



Definition of Professional Development and Standards for Professional Learning

New Jersey’s Definition of Professional Development and Standards for Professional Learning are intended to guide relevant and valuable professional learning opportunities – which are essential to the professional growth of all educators. The updated definition and standards are key elements of the revised regulations for professional development adopted by the State Board of Education on June 5, 2013. Both are focused on identifying professional learning practices that increase educator effectiveness and results for students. Together, they are meant to inform districts and schools on the essential content, conditions, and attributes for effective professional learning.

The charts below provide administrators and educators with the definitions in state regulations – coupled with examples of how those definitions translate into specific applications.

New Definition of Professional Development

New Jersey’s [Professional Development Definition](#), adapted from [Learning Forward’s 2008 definition](#), describes the overall purpose of professional development and delineates specific practices to improve educator and student performance. The definition calls for professional development that is aligned with student learning and educator needs and embedded in educators’ daily work. The following chart includes the language of the definition in the Code and an explanation of its application, as well as examples where appropriate.

N.J.A.C. 6A:9C-3.2	Definition Language	Application/Examples
(a)	Professional development shall be comprised of professional learning opportunities aligned with student learning and educator development needs and school, school district, and/or state improvement goals.	Districts should align, prioritize, and support professional development opportunities based on student and educator needs as well as school, district, and state goals.
(b)	Professional development shall have as its primary focus the improvement of teachers’ and school leaders’ effectiveness in assisting all students to meet the Common Core Curriculum Standards (CCSC).	Professional development should be focused first and foremost on student learning.
(c)	Professional development shall include the work of established collaborative teams of teachers, school leaders, and other administrative, instructional, and educational services staff members who commit to working together to accomplish common goals and who are engaged in a continuous cycle of professional improvement focusing on: 1. Evaluating student learning needs through ongoing reviews of data on student performance. 2. Defining a clear set of educator learning goals based on the analysis of these data.	Current research indicates that team-based learning can create a powerful venue for educators to work together toward continuous improvement. Teams should analyze student performance data and identify clear goals based on identified student needs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, based on assessment results, a middle school might set a goal to improve student writing across the curriculum. The school could use interdisciplinary PLCs to examine writing samples, identify deficiencies, and develop common instructional strategies and assessments to support improvement.



N.J.A.C. 6A:9C-3.2	Definition Language	Application/Examples
(d)	Professional learning shall incorporate coherent, sustained, and evidence-based strategies that improve educator effectiveness and student achievement, including job-embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to support educators' transfer of new knowledge and skills to their work.	<p>Research indicates that professional development is most effective when it is sustained and occurs in the context of educators' daily work in schools. Districts should employ job-embedded strategies such as coaching and peer observation (for non-evaluative purposes) to support deep learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, two members of a fifth-grade team who co-plan a science unit on the rainforest might observe and provide feedback to one another to enhance implementation of the unit.
(e)	<p>Professional development may be supported by external expert assistance or additional activities that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Address defined student and educator learning goals as specified in the educator's Professional Development plan; 2. Advance primarily ongoing school-based professional development; and 3. Include, but are not limited to, courses, workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities outside the school such as universities, educational service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content specialists, and other education organizations and associations. 	<p>Districts, schools, and individuals should utilize the expertise of external professional development providers as needed to support educator learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, a district might contract with a professional development provider with the expertise to help teachers integrate students' use of technology into their lessons to meet curricular goals.
(f)	Professional development shall align with the professional standards for teachers and School Leaders in N.J.A.C. 6A:9-3 and the standards for professional learning in N.J.A.C. 6A:9-5.3.	The definition is designed to be used in conjunction with the Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders and the Standards for Professional Learning to maximize improvement efforts that lead to increased student and educator effectiveness.

Standards for Professional Learning

New Jersey's updated [Standards for Professional Learning](#) provide the framework for designing effective professional learning systems. District and school leaders should use these standards to help design high quality professional learning that can impact student achievement. Recent research has strengthened consensus around the elements of effective professional learning. The standards, developed in 2011 by Learning Forward in partnership with many professional associations and educational associations, promote and support professional learning that is interactive, relevant, sustained, and embedded in everyday practice. These standards align with the professional standards for teachers and school leaders, the Common Core State Standards, and the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards to support continuous improvement. The chart on the following page lists the standards and includes a brief explanation of the purpose of each.



Code Citation	Standard	Explanation/Examples
6A:9C-3.3a	Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and improves results for all students...	The standards each begin with this common statement, which confirms the critical link between educator and student learning.
1.	Occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment	Learning communities are groups of educators who employ collaborative learning to strengthen their practice and improve student results. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, teachers in a high school math department might work together in a professional learning community (PLC) to align their existing math curriculum to the CCCS.
2.	Requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning	Administrators and teacher leaders play a critical role in overseeing and facilitating professional learning opportunities and establishing structures that support continuous improvement.
3.	Requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning	Effective professional learning requires human, fiscal, material, technology, and time resources. Actively and accurately tracking the use of these resources will allow district leaders to make better decisions about ongoing improvements.
4.	Uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning	Data must be used to define and plan individual, team, school, and system goals. Frequent collection and use of data about professional learning allows leaders to adjust opportunities as necessary. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, a group of third-grade teachers could use a PLC to review student assessment data from a common teacher-created benchmark assessment to identify trends to inform instruction.
5.	Integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes	Professional learning opportunities should be designed to fit the needs of the learners and the goals of the learning. Some popular learning designs include: online tutorials, peer coaching, lesson study, peer observation, mentoring, action research, and team-based inquiry into practice and student work.
6.	Applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change	Professional learning is intended to improve educator practice and increase student learning over time. This requires ongoing support by district and school leadership to embed learning into educator practice. Leaders should provide a variety of supports and resources for individuals, teams, and schools to support continuous improvement.
7.	Aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards	Professional learning must address curriculum and professional standards to improve student learning. This standard also clearly ties the outcomes of professional development with the outcomes of educator performance.



For More Information

For further examples of practice derived from the new Definition for Professional Development and Standards for Professional Learning, please contact teachpd@doe.state.nj.us to access New Jersey's Collaborative Professional Learning Toolkit.

For more information on new professional development requirements, please view:

- [Revised Regulations Adopted June 5, 2013](#)
- [AchieveNJ Professional Development and Support Overview](#)

To share questions or comments, please email teachpd@doe.state.nj.us or call 609-292-9556.