

Evidence-Based Professional Development

The Move on When Reading schoolwide comprehensive literacy plan must include information about the evidence-based professional development in early literacy offered for all teachers of students in grades kindergarten through third. This professional development should be prioritized to support educators with the skills needed to implement programs with fidelity, analyze student data, and intensify instruction as needed to support student growth. Investing in the professional learning of teachers has tremendous benefits on the instruction and outcomes in the school. In fact, researchers have repeatedly shown that teacher quality is the single most key factor in impacting student achievement (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). Implementation of a comprehensive and well-planned professional learning system is a critical component to support teachers and improve student literacy outcomes.

Just as students do not typically master high level skills in a single lesson, professional development must be ongoing and meaningful to teachers to have the desired impact.

Teachers are more likely to engage with strategies relative to their work and instruction. It is important to include training and support for core programs and materials and the foundational skills needed for fluent reading. When designing a comprehensive professional development plan, it is important to stay focused on local goals and objectives of the school while remaining flexible enough to customize and adjust for individual differences. Data gathered through literacy assessment, observations, and teacher feedback is instrumental in providing direction for areas of need to be addressed in professional development.

Consider the facts. Students placed with high-performing teachers progress three times faster than students placed with low-performing teachers.

~John Hattie

Principles of Evidence-Based Professional Development

Research on effective professional development provides solid guidance on evidence-based practices when designing and delivering professional learning for teachers. The findings have repeatedly pointed to four specific features that have the strongest evidence of yielding high gains and rates of transfer. These critical elements include 1. **Presentation** 2. **Demonstration** 3. **Practice with Feedback** 4. **Ongoing Support**. While each of these components is beneficial, they must all work together to have the strongest impact (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The following table provides more information about each element and its role in the professional learning model. Professional development that adheres to these suggestions and fits into the overall school plan has been proven to improve student achievement through enhanced teacher practice.

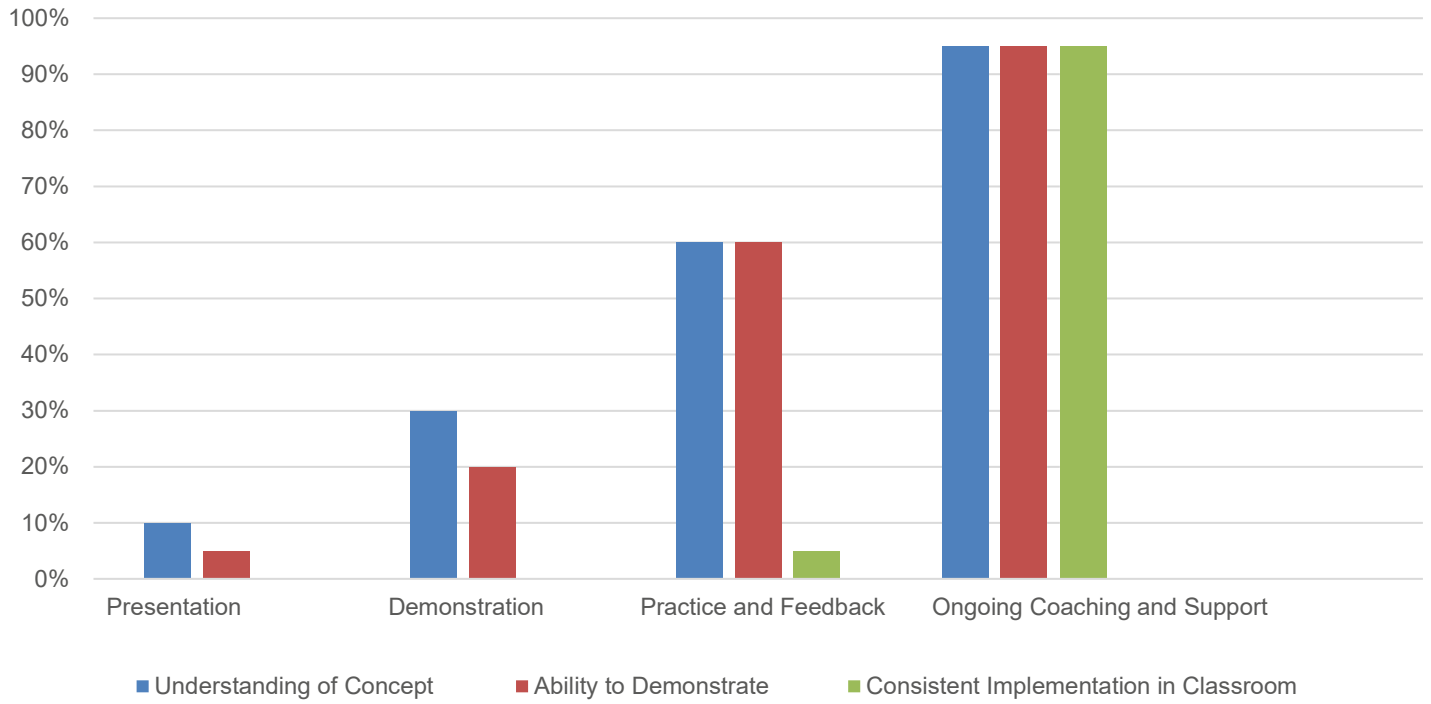
Elements of Effective Professional Development (Joyce & Showers, 2002)	
Presentation of theory/strategy	When presenting a theory, concept, or strategy, participants must be actively engaged by the presenter. Teachers must be informed of the rationale for the learning and should only be exposed to strategies that are evidence-based and grounded in solid research of proven effectiveness. In this way, teachers understand the underlying research base for the new instructional strategy, skill, or concept being presented and the purpose for including it in their instructional practice.
Demonstration of new learning	After explaining the concept, it should be modeled through live demonstration or video examples that enable the teachers to see the strategy in action. Modeling allows for observation and feedback leading to improved teacher buy-in and understanding. When teachers see the value of the strategy, they are more likely to work toward full implementation of the learning.
Practice and feedback	It is important that all participants have an opportunity to experiment with the focus strategies presented during the professional development session. Built-in opportunities to practice through role play and peer support are a critical component that sets apart traditional “sit and get” professional development from the more effective models described here. Each practice opportunity should be combined with immediate and specific feedback on new learning implementation.
Ongoing support	Changes in teaching do not result from a single workshop. Teachers need authentic opportunities to experiment with the new learning and discuss success or barriers with peers. Teachers who receive ongoing support through coaching and/or peer observation while implementing new strategies are more likely to transfer the new learning to the classroom. This ongoing support is the most essential element to make the leap from teacher knowledge to teacher use in the classroom. Research suggests up to a 95% transfer of new when ongoing coaching is included in the professional development model.

Impact of Training Components

The implementation of new learning presents the biggest challenge for many educators. A professional development plan that ignores the need for ongoing support risks losing all benefit to the implementation dip (Fuller, 2001). Table 2.2 summarizes the research findings of each critical element of professional development. The graph clearly shows the benefit of ongoing coaching and support provided to teachers.

These findings confirm that professional development is only beneficial when it is ongoing and supportive.

Professional Development for Teachers Impact of Training Components



Attributes of Effective Professional Development

The critical elements of professional development discussed previously provide a solid framework for the overall professional development plan and design. The United States Department of Education published similar recommendations in their list of [Attributes of Effective Professional Development](#). The list includes other key factors proven by research to benefit teachers and students and to include in the professional development plan.

USDOE Attributes of Effective Professional Development
Results-driven
Standards-based
Job-embedded
Differentiated
Linked to learning needs
Collaborative
Sustained over time
Reflective
Evaluative

K-3 Literacy Professional Development

Teaching students to read is difficult and complex. Several research reports have documented evidence that most new teachers are not well prepared to teach reading (Moats, 2009; Spear-Swerling, 2008; Walsh et al., 2006). The MOWR Literacy Plans submitted by all K-3 schools and LEAs in Arizona require documentation that teachers receive ongoing training in Tier I instruction, Tier II/III intervention, assessment, and data analysis. This should include both program specific training and scientific research on the conceptual foundation for literacy development. Classroom teachers must become critical consumers of the prepackaged curricula so that they can make professional decisions and apply creative approaches to meet the unique needs of each student. Teacher support is necessary to ensure fidelity which will lead to improved student outcomes.

Goals of Program Specific Training

- Familiarize teachers with program materials and lesson structures
- Scope and sequence of instruction
- Instructional planning
- Lesson delivery to whole-group, small-group, and individualized instruction
- Differentiation of instruction to meet individual needs
- How assessment data aligns with program instruction

Topics for Literacy Foundations Training

- Arizona’s ELA Standards
- Early literacy development theories and processes
- Phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension
- Language structures
- Explicit and systematic instruction
- Assessment and evaluation
- Literacy environments
- Effective instruction

Conclusion

Empowering educators through high-quality professional learning has tremendous potential to improve student achievement. Professional development for K-3 reading teachers should be aligned with the core program objectives, essential components of literacy, and strategies of effective instruction. The research base continues to provide solid guidance that professional learning is most effective at changing practice when it is ongoing, and job embedded. Investing in the development of teachers is a valuable way to achieve strong student gains and a positive school culture.

Visit www.azed.gov/mowr for information on Arizona’s *Move on When Reading*.

Helpful Resources/Links

- [Changing Practice: Rolling the Stone up the Hill or Focusing on Implementation](#)
- [Effective Teacher Professional Development \(fact sheet\)](#)
- [Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading—The Center for Effective Reading Instruction](#)
- [Student Achievement through Staff Development](#)

***The views and opinions expressed in any third-party resource do not necessarily reflect those of the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) and do not imply an endorsement by ADE.*

Additional References

Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and teaching*, 8(3), 381-391.

Joyce, B., and Showers, B. (2002). Student achievement through staff development, (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Moats, 2009; Spear-Swerling, 2008; Walsh et al., 2006