helpful to develop a questionnaire, focus group, or structured interview that inquires into the recognition and support of new goals.

Professional development, especially when it is targeted to priority standards and precise student learning goals, ultimately should be evaluated by assessing progress in student achievement. For more information, see the *Student Learning* section of this document.

Personnel Evaluation

For the sake of common standards and system coherence, formal personnel evaluations should be aligned to the CSTP. Formal observations can also be

compared to insights gained from interviews and teacher self-assessments of progress on meeting the standards.

5. Make continuous improvement decisions.

In order to inform continuous improvement decisions, evaluations of teacher learning should be reported in terms of developmental levels on the CSTP, just as students' achievement should be reported in terms of performance levels. Teachers' developmental levels do not necessarily correspond to how long each teacher has been teaching or to certification levels. Teachers may be at one level for the standard on classroom management and at another level on the standard for planning and designing instruction. Even excellent teachers are still improving in some areas of their practice.

The following developmental levels, described in *A Developmental Continuum of Teacher Abilities*,²⁰ provide a common language for discussing specific professional development goals and results:

A DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM OF TEACHER ABILITIES

Developmental Level	Description	Decisions about Professional Development
Beginning	Teacher relies on ongoing assistance from more experienced colleagues for support, guidance, and survival, and is trying to internalize and apply what she or he has learned about teaching.	A large percent of teachers at this level suggests a need for a stronger system for developing mentors and coaches and assigning them to offer intensive classroom support to beginning teachers.
Emerging	Teacher still relies on more experienced colleagues for support but is moving toward becoming more self-directed and independent in her or his practice.	A large percent of teachers at this level suggests a need to assign coaches to work regularly with beginning teachers or other teachers who are implementing new practices.
Applying	Teacher is able to teach independently, internalizes and easily applies what she or he has learned about teaching.	A large percent of teachers at this level suggests a strong professional development program. Teachers continue to inquire into classroom practice and to develop and show mastery, such as through National Board Certification. Teachers need opportunities to engage in teacher leadership roles within the school and professional community.
Integrating	Teacher is fully skilled, confident, and able to integrate complex elements of instruction, curriculum, and professional development into practice. The integrating teacher moves beyond the classroom in her or his teaching, collegial relationships, and professional growth activities and is often a leader among peers.	A large percent of teachers at this level suggests a need for ongoing and regular collaboration among teachers in grade-level teams and subject area departments. Opportunities for coaching may help to extend learning.

A DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM OF TEACHER ABILITIES (*continued*)

Developmental Level	Description	Decisions about Professional Development
Innovating	The teacher is consistently innovating and creating in all areas of teaching and professional development. A leader in school, district, and local community, the innovating teacher contributes to the broader education community through staff development, classroom-based research, articles in professional journals, etc.	A large percent of teachers at this level indicates a very successful professional development system.

6. Report results.

Individual evaluation results should be given to teachers and used within a collegial, supportive setting, such as a peer coaching relationship with a colleague or administrator. The evaluation results should be used to guide individual professional growth.

Group results should be used to examine school program effectiveness. Generally, the results of surveys, questionnaires, walk-throughs, classroom observations, and other evaluation strategies should be presented as group results. For each specific professional development goal, evaluations of classroom practice should be reported in terms of the number or percentage of teachers at different developmental levels. These results should be reported to decision-makers, school leadership teams, committees, program developers, and teachers. These results will help to guide decisions about future professional development and the implementation of school programs.

As with student achievement data, reports should be user-friendly, presenting important data in a structure that allows readers to easily understand and make decisions about how professional development is helping to improve teacher quality and student learning.

Personnel evaluations must remain confidential as described by local bargaining policies. Some districts have inserted accountability for implementing particular practices and improving student learning into their personnel evaluations for administrators and sometimes also for teachers.

Summary results should be included in the district and school accountability reports. These results should be associated with student achievement to encourage decisions about teaching practices to improve student learning.

Indicators of Teacher Learning

Data such as the percentage of teachers who are fully credentialed or the rate of teacher stability/mobility are proxies for teacher effectiveness. In fact, owning a credential and staying in one school for many years are no sure indication that a teacher is making continuous improvement. However, research has shown that of all the school-based factors, teacher qualifications (such as credential status and years of experience) are the biggest determinants of student success. While acknowledging the talent and dedication of many interns, pre-interns, and teachers on emergency permits who are working in California schools, it is important also to acknowledge that, in general, schools with large numbers of under-prepared teachers are not as effective. According to a study by Kati Haycock,²¹ a school with more than 20 percent of its teachers under-prepared loses its ability to advance the learning of students. For under-prepared teachers, districts should accelerate or support their full preparation, provide intensive coaching, emphasize teacher recruitment, or develop other strategies.

SAMPLE INDICATORS

- percentage of teachers fully credentialed
- rate of teacher stability/mobility and exit interview information about reasons for leaving the school, district, or profession
- percentage of teachers with CLAD/BCLAD certification
- percentage of teachers or total number of National Board Certified Teachers
- other locally selected indicators (e.g., percent bilingual)
- percentage of teachers who give at least satisfactory ratings on a self-assessment derived from the California Standards for the Teaching Profession
- percentage of teachers who give at least satisfactory ratings on important characteristics of professional development in four areas:
 - opportunities for individual and team learning
 - practical application in the classroom
 - thematic connection among a series of sessions
 - follow-up support services (e.g., coaching in classrooms)
- percentage of workshop participants who consistently apply professional development concepts and skills at their work sites
- percentage of teachers who rate each professional development session as at least satisfactory in terms of clarity of content and value to teaching
- percentage of teachers who are satisfied with follow-up support and their level of implementation