

Maximizing the Use of New State Professional Learning Investments

to Support Student, Educator,
and School System Growth



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Overview

This executive summary has been created to help districts determine the most effective uses of new state professional learning money [under SB 77](#), which is intended to improve the ability of educators to support learning around the newly adopted **state academic standards**. Those [state academic standards](#) include accompanying curriculum frameworks in [Mathematics](#) and [English Language Arts \(ELA\)/English Language Development \(ELD\)](#); the frameworks to accompany the [Next Generation Science Standards \(NGSS\)](#), as well as literacy in History/Social Studies and additional subjects, will be released soon.

[According to state law](#), districts have four options for using new professional learning funds:

- Induction for beginning teachers with a focus on relevant mentoring
- Professional development/coaching for teachers needing improvement
- Professional development related to the state academic standards
- Training on mentoring and coaching certificated staff and training certificated staff to support effective teaching and learning

To implement the state academic standards, California has developed a wide range of useful materials for districts, which include the standards documents and guidelines for implementing them, curriculum frameworks, professional learning modules, and approved instructional materials. The guidance document is crafted to help districts think through strategies to support all four allowable uses of funds, while focusing primarily on ways districts can approach professional learning to implement the new state academic standards.



State academic standards are used as a broad descriptor throughout the document to capture all current state content standards, including: California Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (CA CCSSM); California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy (CA CCSS ELA/Literacy) and California English Language Development Standards (CA ELD); Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and all additional subject areas (e.g., Career Technical Education, Health Education, History-Social Science, etc.).

How Districts Can Support Quality Professional Learning

Approaches to learning suggested in the state guidance document are applicable to the professional growth of all educators, irrespective of their experience level or expertise. Guidance has been generated knowing there will be pressure on districts to determine how to best use new state money in a relatively quick fashion to strengthen alignment between delivering standards-based instruction and developing the instructional capacity of district educators.



Building instructional capacity starts from a shared understanding that professional learning is not a product, but rather a process comprised of opportunities for educators to learn and practice skills that advance their expertise. Both teachers and principals can benefit from ongoing professional learning that is closely tied to student learning, the realities of practice, and the expertise of colleagues.

Research on professional learning has demonstrated that effective learning for educators has, at minimum, the four following qualities:

1. Professional learning should be intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice.
2. Professional learning should focus on student learning and address the teaching of specific curriculum content.
3. Professional learning should align with school improvement priorities and goals.
4. Professional learning should build strong working relationships among teachers and provide time to collaborate.

It is equally important for districts to be intentional about supporting meaningful, ongoing, and practice-oriented learning for principals. The ability of principals to support teachers can affect whether or not teachers choose to remain in that school, and professional learning is a critical aspect of ensuring that teachers feel supported by school leadership. Principals can learn how to foster and lead practices that grow instructional capacity by participating in job-embedded, professional learning experiences.

Effective principal learning includes three prominent features:

1. A learning continuum operating systematically from pre-service preparation through induction and throughout the career, involving expert, veteran principals in mentoring less experienced others.
2. Leadership learning grounded in practice, including analyses of classroom practice, supervision, and professional development using on-the-job observations.
3. Collegial learning networks, such as principals' networks, study groups, and mentoring or peer coaching, that offer communities of practice and sources of ongoing support for problem solving.

In the **appendices** of the guidance document, there is a fuller discussion of these aspects of professional learning, with specific examples from California districts about how they have organized professional learning to meet these criteria.



High-impact strategies

District strategies for supporting high-quality professional learning are articulated in the guidance document in greater detail, and include:

1. conducting a district needs assessment of professional learning with key partners;
2. using the state's [Curriculum Frameworks](#) as a guide to curriculum planning for the state academic standards;
3. designing professional learning around the major instructional shifts for the state academic standards and to address gaps in students' learning;
4. selecting quality instructional materials with teachers;
5. using student work to support meaningful professional learning;
6. assessing student talk in classrooms for evidence of understanding;
7. utilizing coaching for teams and for cultivating professional learning communities;
8. developing principals' and teacher leaders' skills to foster effective teacher teams;
9. finding and exposing educators to strong classroom practices that can be used as learning opportunities;
10. investing in induction programs for beginning teachers;
11. structuring time in the regular work day for teachers to reflect, collaborate, and learn from each other; and
12. leveraging new and existing professional learning resources to sustain efforts.

Not all professional development results in learning. Although one-shot, short-term workshops are widespread, they have been found to have little effect on teaching practice and no effect on student learning gains. However, there are approaches to professional learning that have been found to have a positive influence on practice and student learning. These approaches generally involve strategies for teaching specific content by engaging teachers in learning new methods and materials with enough time to dig deep, dive in, and develop curriculum and lesson plans with colleagues that they can try out with support and coaching. This process is followed by time for reflection with other teachers on how these new practices affect student learning, often by examining student work for evidence of learning, getting feedback, and refining plans in an ongoing cycle of inquiry, practice, and review.

Even when these elements of professional learning are put in place, there is more to be done to ensure quality instruction. Instructional quality is dependent on both the knowledge and skills of individual educators and on the workplace conditions that allow effective practices to take root and flourish across classrooms: curriculum materials that support instruction, collaborative time for teacher planning and learning, and supports for instructional relationships among staff.



Divided into three sections, the state guidance document has been crafted with a particular eye towards bridging professional learning with approaches for implementing the state academic standards.

Section I defines and describes quality professional learning, specifies what is meant by instructional capacity, and offers districts some strategies for developing a system of professional learning. It also offers suggestions to help districts navigate typical implementation challenges that emerge when trying to use the state academic standards. These suggestions show how some California districts have attended to particular implementation challenges, such as helping teachers and principals to better understand and enact instructional shifts, how to attend to the particular needs of special education or English language learners, and how to regularly carve out time for teachers to work and learn together as they align their teaching to the expectations of the state academic standards.

Section II provides an organized collection of resources to help districts implement state academic standards, [utilize curricular frameworks](#), and grow systems of professional learning. Administrators are directed to tools, trainings, and networks intended to help districts build off of the state’s current professional learning activities and strengthen practitioner-driven efforts, so districts don’t feel a need to start from scratch.

Section III offers suggestions for how to connect district professional learning plans to Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs). Key steps include articulating how capacity-building activities—such as jointly planned standards-based curriculum planning, coaching, or other supports (access to professional learning activities, time, or other metrics)—can leverage efforts to raise achievement for low-income students, English language learners, and foster youth in our school systems.

