



## Use School District Experts for Local Professional Development

### Here is How and Why it Works

Similar to meeting the varying needs of students in the classroom, it is also difficult to meet the staff development needs of teachers within a school building or throughout a district. Some teachers are more experienced in the area of technology while others are well versed in classroom management. Why not utilize the individual strengths of staff while providing local professional development? The simple solution is to have resident specialists share their expertise with their peers in a casual, learning environment of his/her classroom.

A starting point for this process is to have each teacher designate his or her professional strengths. Some teachers are naturally more comfortable at presenting in front of others so make sure to ask if they would be willing to share those skills with their peers. Then, have teachers identify some areas where they want to grow. If the instructional coach or professional development leader is already aware of some areas of need, then a checklist can be created in advance so the teacher can complete and return it to the building leader. A Google Form is a quick and convenient way to gather this information.

Once the building leader identifies the top areas for training, provide the teachers with a list of five to six topics. Have each teacher identify his/her top priority in the topic list

with a one, followed by the second choice with a two, etc. This information is used to determine the top four topics. Save those with fewer votes for future professional development. The next step is to ask the willing staff members to provide a mini-lesson over key points of the topic. Some, especially areas of technology, may involve a team teaching atmosphere, so keep in mind there could be more than one teacher comfortable providing instruction in a high priority area. Do not leave out possible leaders. Newer and veteran teachers can provide fresh ideas and best practices for sharing.

Providing the presenters adequate planning time for their mini-lessons is essential, too. Schools have funds set aside for professional development, so use some of this money for a floating sub to cover classes throughout a day, to provide an extra plan time, or draw on after-school hourly pay to compensate the presenters for their preparation work.

As teachers, we have to remember that giving our students too much information at a time can often be overwhelming to our learners. When planning the staff development mini-lessons, twenty-five minutes is just enough of a sample to keep educators' interest without losing them. Half-days of professional development are ideal for this format. A sample schedule appears below showing how four groups rotate through each session.

	Room 32	Room 14	Room 25	Library
	Differentiation	Classroom Management	Proficiency Scales	Google Classroom
1:00-1:25	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
1:30-1:55	Group D	Group A	Group B	Group C
2:00-2:25	Group C	Group D	Group A	Group B
2:30-2:55	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group A

There are times when it is necessary to bring in the experts, but sometimes the experts are already there. Not only is this type of staff development cost-effective, but it also provides an opportunity to build support networks across a district. Having a local expert available allows additional support opportunities for reinforcement. Consider the following suggestions for follow-up:

1. In a staff meeting, have teachers share how the implementation of the new information impacted their classrooms.
2. Provide an opportunity for those interested in learning more to observe the presenter using the content, technology, or strategy in action.

3. Designate a question/answer time at the next professional development day for learners to ask further questions of the presenters.

All of these suggestions can help teachers keep new skills fresh. When educators are allowed to assist with the planning, implementation, and follow-up of their professional development opportunities, they will be more likely to use the knowledge and skills to increase student achievement.