

NOTEBOOK

The Newsletter for the Reading First Program

Summer 2005

Why Is Professional Development So Important?

School systems today are charged with addressing ever-increasing demands: reducing the achievement gap, adopting evidence-based practices, meeting adequate yearly progress goals, managing the requirements of second-language and special-needs students, and remaining current on the increasing amount of pedagogical and content area research. Educators must keep abreast of the important advances that are occurring in education. This is where professional development comes in.

Professional development is defined as “the process of improving staff skills and competencies needed to produce outstanding educational results for students” (Hassel, 1999). As Thomas Guskey (2000, p.4) states, “One constant finding in the research literature is that notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development.” Professional development is key to meeting today’s educational demands.

High-quality professional development strategies are essential to schools. The days of teacher staff development sessions consisting of “sit-and-get” workshops and expert-delivered awareness campaigns are long gone. We are now moving toward more effective and more engaging professional development models. Research and experience help us recognize that high-quality ongoing professional development that deepens teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogical skills; provides opportunities for practice, research, and reflection; and includes efforts that are job-embedded, sustained, and collaborative will assist in the goal to remain up-to-date (Sparks, 2002). Seminal research by Joyce and Showers (1988) concludes that levels of teacher learning and strategy use are greatly increased when coaching, study teams, and peer support are provided.

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Reading First Levels of Participation As of 6/15/05

1,415 district awards representing
4,775 schools have been made.



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Additionally, professional development is increasingly seen as a systemic process that includes the development of all individuals involved with student achievement from the superintendent to the teaching assistants. The Learning First Alliance's Every Child Reading (2000) maintains that "it is largely ineffective to educate classroom teachers about early reading instruction unless their administrators, policymakers, specialists, teaching assistants, tutors, and parents operate with similar concepts and practices."

Professional development is especially important in Reading First schools and districts because they have established the goal of ensuring that all kids become proficient readers. Therefore, they are learning new instructional strategies, adopting new programs, administering new assessments, and learning to use data to make instructional decisions. Effective training in these areas is key to meeting the program's goal.

In this issue of the *Reading First Notebook*, we'll share important information about professional development,

including a professional development checklist, the specifics of Reading First professional development, professional development pitfalls, the focus of professional development in Reading First schools, professional development for non-Reading First schools, and professional development alignment. In addition, we address the unique professional development models in Arizona and West Virginia. Professional development is a crucial element of school improvement and increased student achievement. For that reason, professional development is a vital component of Reading First.

References:

Guskey, T. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

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Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1988). *Student achievement through staff development*. New York: Longman.

Learning First Alliance. (2000). *Every child reading: A professional development guide*. Learning First Alliance.

Sparks, D. (2002). *Designing powerful professional development for teachers and principals*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.



Reading First Professional Development Fundamentals

Research has shown that teachers who participate in well-designed professional development activities get better results from their students (Guidance for the Reading First Program, 2002).

Effective professional development in Reading First schools comprises several fundamental features. Attention to these features will assist educators in developing and maintaining successful strategies for professional development.

- Professional development plans should focus on the five essential components of scientifically based reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Focusing on the explicit and systematic instruction of these components and how they are related will supply the

foundation that teachers need to provide instruction that will make certain students learn to read well.

- While fully complying with the goals of Reading First, the training must also align with state-outlined academic and performance standards. Since students will ultimately be assessed on their ability to meet state requirements outlined in the standards, those cannot be neglected.
- Training should be provided by a knowledgeable trainer who is qualified to provide instruction to both regular and special education teachers in

reading instruction that is grounded in scientifically based reading research. This person is frequently a site-based reading coach but also may be a consultant or personnel from a nonprofit agency such as a university.

- The professional development should be structured so that it thoroughly prepares teachers to successfully deliver core, intervention, and supplemental reading programs. This training should occur at the beginning of the school year with additional support provided throughout the remainder of the school year.
- Adequate teacher learning and practice time should be considered. Time needs to be built into the system to allow teachers to collaborate, plan, and reflect as they learn.
- Just as students respond to various instructional approaches, teachers respond to a variety of professional development delivery models. A differentiated approach to professional development delivery that may include study groups, job-embedded coaching, demonstrations, analysis of student work, mentoring, and academies will meet the needs of more teachers.
- Professional development should clarify the reasons why some students struggle when learning to read as well as the instructional interventions that may remediate the problem. Professional development should also address assessment issues including test

administration, data analysis, and the use of data to inform instructional decisions.

- Classroom management should be addressed so that the instructional strategies teachers receive can be delivered to the students in an effective manner. Effective professional development should help teachers learn how to use their limited time in an efficient and effective manner. This training may focus on issues such as grouping strategies, use of volunteers and assistants, and differentiated instruction.
- Reading First professional development includes follow-up and ongoing guidance and support during classroom implementation. Instructional coaches are an integral part of this process.
- Finally, training must be coordinated at all levels: state, district, and school. Thoughtful coordination across all levels will avert gaps and overlaps in information.

For more information:

University of Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts. (n.d.). *An introductory guide for Reading First coaches*. Austin, TX: UT System/Texas Education Agency.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. (n.d.). *Federal guidelines for Reading First professional development plans at the local level*. Retrieved March 17, 2005, from <http://ncrel.org/rf/pd/guidel.htm>

References:

U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *Guidance for the Reading First program*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved June 16, 2005, from <http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/guidance.doc>



The Focus of Professional Development in Reading First Schools

by Deborah Reed

Summer is typically the time that districts and schools finalize their calendars, daily schedules, and professional development plans for the next school year. While there are many factors to consider in making those decisions, instructional leaders must ensure that learning outcomes take the highest priority.

Try gathering information with this simple test: Ask staff members involved with Reading First on your campuses the following two questions:

1. What is the purpose or goal of Reading First?
2. How does Reading First expect us to reach that goal?

You will probably find little disagreement that the expected outcome of Reading First is to “leave no child behind” or, in other words, to ensure all students read on level by the end of third grade. Likewise, teachers should be able to list the program requirements, such as the types and frequencies of assessments, the steps used to monitor progress, the tiers and durations of interventions, the grouping of students, and the research-based strategies for skill development. However, it is equally important that professional development conveys to teachers the underlying purpose of all of those program elements—to continually inform and improve instructional practice and effectiveness.

In fact, research has repeatedly shown that the most important variable in student achievement is the quality of the teacher in the classroom (Block, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Haycock, Jerald, & Huang, 2001). A review of the research on teacher preparation and education conducted by the National Reading Panel (2000), which served as the basis for the Reading First requirements, concluded that improvements in teacher knowledge and practice positively impact student reading success. Reading First is as much about teacher change as it is about student change. In order to successfully accomplish the aim of having all students reading on grade level, Reading First schools have to start by increasing teacher skill in research-based instructional practices and by changing the prevailing notion of professional development.

The old perception of professional development as self-selected workshops or required days of faculty busywork throughout the year must be exorcised from the culture of Reading First schools. Part of the rationale for having literacy coaches is to provide job-embedded professional development—that is, to work directly with teachers, not students.

Administrators and teachers alike must broaden their view of professional development to focus on the following distributive chunks of time:

- Time for teachers to meet and plan instruction
- Time to observe in other classrooms
- Time for teams to analyze assessment results and other student work products

- Time for literacy coaches or reading experts to provide training tailored to teacher and school needs
- Time for studying scientifically based reading research and professional books
- Time to research appropriate classroom materials or other resources

If the purpose or goal of Reading First is to leave no child behind in reading, building teacher capacity must be a priority. All the assessments, strategies, and procedures common to Reading First grants are only tools, and the best possible tools can still be put to inappropriate or ineffective uses if not wielded by those properly trained and supported in their implementation. Districts and schools must plan professional development calendars and schedules to communicate that Reading First is not about what we do to kids to make them better but rather about what we as educators must do to improve our professional practice.

References:

Block, C. C. (2000). A case for exemplary classroom instruction: Especially for students who come to school without the precursors for literacy success. *National Reading Conference Yearbook*, 49, 421–440.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(1), 1–42.

Haycock, K., Jerald, C., & Huang, S. (2001). Closing the gap: Done in a decade. *Thinking K–16*, 5(2), 3–22.

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read*. Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Professional Development Checklist

A deeper look into your system's professional development approach can be a constructive and worthwhile task.

This checklist can be used to assess professional development efforts in your school or district. The list of professional development components can also be used as a springboard for discussion, analysis, and improvements in your school's or district's current professional development efforts.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development requires and fosters the norm of continuous improvement.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development involves strong leadership to obtain continuing support and to motivate staff and others to be advocates for continuous improvement.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development is aligned with and related to the district and state strategic plan and is specifically outlined in the Reading First budget.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No The professional development plan provides adequate time during the workday for staff members to learn and work together to accomplish the school's mission and goals.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development bases priorities on a careful analysis of disaggregated student data regarding goals for student learning.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development uses scientifically based content that has proven effectiveness in increasing student learning and development.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development programs require an evaluation process that is ongoing, includes multiple sources of information, and focuses on all levels of the organization.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development provides the follow-up necessary to ensure improvement.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development includes ongoing support and guidance during classroom implementation.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development facilitates the implementation of school- and classroom-based management strategies that maximize student learning.</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development prepares teachers to use research-based teaching strategies appropriate to their instructional objectives and their students.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development prepares teachers to effectively deliver instruction to struggling as well as advanced learners.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development prepares educators to demonstrate high expectations for student learning.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development prepares teachers to use various types of performance assessment in their classrooms.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development prepares teachers to administer, interpret, and effectively use data to inform instruction.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development provides specific training in using selected instructional materials.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Professional development proceeds from introductory to more advanced topics.</p> |
|---|---|

The evidence linking good professional development and increased student achievement is growing (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000). As you consider your system's professional development, focus on these critical elements that impact the learning from which teachers, and ultimately students, will benefit.

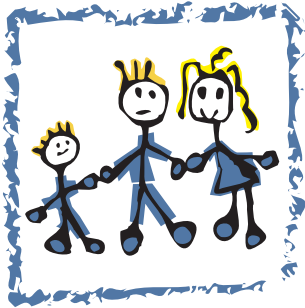
The components of this checklist were culled from the U.S. Department of Education's Guidance for the Reading First Program and the National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development.

References:

National Staff Development Council & National Association of Elementary School Principals. (1995). *Standards for staff development*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

Sparks, D., & Hirsh, S. (2000). Strengthening professional development. *Education Week*, 19, 37.

U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *Guidance for the Reading First program*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved June 16, 2005, from <http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/guidance.doc>



Professional Development in Non-Reading First Schools

States are required to provide high-quality professional development in scientifically based reading instruction to Reading First schools as well as to schools that are not receiving Reading First funds.

Reading First requires that state education agencies develop and implement a plan for professional development that will improve instructional practices in the teaching of reading. Those professional development activities must be based on scientifically based reading research. Professional development similar to that delivered to K-3 teachers in Reading First schools must be available to all teachers of K-3 students, including special education teachers.

Professional development should include information on instructional materials, programs, strategies, and approaches that are based on scientific research. Topics may include instructional strategies based on scientifically based reading research, early intervention, and the use of valid and reliable assessment instruments to monitor progress and to identify students who may be at risk for reading failure. Content must also be aligned with state academic and performance standards. Clearly, this information is valuable to all teachers involved with early reading instruction, not just those receiving funding from Reading First.

The Reading First program insists that professional development be delivered by an eligible professional development provider determined and approved by state officials. Time is also an important consideration, as teachers need adequate time to learn new concepts as well as to practice what they have learned. Professional development should be delivered by various methods in a variety of formats to improve accessibility.

An informal survey of five states indicated that they are providing this comprehensive training in some innovative ways, including the following:

- Leadership and coaching academies
- Brief intensive trainings such as institutes and workshops
- Topical symposiums and forums where experts share and discuss information
- Intensive on-site trainings where teachers are involved in observations, study groups, collaborative planning, and real-time lesson implementation with students

Training based on scientifically based reading research that extends beyond Reading First schools benefits everyone by providing substantive, practical assistance to a wide range of teachers.

From:
U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *Guidance for the Reading First Program*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved June 16, 2005, from <http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/guidance.doc>



West Virginia's Professional Development Strategy

West Virginia has a cohesive system of professional development that helps ensure consistent, high-quality training for all.

West Virginia's professional development consists of a broad system of training provided by a highly qualified cadre of reading specialists, specialized support for the specific needs of teachers and principals, and a rigorous provider approval method.

Beverly Kingery, West Virginia's Reading First project director, described the state's Reading Cadre—a team of 41 teachers, administrators, and higher education faculty—as a dedicated group of professionals who serve on the cadre in addition to their usual responsibilities. This cadre participates in intensive training that adheres to the research-based model of professional development implemented in Reading First districts and schools across the state. That training model includes the use of various delivery formats. Those formats include lectures/research presentations and follow-up by such nationally known presenters as Reid Lyon, Timothy Shanahan, and Isabel Beck; study groups; independent research and sharing of results; a train-the-trainer model in which select cadre members attend national presentations and in turn present to the state cadre; utilization of services of the National Reading First Technical Assistance Center; and e-mail lists.

Topics studied through these formats over the past 2 years have included the five essential reading components, tiered intervention, assessment, coaching, implementation of effective professional development, classroom management, differentiated student learning, analysis and selection of core reading programs, and adult learner strategies. Together with state department employees, this highly trained cadre is available to provide specialized training to meet the specific data-indicated needs of principals,

reading mentor teachers (coaches), and teachers in Reading First and non-Reading First schools. Kingery asserts that this is a cost-effective means of providing current, relevant, and quality information to all Reading First schools.

West Virginia's Reading First plan includes a rigorous professional development provider approval process. State department officials review professional development provider proposals. If the plan follows the local education agency's submitted 3-year professional development plan, is aligned with the goals of Reading First and the school's needs, and uses scientifically based reading research as its foundation, and if the provider is qualified in that particular area, the proposal will likely be approved. State-level authorization ensures that the professional development plan is aligned to the large-scale goals of Reading First and delivered by a competent provider.

West Virginia's comprehensive training system and thorough provider approval procedures are helping build and sustain staff capacity for effective reading instruction.

For more information about West Virginia's Reading First program, please visit its Web site at <http://wvde.state.wv.us/reading/readingfirst.html> or contact Beverly Kingery at bkingery@access.k12.wv.us.



Reading First Professional Development in the State of Arizona

Arizona's distinctive professional development plan ensures quality and continuity.

Arizona's professional development plan is structured in a tiered system of delivery. All Reading First professional development is provided by a state team of highly qualified trainers made up of Arizona Department of Education staff, trainers from WestEd (a regional education service provider), and state reading specialists and features national presenters/researchers who are brought in for specialized topics.

This team provides a series of mandatory trainings for principals (1 full day every other month) and coaches (2 full days every month) as well as summer academies for K-3 teachers of reading and special education. These trainings delve deeply into various topics such as data analysis, implementation strategies, and scientifically based reading research and instructional practice. Topics and content are flexible and planned according to needs determined by observations, frequently asked questions, and data. Although professional development for teachers is primarily scheduled during the summer months, the ongoing training of coaches and principals is designed to be delivered as follow-up when they return to their sites.

Arizona's state reading specialists are part of a unique "borrowing" program between the districts and the Department of Education designed to build statewide capacity for scientifically based research and practice and provide an infrastructure to support it. In Year One of Reading First implementation, at least one highly qualified classroom teacher from each of the state's 15 counties is selected to become a "reading specialist on loan," a 4-year position. In that first year, while remaining a classroom teacher, the reading specialist is provided 15 released days to receive intensive training. In Year Two, the first

actual year of Reading First implementation in local education agencies receiving grant awards, the reading specialist is based at the county school superintendent's office. The reading specialist is assigned four Reading First schools to serve in that county/region.

In addition to participating as a trainer in the state-sponsored professional development, the reading specialist also works directly at the assigned sites to support the site-based coaches and principals. In Year Three, the state specialists continue to support their Reading First schools but also provide county-sponsored training in the state's reading initiative, AZ READS. Additionally, they work to disseminate relevant information about scientifically based reading research to non-Reading First schools. This provides the means to offer the same training to all K-3 schools in the state. As a result, K-3 reading academies and DIBELS training has been presented in every county in the state, ensuring consistency and quality that is accessible to teachers at the local level.

In the final year of the cycle, a new team of reading specialists is brought on board. The new team learns by shadowing the veteran specialists as they support their Reading First schools and provide professional development and technical assistance to both Reading First and non-Reading First schools. After their first year as trainees, they assume responsibility for technical assistance to the new round of Reading First grant awardees.

This development cycle of state reading specialists provides support for Reading First schools and beyond. The quality training and support that principals and coaches obtain through this program

ensure that the leadership in Reading First schools receive the support they need to create change. The highly trained reading specialists on loan return to their districts after their “terms,” where their newly gained knowledge and experience is greatly valued and utilized. They are often hired to become trainers and coaches. These specialists can become a

permanent catalyst for improvement and change in their own districts. Most importantly, the cycle provides a mechanism to continuously build capacity throughout the state.

For more information on Arizona's Reading First program, visit the AZ READS Web site at www.ade.state.az.us/azreads/reading1st/ or contact Marie Mancuso at MMancuso@ade.az.gov.

Professional Development Pitfalls

Avoid these common pitfalls to increase the likelihood of professional development success.

With careful planning and preparation, professional development efforts can be enormously beneficial. A review of the NSDC's Standards for Staff Development and *A New Vision for Staff Development* (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997) revealed some common mistakes made when planning professional development. Educators should be aware of these pitfalls in order to create the most effective professional development plans.

Pitfall #1: Fads and Quick-Fix Approaches

Schools sometimes choose faddish improvement innovations involving one-shot training with no follow-up support. Lack of adequate training leads to poorly or incorrectly executed implementation of the innovation. The effort often is abandoned before its effectiveness is adequately evaluated. In contrast, well-planned training programs focusing on content that has proven effectiveness in increasing student learning, followed by coaching, study groups, and observations, will provide better, more lasting results (NSDC & NAESP, 1995). Reading First's consistent focus on the research helps to avoid the fad trap.

Pitfall #2: Unutilized Data

Every school has assessment data. However, sometimes that data is not utilized in a constructive manner. According to one guide, “Effective . . . staff development bases priorities on a careful analysis of disaggregated student data regarding goals for student learning” (NSDC & NAESP, 1995). Analysis of student data helps staff recognize the need for improvement, set priorities to meet improvement goals, and determine if programs and strategies are impacting student achievement. Decisions about

professional development should be based on the identified needs and the goals for improvement as indicated by data. Professional development efforts should advance the instructional skills and knowledge necessary to accomplish those goals. For this reason, progress monitoring is an important element of Reading First.

Pitfall #3: The Happiness Quotient

Too often, professional development is evaluated on its “happiness quotient” or entertainment value rather than its quality or worth. Professional development should be judged on its effectiveness in getting teachers actively involved in meaningful study of theory and research of the strategies they are learning and, perhaps more importantly, the degree to which changes occur in instructional habits and the level to which student learning is enhanced (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).

Pitfall #4: “Sit and Get” Professional Development Event

One-shot workshop professional development experiences often fail because they do not offer the ongoing assistance and feedback that is necessary to fully learn, practice, and refine a new strategy. Effective professional development is a sustained process that involves active teacher participation. The professional development implemented through Reading First is multilevel and supported by trained leaders and coaches.

Pitfall #5: Expert Information Dissemination

Professional development that relies on lecturing and instructing in which educators are passive recipients of

received wisdom is less desirable than models that incorporate facilitation, interaction, collaboration, coaching, guiding, and supporting (Sparks, 1997). Through the latter processes, teachers will begin to develop their own expertise and continually refine their knowledge and skills.

Pitfall #6: Teacher as the Sole Focus

Teachers have a great direct impact on increased student achievement. However, additional school staff and others must also be familiar with the professional development tied to improvement efforts to ensure continuity (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Instructional assistants, librarians, and volunteers should continually refine their skills as they often work directly with students. Administrators and central office staff must also be aware of the new learning in order to effectively monitor, support, and assess the improvement efforts. For these reasons school and district leaders and even substitute teachers are invited and encouraged to participate in Reading First professional development.

Pitfall #7: Professional Development as a Frill

Professional development should not be considered a “frill” or “extra” that can easily be cut when finances are tight. Rather, it should be considered an essential element of the strategic improvement plan that plays a key role in increasing student achievement scores. Professional development that is placed in the budget under a specified line item conveys a message to the entire community about its merit (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Reading First grants specifically include funding for professional development.

Pitfall #8: Initiative Overload

When too many initiatives are implemented at once, time, energy, and resources become diluted, decreasing the chances of meaningful, lasting change (Collins, 1997). Instead, a focused and concentrated effort on one or two important initiatives, driven by data-indicated needs, produce better results. With multiple demands, teachers

become frustrated and confused. With single initiatives, teachers have the opportunity to thoroughly study, practice, and reflect on their learning, increasing the likelihood of success. Reading First schools are encouraged to minimize distractions and focus on all elements of effective Reading First implementation.

Pitfall #9: Insufficient Time

Research shows that “effective...staff development provides adequate time during the work day for staff members to learn and work together to accomplish the school’s mission and goals” (NSDC & NAESP, 1995). Teachers need time to learn. Real learning cannot take place in the 15 minutes before the students arrive at school and the 10 minutes after the students are dismissed. Schools must be creative in establishing extended periods of released time for teachers to study, share, observe, collaborate, plan, and reflect.

Careful coordination and consideration of professional development processes, content, and delivery is a must if teachers and schools are to realize the full potential of professional development efforts.

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Collins, D. (1997). *Achieving your vision of professional development: How to assess your needs and get what you want*. Tallahassee, FL: Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE).

Fullan, M. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.

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Aligning Professional Development

Careful coordination of all elements of professional development can prevent learning gaps and overlaps.

Readng First professional development is complex. It is a multifaceted process that

- is disseminated at different levels—state, district, and school;
- includes assorted content on such topics as assessment, the five essential components of effective reading instruction, and differentiated instruction, among others; and
- fluctuates in degree of specificity, from very broad topics, such as an overview of general requirements of Reading First, to very detailed information, such as a step-by-step process to effectively teach phoneme blending.

It is important that these levels be aligned and coordinated. Careful planning helps prevent teachers from being unnecessarily exposed to duplicate information at various professional development experiences and, perhaps more importantly, averts serious gaps in teacher knowledge. All levels of professional development should support, supplement, and complement each other in their content and specificity.

So who is responsible for planning and organizing this coordinated professional development? In short, everyone is responsible. State coordinators need to be cognizant of the overarching needs of schools on a large-scale basis as well as the goals and obligations established by their state's Reading First grant. Districts must pay attention to the information the state is disseminating and be ready to reinforce and extend that information according to the needs of the Reading First schools in that district. Leaders at the school level must be aware of the professional development needs of their teachers as they relate to the specific demands of the school's core reading program and be ready to

supplement the district and state professional development with any site-specific needs the school may have.

While state coordinators are responsible for establishing general professional development goals and implementing statewide professional development on a large scale, it may be difficult for state coordinators to plan and deliver professional development to address specific content objectives. These objectives are often tied to the core reading programs, which may vary from district to district. Additionally, state coordinators are responsible for establishing guidelines and for reviewing and approving district-planned professional development to ensure alignment with the overall goals of Reading First.

District coordinators and school leaders may be more able to provide specialized training that can be tailored to meet the needs of the teachers and students in that district. At this level, student assessment data is readily available and teacher needs become apparent through observations, surveys, and informal dialogue. Focused in-class support through coaching can help teachers grasp the particular skills and knowledge they need to improve their instruction. Meanwhile, all involved should remain aware of professional development that is occurring at each level and be prepared to fill in gaps that become apparent.

Consistent analysis of the level, content, and degree of detail of the professional development disseminated is imperative. This will lead to a thoroughly skilled staff that is void of the knowledge gaps and overlap that can result in diminished student achievement.

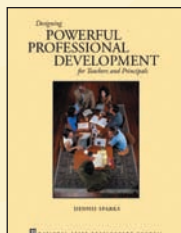
Resources

Every Child Reading: A Professional Development Guide (2000)

This guide builds on *Every Child Reading: An Action Plan* and provides strategies to help teachers improve their skills as reading instructors. It assists elementary school professional development planners in designing viable professional development programs by presenting guidelines for the content, context, and methodology of professional development in reading instruction based on the best available research. It may be downloaded at <http://www.learningfirst.org/publications/reading/>.

Designing Powerful Professional Development for Teachers and Principals (2002)

Dennis Sparks, executive director of the National Staff Development Council, discusses his ideas for connecting the quality of teaching and leadership to the improvement of schools in this 14-chapter book. Sparks makes his case for powerful professional learning and then demonstrates to readers how their schools and school systems can provide that learning for their teachers and principals. It may be downloaded at <http://www.nsdc.org/library/leaders/sparksbook.cfm>.



Building a Community of Reading Experts: Tips for Designing a High Quality Professional Development Program (2004)

Effective professional development delivers coherent, focused training and orientation designed to elicit a specific outcome. This eight-page Quality Brief created by the National Reading First Technical Assistance Center outlines the steps and considerations for building a high-quality professional development program in Reading First schools. Topics include preparing teachers in all essential components of reading instruction, providing information on scientifically based instructional materials and strategies, enhancing teachers' ability to implement early intervention and remediation, and facilitating the use of assessment data to inform instruction. It may be downloaded from the National Reading First Technical Assistance Center section at <http://www.ReadingFirstSupport.us>.

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