

# Individual Item Prompts

## Professional Learning

## 8.1a: Sufficient resources are available for professional learning in my school.

When examining specific areas of a school's professional development, challenges may not be in the lack of resources present. They may, instead, lie in the allocation of resources, management and maintenance of existing resources, or perhaps the accessibility to resources. As you reflect on the specific conditions within your school, consider the policies and procedures in place to allocate and maintain your resources. Does the faculty know how to access the professional development? Have teachers been trained on the materials and resources? If training has been provided, has there been follow up from the administration on effectively utilizing the resources available? Is there an equitable process for gaining access to professional development?

Perhaps a discussion of the distribution of resources and funds from the district level down to the individual schools could help teachers to frame the quantity and quality of the professional development they have access to in the school. Knowing who makes choices and how those decisions are made could improve teacher perception of these areas of the survey. Are there ways teachers can be included in the process?

### Table Group Activity

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## 8.1a: Reflections

How are decisions made about using resources?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* Do teachers have a say in the process?</li><li>* How are funds appropriated?</li><li>* How do ideas of teachers need and efficacy play into the decision making process?</li></ul>
Is access to resources equitable across grade levels, teams, and subject areas? Across veteran and new teachers?
What does sufficient resources for PD look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* How do you define sufficient?</li><li>* Is that definition between administration and teachers?</li><li>* How do you come to consensus around sufficient resources?</li><li>* Do some educators need more or less PD than others?</li><li>* How do the resources at your school compare to similar schools across the district?</li></ul>
In your discussion of specific facilities, personnel, and resource issue, how do you and your staff define the term "sufficient" in this item's question?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* Are there steps within your control to improve the availability and accessibility of these materials?</li><li>* Are all teachers adequately trained on the effective use, policies, and procedures of the available resources? What about new teachers?</li></ul>
Do resources function properly when teachers need them?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* How are resources communicated throughout the course of the year?</li></ul>

\* Do new teachers know the policies and procedures that are in place to use resources?

## 8.1b: An appropriate amount of time is provided for professional learning.

In order for educators to participate in professional development in a truly meaningful way, they first must have an appropriate amount of time available to do so. As has been overwhelmingly expressed by the over 1 million educator voices heard nationally by the TELL survey over the past 15 years, time available to teachers during the workday is always a challenge. Given this, it is likely that an appropriate amount of time for professional development is hard to come by in many schools.

As you reflect on the specific conditions within your school, consider the policies and procedures in place for allocating time for educators to participate in professional development. Consider the following: What is an appropriate amount of time to allow for educators to participate in professional development? Do educators have an appropriate amount of time available to participate in professional development in a way that allows them to truly engage with the content in a meaningful way? Do educators have time to reflect on what they have learned once the professional development is over? Do educators have enough time to take what they have learned and apply it to their practice? Do educators have time to share what they have learned with their colleagues?

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## 8.1b: Reflections

How do educators find time to share what they are doing and learning with colleagues?

- \* What opportunities currently exist for educators to share their professional learning with colleagues? Formally? Informally? Does this differ for teachers and principals?
- \* To what extent do sharing opportunities come immediately after a professional learning session (“tell us what you learned yesterday”) versus after implementation (“how is that new strategy working for you”)?
- \* How do teachers and principals make their own professional learning decision based on what they’ve learned from colleagues’ experiences?

What is an “appropriate” amount of time to provide for educators?

- \* What are the PD allocations in your school/district? How many hours or days are allotted for professional learning? Are there exceptions (for particularly good opportunities, for example)?
- \* To what extent are current allocations adequate for most educators’ learning needs?
- \* What are the implications of allocating too little time to PD?
- \* Can there be “too much” time for PD? What are the implications of allocating too much time for PD? Consider cost of absences, substitutes, implications for student learning, etc.

What accommodations are made to allow educators to implement their new learning?

- \* Are teachers encouraged to try new things or experiment with new learning in their classrooms?
- \* Do teachers have enough autonomy over their classrooms to make the time to try new things without repercussions?
- \* Are principals afforded similar encouragement and autonomy over their time?

## 8.1c: Professional learning offerings are data driven.

Given limitations in resources like time and funding, professional learning opportunities must be relevant, applicable, and most importantly, impactful. High leverage learning opportunities include strategies and content with a strong connection to supporting students with college and career readiness. When the content of the PD is clearly connected to better outcomes for students, educators will be more eager to engage and more willing to implement once the session ends. Content that is grounded in rigorous research demonstrating better outcomes for students should be given high priority. In addition, professional learning opportunities that generate impact “buzz” gain interest and momentum more quickly than less data-driven activities. Educator stories can provide compelling evidence of value. Peer experiences with meaningful PD that changes practice or impacts students can be very persuasive. Evidence of impact, both research-based and experience-based, should be communicated clearly for all professional learning opportunities. Likewise, PD offerings should be aligned with evidence of staff and student needs. Teacher effectiveness data and student assessment data both are important sources of information about what gaps exist and what PD is needed. The most important PD offerings are those that are a good fit for teacher and student needs, and are grounded in evidence of effectiveness.

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## 8.1c: Reflections

What evidence standards are used to select professional learning opportunities?

- \* Is all PD content evidence-based? How do you know?
- \* Are the criteria for selection communicated to educators when they participate in PD?
- \* How much evidence is enough to call a PD opportunity “data-driven?”
- \* Do personal experiences count as much as research studies? What is most compelling to teachers?

What data is used to decide what PD is needed?

- \* Teacher data? Student data? School level data? Other data?
- \* What resources exist in the school/district to support educators in making decisions about what data-driven, need-based PD to offer or select for themselves?
- \* Given limitations in PD time and resources, what method is used to prioritize among a range of teacher and student needs?
- \* What information do educators need to make PD selections and how is that information communicated?

## 8.1d: Professional learning opportunities are aligned with the school's improvement plan.

School Improvement Plans (SIPs) not only identify priority focus areas for the school year, they also provide a roadmap to accomplishing the school's goals and objectives. SIPs are more successful when priorities are aligned with resources and actions. Professional learning is one specific mechanism within which this alignment can occur. When opportunities to choose among professional learning opportunities arise, the SIP can provide a benchmark against which those decisions can be made.

SIP-connected professional learning also gives teachers the opportunity to engage in school improvement in a meaningful way. PD that helps them make changes in their classrooms that also are connected to larger school goals engenders ownership of the SIP across vertical lines. Teachers feel a stronger sense of connection to the SIP, and ultimately, are more likely to help support the goals.

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## 8.1d: Reflections

What PD opportunities support teacher development aims connected to school-level improvement?

- \* In what ways do educators in your school encourage shared responsibility for student learning?
- \* How could you leverage PD to develop principal capacity for instructional leadership?
- \* What opportunities are available to support whole-group PD? Individual PD?
- \* How will you assess interim progress toward the improvement goals and connect it back to PD?

Is PD backwards planned to intentionally connect to improvement goals?

- \* What are the focus and goals of the current SIP?
- \* How does the PD plan connect to these goals in general?
- \* What are the most clearly relevant planned PD opportunities?
- \* To what extent are discretionary PD decision (such as for individual teacher and principals) measured against the SIP? Is it acceptable to spend resources on PD that is not clearly aligned to the SIP? Why or why not?

## 8.1e: Professional learning is differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers.

Professional development isn't one-size-fits-all for teachers any more than a single education initiative fits all kids. Teachers are learners, and as such have diverse needs, both professionally and personally. Professionally, teacher needs differ by teaching assignment (e.g., subject area, grade-level), developmental needs of their students; teacher prior knowledge, skills, and experience; and instructional priorities.

Personally, teachers have the same learning needs as their students. There can be wide variation among groups of teachers in terms of their own readiness, interest, preferences, and passions. Some teachers may thrive in a seminar setting, while others learn best in more interactive sessions. Others may prefer self-paced learning. The same instructional strategies teachers use for their students also are important for PD leaders to use, like flexible grouping by readiness, peer support, and engaging participants by folding their own interests into the session. Learning opportunities that fail to consider the diverse needs of teachers will fit some, but fail others.

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## 8.1e: Reflections

How do we ensure that professional learning opportunities are relevant to teachers' daily work?

- \* How are classroom context factors considered with respect to PD selection?
- \* To what extent are PD offerings targeted to specific teacher needs by student characteristics? English language learners? Special Education students? Gifted/Talented students?
- \* Do PD offerings differ for teachers by grade level (i.e. different for elementary, middle, high)?
- \* How are factors like school climate, culture, socio-economic status considered in professional learning?

How much autonomy, do teachers have over their own instructional improvement?

- \* How do teachers provide feedback to ensure their needs are being met by PD provided by the school/district?
- \* What measures are taken if teachers' needs are not being met by school/district PD?
- \* To what extent do teacher self-identify learning needs?
- \* In what ways are teachers empowered to seek out and engage in their own professional learning opportunities to meet their needs?
- \* How does individual professional learning fit in with school and district priorities?

What does "differentiated" PD look like?

- \* How is professional development currently differentiated in your school/district?
- \* How are teacher learning needs identified?
- \* How are adult learning needs incorporated into PD currently?
- \* How are PD offerings connected to teacher needs?
- \* How are different needs met by variation in offerings? Is the same content offered using different modalities (e.g., seminar, web-based)?
- \* How is PD differentiated for different teachers in the same session? What processes exist to assess prior knowledge and experiences that may be relevant?

## 8.1f: Professional learning deepens teachers' content knowledge.

Content-neutral PD can be quite useful if it is focused on pedagogical strategies that are valuable regardless of content area or student group. For example, professional learning focused on social-emotional learning or meeting the needs of diverse learners will be relevant for all teachers, regardless of their teaching assignment. But it is important to complement content-neutral PD with learning opportunities that deepen teachers' expertise in their content areas and in particular in teaching for understanding. Rather than focus exclusively on advancing teacher understanding, content-focused PD should emphasize translation of knowledge into teaching and learning. Content-focused PD also allows teachers to engage with colleagues to better understand state standards and instructional shifts in a way that can be difficult to do across grade-levels and subject areas. Likewise, teachers can dive deeply into content-specific assessment.

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## 8.1f: Reflections

What high-quality opportunities do teachers have to deepen their content knowledge?

- \* What internal and opportunities are available for groups and individual teachers?
- \* What external opportunities are available to build content expertise? Are teachers afforded time to advance their knowledge, for example, by taking an advanced course, attending professional conferences, reading current research?
- \* Are professional learning communities organized topically? Do teachers who teach the same subject have dedicated time to work together and learn from one another?
- \* Are content experts PD leaders in the school? The district?

How do content and pedagogy complement one another in your school/district?

- \* What is the current balance between content-neutral and content-focused PD?
- \* Are school/district select PD offerings largely content-focused or content-neutral?
- \* To what extent do teachers have access to content-focused instructional coaches?
- \* How are content-experts also included as leaders for content-neutral PD? For example, would math and ELA coaches support PD offerings on social-emotional learning?

## 8.1g: Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice.

Reflection is a critical component of the teaching cycle because it connects one lesson to the next planning period and supports improvement. Critical reflection also should lead teachers to insights into their practice that cause them to seek out professional learning opportunities, collaboration with colleagues or coaches, and opportunities to share their successes with others. Thinking deeply and carefully about lesson execution and student learning also can lead teachers to practices that support better teaching, such as increasing their understanding of students. Administrators can support reflection by creating opportunities, such as scheduling grade-level teams with concurrent planning periods and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. They also can model best practices by engaging teachers in conversation about successes and challenges where they can share and learn from others and enlisting support from teacher leaders.

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## 8.1g: Reflections

What does critical reflection look like in day to day teaching practice?

- \* How frequently should reflections on past experiences inform lesson planning?
- \* How do teachers seek out collaboration with others to improve a lesson that did not go well?
- \* What benefits might come from teachers reflecting together even when lessons do go well?

What does a culture of continuous improvement look like?

- \* How can school administrators foster a supportive learning environment in which all teachers feel comfortable sharing their successes and failures?
- \* What does modeling reflective practice look like?
- \* What resources are available to support educators and schools in the process of reflection and improvement?
- \* Who is responsible for guiding new teachers through the process of using reflection to improve practice? Likewise, how are veteran teachers supported to remain critically reflective?

## 8.1h: In this school, follow up is provided from professional learning.

An effective strategy for improving the quality and longevity of the impact of PD is to plan opportunities for reengagement; “one and done” is rarely enough to lead to lasting change. Learning should not stop when the session ends, rather, teachers should have the opportunity to use the skills and tools to which they were introduced and then revisit to provide feedback, make adjustments, and generally get support for implementation. New learning also is more likely to take hold and be well-implemented if it is job-embedded rather than “one more thing.” Situating new skills and strategies within existing practice or expectations creates a natural opportunity for ongoing conversation and support.

In addition, teacher needs will change as they implement new skills and strategies and the amount and type of ongoing support they need will change as well. The ongoing support for implementation should be planned and communicated to the participants, and scheduled as formally as necessary to provide teachers with the support they need. This iteration (and reiteration) is essential to support translating professional development into practice.

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## 8.1h: Reflections

How can we sustain implementation of new knowledge and skills from professional learning?

- \* Currently, how are most PD efforts supported during the implementation phase?
- \* Is follow-up typically preplanned? Do participants know what to expect in terms of follow up?
- \* What support activities are typical (e.g., follow up seminars? Web-resource for continued support? PLCs that meet regularly to support implementation)?
- \* What is the timeframe for PD support that will best sustain learning and practice?
- \* What resources are available (school, district, others) to support sustained professional learning efforts, particularly around implementation of new learning?
- \* Historically in your school/district, what kinds of PD are most likely to be implemented in the school/classroom? What can you learn from past experiences about how to support implementation and continued learning?

How is PD embedded into the everyday work of teachers and principals?

- \* How are new learning and skills implementation job-embedded?
- \* How supportive are principals when teachers want to integrate new strategies into their existing practice?
- \* How do teachers and principals guard against too many PD “add-ons” that become a burden rather than real skill or support?
- \* How is use of time for PD, including implementing new learning, monitored for effectiveness? What are the ways in which school leaders ensure protected time for innovation in addition to time to attend trainings?

## 8.1i: Professional learning provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices.

Teachers who feel a strong sense of community and shared responsibility stay together longer, and this benefits both teachers and students. Building a community of practice in which all teachers thrive requires everyone to place value on and engage in collaboration with their colleagues. This can happen both formally and informally as teachers learn the best ways to get the support they need from each other and offer help. Formally, teachers may be involved in work teams or professional learning communities. Master teachers may be assigned to support developing teachers through co-teaching and modeling. Informally, teachers may gather to discuss their successes and challenges with lessons or content at every opportunity, in the hallways and on the playgrounds. These informal opportunities foster a sense of collegiality and social support that can lead to improvements to practice and to morale.

Administrators play a crucial role by fostering a collaborative culture and providing opportunities for ongoing peer and teacher leader engagement through PLCs, grade-level and content area team collaboration, and a whole school focus on continuous improvement. They can partner teachers with mentors and coaches to help even successful teachers improve. They also must work to align resources with instructional goals, including collaboration.

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## 8.1i: Reflections

What are the best ways in which to foster a strong school learning?

- \* How are the strengths of individual teachers identified? In what way are teacher strengths utilized to build greater community and improve practice?
- \* Are there strong interpersonal relationships among faculty at your school? What are some effective ways to improve collegiality?
- \* How can all educators at a school work together to foster commitment to shared responsibility for students and for each other?
- \* What is the role of leadership and empowerment in building a strong learning community?

How do we encourage and enable teachers to learn from each other?

- \* How are teachers supported to communicate and collaborate more effectively?
- \* How PD needs for some teachers lead to leadership opportunities for others?
- \* How are instructional support staff (like instructional coaches and specialists) leveraged?
- \* What opportunities are in place for teachers to share their instructional expertise with each other?

## 8.1j: Professional learning is evaluated and results are communicated to teachers.

Teachers can be excellent judges of the quality and value of professional learning opportunities. And, teachers trust feedback from their peers when assessing whether or not an opportunity is a good fit for them. Participants should be able to evaluate their PD experiences at at least two time points. First, they should evaluate the professional learning immediately following the session, including questions about the value, relevance, and quality of the learning experience as well as about the content. Then, participants should complete a follow-up evaluation weeks or even months after the initial learning opportunity. This second evaluation should focus on issues such as the implementation of the tools and strategies that were the focus of the PD, barriers to implementation, and additional questions or needs that have arisen. The evaluation results at both time points will inform PD improvement efforts, PD needs assessment, and other improvements to professional learning for teachers.

In addition, formal research and program evaluation are critical to understanding the relationships among professional learning, implementation, and outcomes for students and teachers. District, state, and/or national evaluation teams may use robust methodologies to assess, compare, and ultimately recommend professional learning opportunities that have a positive impact on teachers and students. Of equal importance is communicating evaluation information to teachers who may benefit from the learning opportunity. This matters most when teachers have the opportunity to choose among a range of PD opportunities. Insights gleaned from former participants as well as from research and evaluation may steer teachers toward successful learning chances and away from wasted opportunities.

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## 8.1j: Reflections

How are evaluation results communicated?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* What are the current methods for disseminating the results of professional development evaluations in your school/district?</li><li>* Does the current mode of communication seem to be working?</li><li>* Are there any other modes of communication that would potentially be more effective, or would at least add to the effectiveness of the current mode of communication?</li></ul>
What information regarding professional development opportunities is most important to educators?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* What information is necessary for educators to make a decision included in the evaluation results (e.g., location of PD, time involved, quality of content/instructor/institution, etc)?</li></ul>
Who is involved in the professional development evaluation process?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* Do all parties with vested interest have input in the evaluation process?</li><li>* Is this process a top-down, bottom-up, or a mixture in terms of organizational hierarchy regarding which way information flows in the PD evaluation process?</li></ul>
How are professional development opportunities currently evaluated in your school/district?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* What is the current PD evaluation system like in your school/district?</li><li>* When are participants given the opportunity to provide feedback? Immediately after attending PD? During implementation? Later?</li><li>* To what extent are local/state or national partners enlisted to evaluate school or district provided PD?</li></ul>

## 8.1k: Professional learning enhances teachers' ability to implement instructional strategies that meet diverse student learning needs.

Providing equitable instructional opportunities means teachers must create an optimal learning environment in which all children learn and thrive. Teachers are charged with meeting the needs of all students in their increasingly diverse classrooms while standards for academic achievement increase. It is critical to support their work developing strategies for scaffolding and content, teaching to students with many ways of learning, gauging learning needs and readiness, and ensuring all students gain access to rigorous, grade-level content.

All professional learning should address equitable instruction in some way. PD efforts might focus directly on equity, by addressing learner variability (e.g, using data to know and understand students). Others might incorporate specific skills and strategies for implementing new practices with students who have a wide range of interests and prior experience. As with all new learning, teachers will need additional support for improving their practice beyond the PD session. Administrators can strengthen innovation and improvement through their own instructional leadership in this area, as well as by giving teachers the time and space to collaborate and try new things in a supportive environment.

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## 8.1k: Reflections

How do PD offerings and requirements foster equity?

To what extent do PD offerings address

- \* cultural proficiency and responsiveness?
- \* delivering relevant, rigorous, grade appropriate content for all students?
- \* supporting students' agency with feedback and opportunities for self-directed learning?
- \* Strategies for leveraging students' individual strengths to support academic, social, and emotional growth?
- \* providing multiple pathways to learn and demonstrate learning?
- \* supporting each learner in productive struggle?
- \* scaffolding instruction to meet needs of diverse learners?

What supports do principals need to ensure the academic and social-emotional needs of all students are met?

- \* What opportunities do administrators have to learn how to cultivate an inclusive community where all aspects of diversity and learner variability are understood, accepted, and welcomed?
- \* How can principals be supported in their use of data to  
Help teachers understand the learning needs of their students?  
understand students' personal and academic backgrounds?  
improve instructional decisions for all students?

## 8.1I: Professional learning enhances teachers' abilities to improve student learning.

To keep up with increasing achievement demands for their students, teachers always need professional learning opportunities targeted at strategies and practices that improve student learning. Given limitations in resources like time and funding professional learning opportunities must be relevant, applicable, and most importantly, impactful. When the content of the PD is clearly connected to better outcomes for students, educators will be more eager to engage and more willing to implement once the session ends. Content that is grounded in rigorous research demonstrating better outcomes for students should be given high priority. This also means that PD must be standards-aligned, and mechanisms to assess standards alignment.

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## 8.1I: Reflections

Are current professional development opportunities research-based, showing positive outcomes for student learning?

- \* Are the parties evaluating professional development in your school/district looking specifically for opportunities that are tied to rigorous research?
- \* Is the research tied to given PD communicated to educators prior to their registering/attending said PD (it is beneficial to understand, or at least be familiar with, the research behind the professional learning before attending)?

Are student outcomes monitored following PD that research suggests is associated with specific student outcomes?

- \* Are educators encouraged to follow their students' learning outcomes specifically in the aspects that the research suggests may be affected by implementing the methods/pedagogy/etc included in the given PD offering?
- \* If student outcomes are monitored post-PD,  
Is this process largely anecdotal, or are there systems in place that allow for data analysis?  
Does the school/district support these efforts?  
Are results shared with other educators?  
Are results filtered back into the PD evaluation process for the school/district?