

## SECTION 7: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT



### ESSA DEFINITION AND IMPLICATIONS

When the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Barack Obama in 2015, it provided a new federal definition of professional learning. Through ESSA, an update to 2002's No Child Left Behind (NCLB), President Obama worked with families, educators and other stakeholders to create a law (ESSA) that readied all students for success in college and career opportunities. One of the highlights of ESSA is that it, "Requires—for the first time—that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers" (US Department of Education, 2017). Standards-aligned instruction that prepares students for college and career also requires continued and more robust teacher development and support. The important concepts below, highlighted in ESSA's definition, signal important implications for the design and structure of professional learning plans in public schools in the District of Columbia. There are a few important distinctions between professional learning under ESSA and the former NCLB.

1. PL is for all educators – principals, school leaders, teachers, support personnel, paraprofessionals and early childhood educators. Active participation in PL will glean skills to improve practice and increase student achievement. PL should be provided to explicitly support teachers in providing students succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet state academic standards.
2. PL needs to be "sustained, intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven and classroom-focused." This language shifts away from ineffective forms of PL that had been prevalent in previous years, some of which include stand-alone, one-day, or short-term workshops.
3. PL should be part of (included in) school and district improvement plans; that it provides educators training in the effective use of technology; that it be evaluated for its impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement; and that it be personalized "to address the educator's specific needs."
4. ESSA requires the use of evidence-based interventions and activities. PL programs and activities must have demonstrated a record of success, which includes reliable, trustworthy and valid evidence to suggest the program is effective. This is a more flexible and context-informed approach to applying research to practice than the "scientifically based research" standard under NCLB.

With these shifts in how PL is designed and the elements of effective learning, LEAs, district and school leaders have implications to consider when designing and delivering PL. Questions to consider and plan for these implications include:

- How will PL affect the master schedule? Will teachers have opportunities to plan together? Will teachers have opportunities to review student work and data together? Are there dedicated times in the schedule for PL?
- What does the learning experience look like for a new teacher? An experienced teacher? Are there opportunities for teachers to mentor one another?
- Does PL include opportunities for practice, feedback and reflection?
- Is there adequate funding in the budget to support PL opportunities (personnel, speakers, conferences, resources, etc.)?

This guidance aligns to [Guiding Principle 4](#).

## A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FRAMEWORK

In order to begin preparing for rich professional learning (PL) experiences an LEA, school or community organization may consider a framework to support the beginning stages. A framework will guide you in information gathering, identifying key stakeholders, goal setting and provide guidance to support plan development. Below is an example of a seven-stage process to develop a new or revisit an existing professional learning plan.

Stage one: Organize for Effectiveness
Stage two: Develop Partnerships
Stage three: Needs Assessment
Stage four: Create a Literacy Plan
Stage five: Curriculum Review
Stage six: Implementation of PL activities
Stage seven: Progress Monitoring and Adjustments

For more details related to the Professional Learning Framework, see [Appendix I](#)

## CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

In addition to adopting a framework, LEA's, schools, and CBOs should be aligned to the six criteria for high-quality professional learning as defined by ESSA.

- **Sustained** – taking place over an extended period; longer than one day or a one-time workshop.
- **Intensive** – focused on a discrete concept, practice or program.
- **Collaborative** – involving multiple educators, educators and coaches, or a set of participants grappling with the same concept or practice and in which participants work together to achieve shared understanding.
- **Job-embedded** – a part of the on-going, regular work of instruction and related to teaching and learning taking place in real time in the teaching and learning environment.
- **Data-driven** – based upon and responsive to real-time information about the needs of participants and their students.
- **Classroom-focused** – related to the practices taking place during the teaching process and relevant to the instructional process.

## STANDARDS FOR THE PREPARATION OF LITERACY PROFESSIONALS

The following section explores teacher PL and its impact on instructional practice and literacy outcomes. The term “professional learning” encompasses building teachers’ knowledge of the evidence-based foundations of literacy and language, teaching and refining classroom pedagogy, assessment and evaluation, and on-going collaboration among educators. Effective PL results in teachers who deepen their knowledge base and demonstrate sustainable and positive changes in their competencies, leading to improved student outcomes.

The Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals (2017) provide a framework for literacy PL, refinement and assessment. They include foundational knowledge, curriculum and instruction, assessment and evaluation, diversity and equity, learners and the literacy environment, PL and leadership, and practicum/clinical experiences. The standards aim for candidates to demonstrate knowledge of the theoretical, historical and evidence-based foundations of literacy and language and the ways in which they interrelate and the role of literacy professionals in schools.

Foundational literacy knowledge includes knowledge of the theories, content and instructional practices supported by scientific research, and is an essential part of literacy teachers’ preparation and ongoing professional development. Over the past few decades, a growing body of scientific research has led to a consensus on how students learn to read and the most effective ways to teach them. Recent brain-imaging studies have confirmed well-established conceptual models explaining how human brains become wired to read print. Meanwhile, achievement data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress for the past 10 years demonstrates that only about a third of fourth and eighth graders read at proficient levels.

Studies show, however, that *teachers* are the key to improving literacy outcomes for students - effective teaching can prevent or reduce reading failure in all but a small percentage of students. If national reading outcomes are to change, teachers must be equipped with the foundational knowledge of the theoretical, historical and evidence-based foundations of literacy and language.

Research on the impact of teacher knowledge on student performance reveals that specialized knowledge is “a key element of teacher quality” (Piasta, 2009). While there is little disagreement among educators that the teaching of reading is complex, teachers’ knowledge base and the curricula and methods in use across classrooms vary widely. As Dr. Louisa Moats, literacy researcher and expert, reminds us, “teaching reading is rocket science. But it is also established science, with clear, specific, practical instructional strategies that all teachers should be taught and supported in using.” The International Literacy Association and National Council of Teachers of English identifies teacher knowledge as a critical quality indicator of teacher preparation and performance. Teachers must possess a depth and breadth of knowledge, including a conceptual understanding of subject matter content and pedagogical knowledge, literacy learning, language development and theories of teaching and learning within social contexts, focusing on diverse learners.

Literacy teachers must also be prepared to develop, implement and differentiate evidence-based curricula to meet the needs of all learners. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) describes “evidence-based interventions” as practices or programs that have evidence to show that they are effective at producing results and improving outcomes when implemented. The term “evidence-based” ensures that curricula, programs and interventions have proven to be effective by leading to improved student achievement.

A primary goal of PL is to equip teachers with the foundational knowledge necessary to implement literacy curricula with fidelity, differentiate instruction for all learners, and evaluate whether or not the curricular methods and resources are aligned to evidence-based practices.

Literacy professionals should be prepared to administer and use the results of multiple assessment tools to evaluate literacy instruction at the individual, classroom, school and district levels. PL should focus on building teachers’ knowledge and skills of how to systematically use assessment data to plan and differentiate instruction and to respond to student progress. Literacy professionals need to understand and facilitate the analysis of multiple data sources including formal and informal assessment measures, formative and summative assessments, diagnostics, benchmark assessments and student work samples to inform and enhance instructional decisions.

## ADULT LEARNING THEORY

Educators can benefit from PL activities that address adult learning principles. These principles, referred to as andragogy (Knowles et al., 2015), include the use of personalized, experiential and interactive approaches that allow experience of the learner to serve as a scaffold upon which new learning is built. Pedagogy refers to the learning experience of children and adolescents. Andragogy refers to the learning experiences of adults. The chart below outlines those distinct differences.

## PEDAGOGY VS ANDRAGOGY

	PEDAGOGY	ANDRAGOGY
The Need to Know	Learners must learn what the teacher knows to be successful	Learners must know why they need to know something
The Learners Self Concept	Learners are dependent	Learners are responsible for their own decisions
The Role of Experience	Learners are reliant on the experience of the teacher	The experience of learners is a resource for the teacher
Readiness to Learn	Learners become ready to learn when the teacher tells them they need to be ready	Learners become ready to learn so they can cope with real life
Orientation to Learning	Subject centered	Task or problem centered
Motivation	Externally motivated (grades, approval, pressure, etc.)	Mostly internally motivated with some external motivators

The Andragogic Process Model will.

1. Prepare the learner how to learn
2. Establish a climate conducive to learning
3. Create a mechanism for mutual planning
4. Diagnose the needs for learning
5. Formulate program objectives/content to meet the needs
6. Design a pattern of learning experiences
7. Conduct learning experiences with suitable techniques and materials
8. Evaluate the learning outcomes

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION



Ongoing PL for educators in reading should regularly and thoroughly attend to equipping educators with the knowledge and skills to provide equitable opportunities for reading instruction to all students. PL should include opportunities for educators to understand opportunities and barriers to access of reading instruction and also understand assessment bias, reading disabilities, dialectical differences and how to select texts that support reading development that avoid bias in terms of representation or perspective. PL that provides educators with opportunities to engage in knowledge of diversity, equity and inclusion as it relates to both the provision and content of instructional practices should be an ongoing area of focus. Educators should engage in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) activities as outlined in [Guiding Principle 1](#), such as investigations of:

- Equity literacy;
- Appreciating dialectical differences;
- Developing relationships and disrupting bias in texts;
- Dyslexia and other reading/language disabilities; and
- Engaging in reading instruction that is culturally, linguistically and historically responsive.

Further, school leaders should carefully consider who is involved in ongoing PL in reading instruction. In order to support a comprehensive approach to literacy development, all educators should be encouraged to participate in PL. Instructional aides, general and special educators, and school leaders should participate in PL and collaboration around the provision of literacy instruction. The responsibility and opportunity for student growth in literacy does not exist in the curriculum or in a particular instructional approach. Rather, the investment in educators is vital. Educators who can engage in ongoing assessment, instruction and planning to support readers' growth and development are key to improving literacy outcomes of all learners. PL should include ongoing and engaging interaction with content and perspectives on how children learn to read, including a sustaining opportunities to practice and model instructional approaches, in-session coaching, collaborative planning and ongoing communities of practice in which educators can share results and refine approaches. Long-term, school-based, embedded PL that addresses school priorities will lead to the greatest improvement over time.

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP

Educators' engagement in ongoing and meaningful PL opportunities is the key to successful reading instruction. Selection of high-leverage, evidence-based curricula is not enough. Educators' knowledge of language and literacy, reading development and use of assessment and evaluation are necessary to ensure that all children are given the opportunity to learn to read. The content of PL should allow educators to demonstrate knowledge and implementation of assessment and evaluation of reading development, use of culturally, linguistically and historically responsive literacy, recognition and interventions for students with dyslexia and other reading disabilities, elements of word recognition and language comprehension, and how to evaluate curricula and assessments to determine if those tools will improve reading and literacy outcomes for children. PL must include, but also go beyond single workshops or awareness modules, making use of coursework, summer institutes, coaching, apprenticeships and communities of practice that allow educators ongoing opportunities to evaluate and refine approaches to reading instruction.

See [Appendix J](#) for templates to use in planning ongoing and meaningful PL for your school, LEA or organization.