NSTU
Position Paper

Member
Professional
Development

January, 2009

Background

Members of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union require and value needs-based, long-range, collaborative professional development throughout the course of their careers.

Traditionally, professional development has been accomplished through employer-initiated workshops, university course offerings, and association-sponsored conferences.

Over the past decade, an increasing variety of organizational structures emerged in professional development – on-line networks, professional learning communities, peer coaching and literature reflection.

Effective professional development is best characterized as participant planned and implemented in a collaborative setting; supported by all education partners for appropriate resources and time; and, evaluated to assess goals and outcomes.

The preferred vision of today's professional development is: *a community of learners meeting on a regular, on-going basis to collaborate on best teaching practices to enhance student achievement*.

Guiding Principles

The foundation of quality professional development is built on the following beliefs.
- Focuses on the improvement of teaching practice.
- Utilizes a knowledge base substantiated in research.
- Involves participants in design and delivery.
- Offers cumulative and on-going activities.
- Promotes collaborative settings.
- Integrates into an overall educational improvement plan.
- Incorporates an evaluation strategy.
- Includes, but is not limited to, a job-embedded process that is seen as a regular part of the instructional day.

Issues and Needs

Quality professional development includes four fundamental components – planning, implementation, sustainability and evaluation.

I.   *Issue*
     A review of the literature demonstrates that professional development is generally planned and implemented by supervisory staff and site administrators. Further, sustainable, collaborative professional development is concentrated at the elementary level. Research emphasizes the importance of planning, implementing, sustaining and evaluating professional development by participants themselves. In such a model, participants articulate their needs as well as plan and implement professional development opportunities, thus ensuring the formation of a professional learning community.

     Need
     NSTU members need to assume a greater role in their professional growth by ensuring that professional development activities are selected for their potential to enhance teaching practice and improve student learning.

II. *Issue*
     Concerns pertinent to professional development implementation centre around the experience level of participants. Surveys conclude that voluntary participation in professional development is greatest among experienced educators (i.e. those with more than 3 years experience). Beginning educators primarily participate in mandated professional development activities such as induction and mentoring programs.

     Need
     NSTU members require collaborative professional development as part of their jobs; professional development needs to be embedded into the educational system itself so that all educators benefit.

III.   *Issue*
Regarding sustainability, concerns arise around collaboration, continuity, resources and time. Research indicates that between 10 and 20 days for quality professional learning are required on an annual basis to improve instruction. Options for provision of these days range from release time, contract-designated hours, and restructured timetables to provide flexible site schedules.

Further, research demonstrates that professional development that includes the entire educational site community achieves higher rates of change in teaching practice than does professional development where educators participate as individuals or in small groups.

Need
NSTU members require an appropriate allocation of professional development time to enhance collaborative professional development activities that result in a professional learning community at the educational site level.

IV.   *Issue*
Evaluation is critical to any initiative. With regard to professional development, most educators rate their activities as very useful. In particular, participants expressed satisfaction with in-depth professional development. The more time spent by educators on professional development the more likely they were to consider it very useful.

Need
The NSTU needs to promote the use of effective strategies including collaborative professional conversation among all education partners so that an accurate assessment can be made between the professional development and improved student learning.

Organizational Position

Under the leadership of provincial NSTU Committees; in particular, the *Comité de programmation acadienne*, the *Curriculum Committee*, the *Professional Associations Coordination Committee*, the *Professional Development Committee* and the *Teachers With Administrative Responsibilities Committee*, as well as with the assistance and guidance of the 22 *NSTU Local Professional Development Committees*, the organization performs the following roles to ensure quality professional development for its members.

Professional Development Advocate

As a professional development advocate, the Union promotes the need for increased resources and time allotment for its members to engage in quality professional conversation, development and learning.

Professional Development Collaborator

As a professional development collaborator, the Union works with education partners to plan, implement, sustain and evaluate quality professional development opportunities.

Professional Development Provider

As a professional development provider, the Union provides a broad spectrum of programs to members designed to enhance teaching practice, education leadership and student learning.

Reading List

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13. _____ Definition of Professional Development. *Council of Atlantic Provinces Teacher Organizations*

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