Professional Learning for Informed Transformation: The 2010 Professional Development Survey

reallearningfirst.ca

The Alberta
Teachers' Association

Contents

Preface

Alberta's teachers and professional development leaders are deeply committed to lifelong learning and the enhancement of their professional skills.

Education stakeholders in Alberta are becoming increasingly aware that if the province's K–12 education system is to remain one of the finest in the world, it will need to change fundamentally in the very near future. Such changes will require tremendous resilience on the part of teachers. For that reason, an indepth examination of teachers' professional development opportunities is timely. If teachers are to lead the informed transformation of Alberta's education system so that it meets the changing needs of students and society, they must identify and nurture those conditions of practice upon which professional learning depends.

This publication reports the results of a study that the Association undertook in 2010 to identify the professional development structures and resources that are currently in place in Alberta to assist teachers in transforming their practice to meet the demands of students and the larger educational community. The resulting data reinforce much of what the literature tells us: namely, that teachers' learning needs should be addressed through job-embedded and practice-based learning experiences that take into account teachers' individual needs and the stage at which they are in their careers. To ensure that teachers receive the professional development that they need, some new approaches will clearly be required. Furthermore, schools will need to set aside time during the day for teachers to learn about, discuss, reflect upon and implement new teaching strategies.

This study clearly suggests that professional development opportunities should be planned cooperatively and implemented at a pace that allows teachers to learn at the depth required to transform their practice. The study also suggests that professional development resources need to be available to all teachers, regardless of their area of specialization, geographic location or career stage. The comments of respondents, including professional development chairs from across Alberta, reveal that Alberta's teachers and professional development leaders are deeply committed to lifelong learning and the enhancement of their professional skills.

Many people contributed to the study and the resulting report. Special thanks to the chairs of ATA local professional development committees and economic policy committees and to the ATA's corps of professional development facilitators, without whose time, effort and expertise this project would not have been possible. Gaylene Schreiber, an executive staff officer in the ATA's Professional Development program area was the primary researcher. Additional thanks to Michael Podlosky, the ATA's coordinator of professional development, for his thoughtful feedback; to Jacquie Skytt, ATA assistant executive secretary, and to J-C Couture, the ATA executive staff officer responsible for coordinating research, for their support.

Gordon R Thomas
Executive Secretary

Introduction

Professional development (PD) plays a critical role in helping teachers ensure that their professional practice meets public demands and expectations. As Hart and Livingstone (2009, 5) assert, "there is a growing consensus among Canadians of all backgrounds that investment in education up to the most advanced level is an inherently valuable social good." The significant economic changes that have occurred in Alberta, a resource-rich province, during the last few years have given the community at large a renewed appreciation of the value of a good education system.

Although providing teachers with effective professional development is the best way of ensuring that students have productive learning experiences, the study suggests that professional development opportunities vary considerably from one jurisdiction to another and are largely ad hoc. At its best, professional development is systematically planned, systemic, supported and sustained. However, as the workload of teachers has increased and as classrooms have become more complex, the conditions under which teachers practise have gradually deteriorated. Ironically, just when coherent professional development is more important than ever in helping teachers meet the rapidly changing demands of Alberta's classrooms, teachers seem to have less time than ever to engage in reflective practice and growth. The Association has thoroughly documented these trends over the last decade in its annual survey of professional development opportunities, and more recently in its publication *The Courage to Choose: Emerging Trends and Strategic Possibilities for Informed Transformation 2010–2011.*

The Association administered the professional development survey to the PD committee chairs of its 54 local associations. Given that 89 per cent of locals responded, the survey constitutes a reliable representation of teachers' perspectives on professional development activities across the province. The survey consisted of an online form that invited participants to respond to various numerical and descriptive scales and to add comments. Respondents were also asked to fill out a chart detailing how their local and jurisdiction allocate professional development resources.

At its best, professional development is systematically planned, systemic, supported and sustained.

Executive Summary

Here are the major findings to emerge from the study:

1. Funding and access for most forms of professional development have declined. However teachers noted an increase in their ability to participate in professional learning communities.

   • Overall, 21.7 per cent of the 46 respondents indicated that spending for professional development at the school level had declined, 63 per cent indicated that spending had remained at about the same level as in the previous two years and 15.2 per cent indicated that spending had increased. These findings compare unfavourably with those of the 2009 survey in which none of the respondents indicated that spending for professional development had declined.

   • Overall, 13 per cent of respondents indicated that access to professional development had increased, 67.4 per cent stated that it was about the same and 19.6 per cent stated that access had decreased. In the 2009 survey, by contrast, no respondents indicated that access had decreased over the previous year.

   • The amount of money and time allocated to professional development varies widely from one jurisdiction to another.

   • A total of 27.7 per cent of respondents indicated that opportunities to participate in professional learning communities (PLCs) had increased, and only 14.9 per cent stated that their access to PLCs had decreased. This finding seems inconsistent with those reported above concerning the funding of and access to professional development opportunities.

2. Respondents indicated that stakeholders have been generally successful in implementing professional development planning practices. According to respondents, the principle of effective professional development that is most evident is that professional development "contributes to collaborative learning cultures."

3. Respondents indicated that the various conditions considered essential for effective professional development are generally apparent in their areas but that considerable room for improvement still exists. Respondents were asked to rate each condition on a four-point scale in which 1 indicated "not evident" and 4 indicated "consistently evident." Here are the results:

   • Professional development is supported by employers: 3.28

   • Professional development supports school improvement goals: 3.3

   • Professional development promotes collaboration at the school level: 2.64

   • Professional development is embedded in the workday: 2.72

   • Professional development is offered at a variety of times: 2.7

- 17.0 per cent of respondents reported that professional development was consistently embedded in the workday.
- 12.8 per cent of respondents reported that it was consistently evident professional development is chosen by the teacher.
- 31.9 per cent of respondents indicated that it was only sometimes evident that professional development opportunities supported teacher growth plans.
- 89.3 per cent of respondents indicated that it was often evident or consistently evident that professional development supported school improvement goals.

4. Respondents report that teachers are most interested in professional development opportunities that have a collaborative element, such as seminars, joint unit or lesson planning, curriculum development and interschool visits.

5. Teachers believe that the professional autonomy and choice they have when developing and pursuing their individual professional growth goals has declined.

- Only 44.4 per cent of respondents reported that teachers have a high degree of autonomy and choice in pursuing growth plan goals, 6.7 per cent reported that teachers have little autonomy and choice, and 48.9 per cent indicated that teachers have some degree of autonomy and choice. These findings compare unfavourably with the results of last year's survey (based on 2008/09 data) in which 50.9 per cent of respondents reported that teachers believe they have a high degree of autonomy, 49.1 per cent reported that teachers believe they have some autonomy and none reported that teachers believe they have little autonomy.
- Respondents noted that, in some cases, school or jurisdictional authorities expected teachers to produce professional growth plans that support the goals of the school or jurisdiction. Although subtle, this trend is concerning because it signals an erosion in the professional autonomy of teachers.

6. Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) projects continue to shape professional development opportunities for teachers. Teachers do not appear to have as much influence, especially at the jurisdictional level, in setting AISI priorities as had been expected. Indeed nearly half of the respondents (46.7 per cent) reported that teachers have only a limited influence in determining project priorities at the jurisdictional level.

- Asked how much influence teachers in their area had in determining AISI priorities, 8.9 per cent said they had no influence at the school level, 15.6 per cent said they had no influence at the jurisdictional level and 4.5 per cent said they had no influence in determining the professional development support for projects.
- Only 27.3 per cent of respondents indicated that teachers had either a high or a very high degree of influence in determining the professional development support for projects.

Respondents noted that, in some cases, school or jurisdictional authorities expected teachers to produce professional growth plans that support the goals of the school or jurisdiction.

- In all, 57.8 per cent of respondents indicated that teachers have either a moderately high or a high degree of influence in determining project priorities at the school level.

7. Most ATA locals and jurisdictions in the province offer programs to support beginning and early-career teachers. In many cases, locals and jurisdictions share the cost of these programs; in other cases, either the local or the jurisdiction bears the full cost. In some cases, locals and jurisdictions share the cost of sending teachers to an ATA Beginning Teachers' Conference.

   - A majority (56.8 per cent) of respondents indicated that their jurisdiction had some form of mentorship program. These programs ranged from offering sessions on specific topics to pairing mentors and protégés to (in a few cases) assigning a full-time teacher to mentor beginning teachers throughout the division.

   - A variety of informal mentorship activities are in place at the school level.

   - The Association collaborates with some locals and jurisdictions in offering formal mentorship programs.

   - Few respondents reported having no mentorship program available for beginning teachers in their area.

8. Respondents reported that although part-time teachers enjoyed the same access to professional development as full-time teachers, professional development opportunities for substitute teachers were quite limited.

   - Although substitutes were often invited to attend locally sponsored institute days and, in some cases, joint or jurisdictionally sponsored professional development events, they generally had to do so on their own time and at their own expense.

   - Locals often provided financial assistance to enable substitute teachers to attend the Substitute Teachers' Conference and other Association-sponsored events, and they invited substitutes to attend teachers' conventions.

   - Few respondents reported the existence of professional development opportunities designed to address the unique learning needs of substitute teachers in their area.

9. Professional development programs for new and veteran administrators and for teachers aspiring to administrative positions were broad and varied.

   - Professional development opportunities for administrators tend to include conferences and administrator retreats. Some informal mentorship programs exist, most of which are sponsored by jurisdictions.

   - Approximately 54 per cent of respondents indicated that their jurisdiction designed and funded some form of cohort leadership development program for aspiring administrators.

   - Ten respondents indicated that their jurisdiction offered no or minimal support for new administrators.

10. Very few respondents indicated that their area offered professional development programs tailored to the needs of teachers new to Canada or to Alberta.

- Respondents reported that teachers new to Alberta are often offered the same professional development opportunities as other teachers. Regardless of their teaching experience, such teachers are encouraged to attend a Beginning Teachers' Conference or to enrol in a mentorship program for new teachers.
- Only two respondents indicated any awareness of specific supports offered by the jurisdiction tailored to the needs of teachers new to the province.

Research Method

A. Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data from local professional development committee chairs. (Appointed by members of their local, PD chairs assess the needs of teachers in their area, plan professional development events and evaluate the professional development programs offered by their jurisdiction.) PD chairs were invited to respond to an online survey containing a variety of questions designed to capture information about the number and nature of professional development opportunities available in their area. Most questions involved rating some aspect of professional development on a graded scale for which descriptors were provided. In the case of most questions, respondents could also add comments. Forty-eight of the Association's 54 locals (89 per cent) responded. Although respondents did not necessarily answer all questions, the response rate on individual questions was nevertheless impressive, ranging from 83 per cent to 100 per cent. PD chairs were also asked to fill out a chart detailing the time and money that their jurisdiction and their local had committed to supporting professional development in 2010.

Participants were asked to rate (a) the ability of teachers in their area to participate in professional development programs and professional learning communities and (b) the extent to which various partners were able to implement successful planning practices. In another question, participants were provided with a list of conditions essential for professional development and asked to assess the extent to which those conditions were evident in their area. Still another question asked participants to assess the interest of teachers in their area in each of a number of specified professional development activities. Another question asked respondents to assess the degree to which teachers in their area had autonomy with respect to developing and pursuing a professional growth plan and to comment on the challenges and successes facing teachers in developing and implementing a growth plan.

Three other questions prompted PD chairs to assess the extent to which teachers had a role in choosing how their jurisdiction used AISI funds. Finally, participants were asked to comment on the professional development opportunities available in their area for the following groups of teachers: new teachers, part-time and substitute teachers, administrators, teachers aspiring to administrative positions and teachers new to the province or country.

B. Process

Based to some extent on versions of the survey administered in previous years, the 2010 survey was piloted with a few members of the Association's corps of professional development facilitators (a group of 10 practising teachers whose primary role is to support the PD chairs in their locals) as well as with executive staff officers in the Association's Professional Development program area. The survey was then revised on the basis of the feedback obtained and

sent to the professional development facilitators for further input and affirmation.

Once the survey had been administered and the data collected, the aggregate raw data was examined, on a question-by-question basis, by teachers attending the Professional Development Course at the ATA's 2010 Summer Conference. Their observations were taken into account in analyzing the data.

C. Timeline

The survey was introduced to PD chairs at the Professional Development Area Conference on November 28, 2009, and economic policy committee chairs were sent a copy the following week so that they might assist PD chairs. The link to the online survey was emailed to PD chairs in early December 2009 along with a reminder that responses were due by February 15, 2010. PD facilitators and PD staff officers were available to answer questions and help professional development chairs locate the information needed to complete the survey. The online survey was closed to submissions on May 15, 2010.

D. Respondents

The survey was administered to the professional development chairs in each of the Association's 54 locals across the province. PD chairs provide leadership with respect to professional development in their area by conducting needs assessments, planning and implementing professional development initiatives, administering funds both through teacher committees and in collaboration with other PD providers, sitting on jurisdictional planning committees, and assisting school-based professional development committees. Although they work at the local level, PD chairs also provide advice to the provincial Association.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents by professional development region. Although most locals represent teachers from only one school board, some locals have members from two or more boards. Unité locale francophone No 24 consists of teachers from five school boards of varying sizes and is the only local in region G. Given the assignment of locals to regions, professional development chairs are not a truly representative sample of teachers in the province. However, the sample provides a reasonable cross-provincial representation.
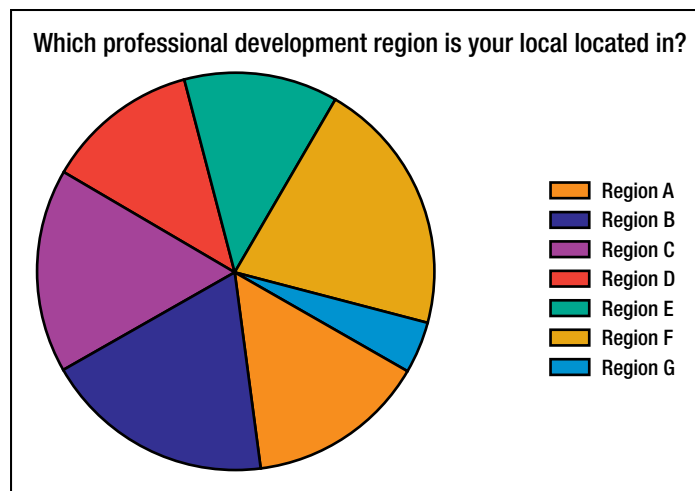

Which professional development region is your local located in?

- Region A
- Region B
- Region C
- Region D
- Region E
- Region F
- Region G

Figure 1

Teachers' Professional Development Opportunities in Alberta

A. Spending on Professional Development

Of the 46 respondents, 21.7 per cent indicated that financial provisions at the school level for professional development had decreased, 15.2 per cent reported that spending had increased and 63 per cent indicated that funding was comparable to that of the previous two years (see Figure 2). These findings compare unfavourably with those of the 2009 survey in which *none* of the respondents indicated that spending for professional development had declined. While this trend is troubling, it is not surprising given that many boards in 2009/10 did not receive timely funding from the ministry to meet their contractual salary obligations and, as a result, were very frugal with their resources. It was encouraging to see that, given this situation, 15.2 per cent of respondents reported an increase in spending at the school level.

a) Based on the data your PD committee has collected over the last two years, as a percentage of overall school budgets, how does spending on professional development compare? Please check one.

- 21.7% (10)
- 15.2% (7)
- 63.0% (29)

Legend:
- an increase over last year
- about the same as last year
- a decrease from last year
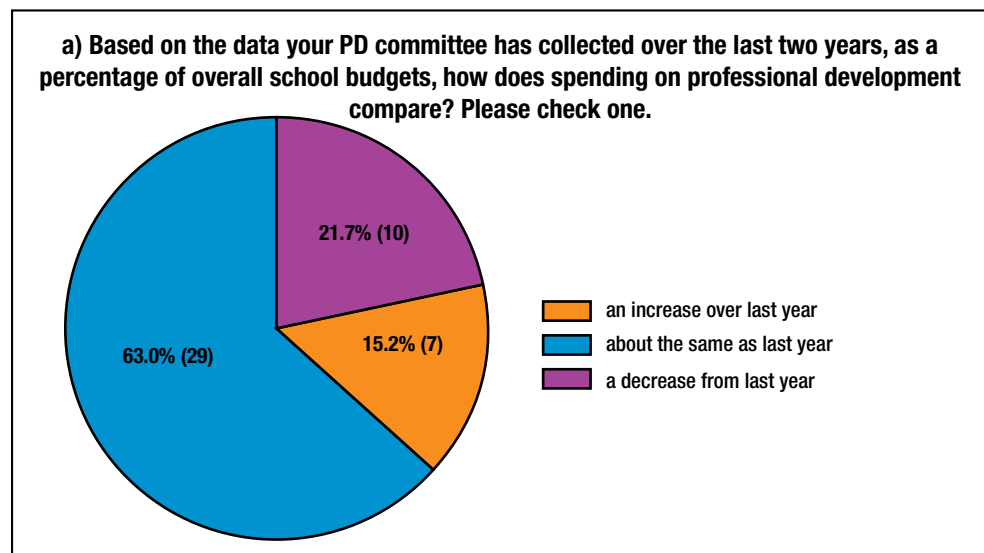
Figure 2

In addition to answering the online survey, PD chairs, in consultation with local economic policy committee chairs, filled out a chart detailing the time and money allocated to professional development in their area. An analysis of that data reveals the following findings:

• Based on information received from 36 of the Association's 54 locals, locals budgeted a total of $1,860,171 to support professional development activities and contributed $200,000 to support districtwide activities.

- The way in which money for professional development was allocated varied from local to local. Some locals allocated a specified amount per teacher (the highest was $251). One local funded up to 800 teachers at $500 each. Other locals contributed a lump sum to support school-based events or to facilitate collaboration with the jurisdiction.
- The jurisdictions associated with the PD chairs who responded budgeted a total of approximately $11.7 million to support professional development. However, because jurisdictions use different budgeting practices, the actual amount that they spend on professional development is hard to track.
- In the case of jurisdictions that allocate PD funds on a per-teacher basis, the amounts ranged from $120 to $1,640. The average, based on 31 responses, was $568 per teacher.

Getting an accurate picture of the amount of money spent on professional development is difficult because jurisdictions have differing notions about what constitutes professional development spending. The amount of money that jurisdictions allocate per teacher for professional development depen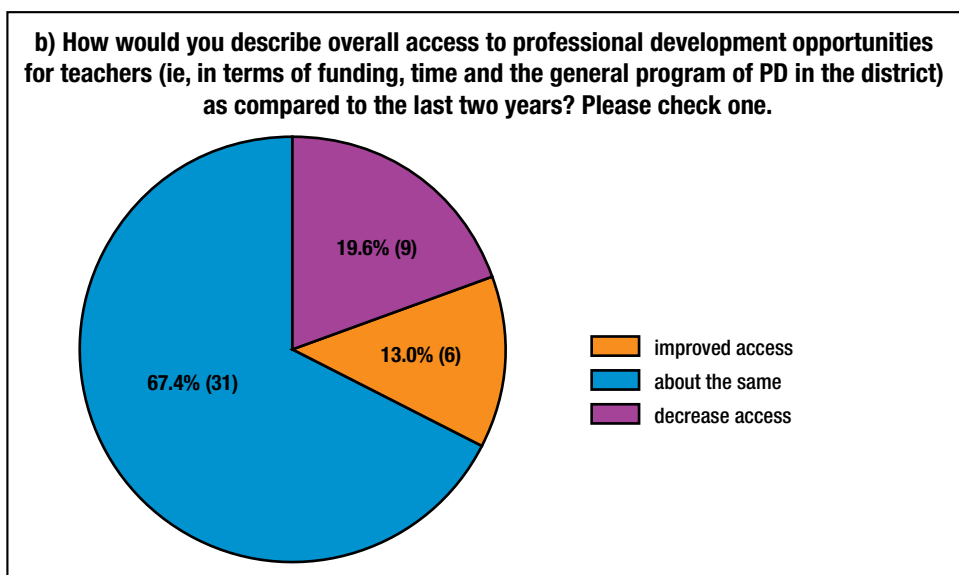ds on their philosophical assumptions. Some jurisdictions provide teachers with money to fulfill their individual growth plans. Other jurisdictions implement one-size-fits-all initiatives. One thing is clear, however: how jurisdictions allocate money for professional development profoundly shapes the professional growth of teachers.

B. Access to Professional Development Opportunities

As Figure 3 shows, 13 per cent of respondents to the 2010 survey indicated that access to professional development had increased, 67.4 per cent stated that it was about the same and 19.6 per cent started that access had decreased. In the 2009 survey, by contrast, *no* respondents said that access to professional development had decreased.

Getting an accurate picture of the amount of money spent on professional development is difficult because jurisdictions have differing notions about what constitutes professional development spending.

b) How would you describe overall access to professional development opportunities for teachers (ie, in terms of funding, time and the general program of PD in the district) as compared to the last two years? Please check one.

19.6% (9)

13.0% (6)

67.4% (31)

■ improved access
■ about the same
■ decrease access

Figure 3

An analysis of the data on the time and money that various jurisdictions allocated to professional development reveals the following trends:

- The number of days that jurisdictions set aside for professional development each year ranges from 1 to 18. The provincial average is 8.55 days per school year.

- All jurisdictions except one hold some form of districtwide professional development day, which is offered in some cases by the local, in others by the jurisdiction, and in still others by the two groups acting in collaboration. The number of districtwide professional development days ranges from 0 to 7. The provincial average is 2.57 days.

- There are about twice as many school-based PD days as jurisdiction-sponsored PD days. The number of school-based PD days ranges from 0 to 12.5 days. The provincial average is 5.16 days.

Although these calculations are based on responses from 38 of the Association's 54 locals, they nevertheless suggest that the time that teachers have to engage in professional development varies widely from one jurisdiction to another.
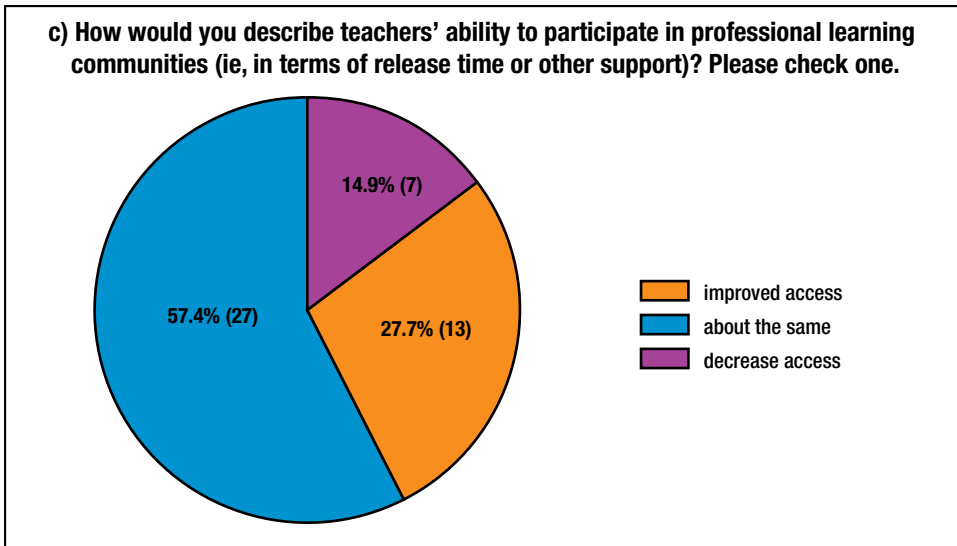
C. Ability to Participate in a Professional Learning Community

Current research findings in the professional learning community literature regard teachers as professional learners and hold that development of educators' learning communities is imperative in a thriving learning community. The teacher is seen as an exemplar learner in a community of practice (Sergiovanni 1999; Clarke et al 2007). In a learning community, professional development must be reconceptualized to be an ongoing series of actions and attitudes embedded in practice within the school. Professional development is sometimes envisioned as a whole staff activity based on the needs of the school, and a starting point for school reform towards the creation of a learning community (Jenlick & Kinnucan-Welsch 1999; Lezotte 2005).

Somewhat surprisingly, given the above-noted trend toward a decline in the amount of time and money devoted to professional development, 27.7 per cent of respondents indicated that access to professional learning communities (PLC) had improved (see Figure 4). Only 14.9 per cent indicated that access to PLCs had declined. Such a finding is heartening, for PLCs help not only to improve the school culture but also to sustain school change.

An analysis of the data concerning the amount of time and money that jurisdictions allocate to professional development reveals that jurisdictions vary enormously in the amount of time that they set aside for PLCs. At one end of the spectrum, 12 respondents reported that their jurisdictions encouraged teachers to incorporate PLC activities into the school day. In some cases, schools devote half-days to PLC activities. In others, schools devote one- to two-hour segments at regular intervals within the school day to PLC activities. One jurisdiction allocated 28 one-hour blocks with four lieu

c) How would you describe teachers' ability to participate in professional learning communities (ie, in terms of release time or other support)? Please check one.

14.9% (7)

57.4% (27)

27.7% (13)

- improved access
- about the same
- decrease access

Figure 4

days scheduled as compensation. Another jurisdiction allocated four half-days spread throughout the year. In some cases, PLC time was routinely scheduled outside of instructional time (for example, between 3:30 and 5:00 PM).

Many districts accommodated PLC activities by dismissing students anywhere from one hour to half a day early. In some cases, time for PLC activities was scheduled on a weekly or monthly basis. Three PD chairs reported that the inclusion of PLC activities resulted in a longer workday, either because instructional hours were lengthened or because teachers were expected to attend PLCs after class. Occasionally, respondents noted that scheduled PD time also included staff meetings, and organizational or administrative activities. At the other end of the spectrum, some jurisdictions do not regularly schedule any time during the school day for PLC activities or other professional development.

Chung Wei, Andree and Darling-Hammond (2009) report that in high-achieving nations such as South Korea, Japan and Singapore, teachers spend only about 35 per cent of their working time teaching and most of the remainder working collaboratively on other tasks. In Finland, teachers meet one afternoon a week to jointly plan and develop curricula.

D. Successful Professional Development Planning
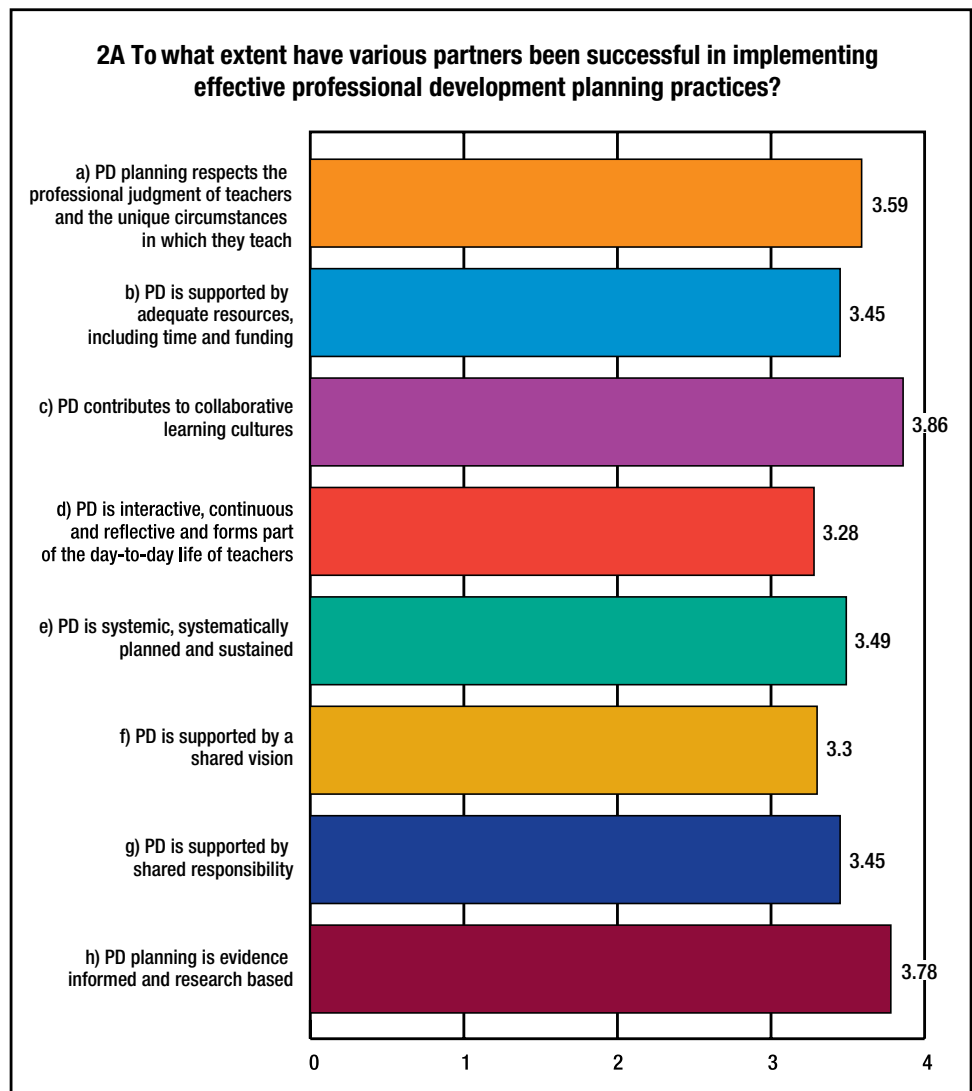
Current literature identifies a number of successful professional development planning strategies. As the Association noted in its *A Guide to Comprehensive Professional Development Planning* (2005), professional development has to be thoughtfully designed and systematically implemented. As Guskey (2009, 230) puts it, "effective PD must be well-organized, carefully structured,

clearly focussed and purposefully directed." This should be supported by a coordinated strategy for research and development in education to inform and improve decision making (Guskey and Yoon 2009; Levin 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon 2001; Murgatroyd 2010). Professional development program planning which recognizes coherence as a key element is more likely to enjoy genuine commitment and sustained successes (Hirsh and Killion 2009). With coherent implementation, teacher practice and beliefs change (Darling-Hammond and Richardson 2009). Hirsh and Killion (2009, 467) note that "schools have the capacity to accomplish bold and audacious goals" if sufficient resources are channelled through a limited number of strategies on the issues that matter most. Darling-Hammond and Friedlander (2008) observe that democratic decision making and engaging teachers in a variety of leadership functions leads to greater support of school goals and collaboration with parents, community and industry.

2A To what extent have various partners been successful in implementing effective professional development planning practices?

Practice	Rating
a) PD planning respects the professional judgment of teachers and the unique circumstances in which they teach	3.59
b) PD is supported by adequate resources, including time and funding	3.45
c) PD contributes to collaborative learning cultures	3.86
d) PD is interactive, continuous and reflective and forms part of the day-to-day life of teachers	3.28
e) PD is systemic, systematically planned and sustained	3.49
f) PD is supported by a shared vision	3.3
g) PD is supported by shared responsibility	3.45
h) PD planning is evidence informed and research based	3.78

Figure 5

Professional Learning for Informed Transformation: The 2010 Professional Development Survey

Participants were presented with eight principles generally considered to be essential to effective professional development planning and asked to rate, on a five-point scale, the degree to which each of these principles had been implemented (see Figure 5). According to respondents, the two principles that had been most successfully implemented were "professional development contributes to a collaborative learning environment" (3.86) and "professional development planning is evidence-informed and research-based " (3.78) The two principles that received the lowest ratings were "professional development is supported by a shared vision" (3.3) and "professional development is supported by shared responsibility" (3.45). Overall, the results suggest that schools have been moderately successful in implementing effective professional development planning practices.

Asked to rate the extent to which professional development in their area "respects the professional judgement of teachers and the unique circumstances in which they teach," fully one-third of respondents reported that planning practices had resulted in only limited or moderate success. This finding is somewhat troubling. At the same time, 24.4 per cent of respondents reported excellent planning practices with respect to the extent to which professional development in their area "contributes to collaborative learning cultures." It is important to note that this question asked participants to assess the extent to which the various partners had succeeded in implementing each of the planning practices principles, not the extent to which the partners had worked together.
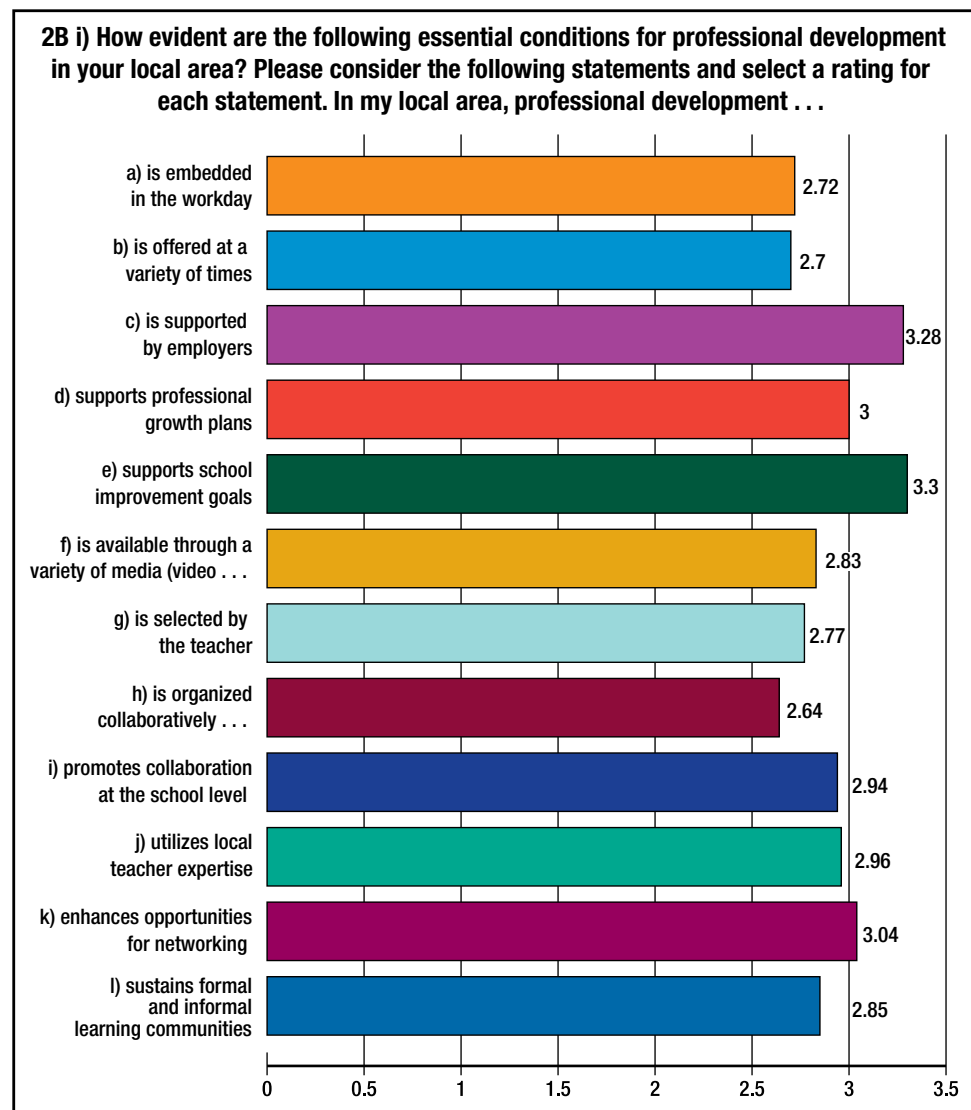
E. Essential Conditions for Effective Professional Development

Ideally, professional development should take into account the context of the participants, be planned collaboratively, give teachers job-embedded practice in implementing new strategies and provide participants with opportunities for reflection. Kragler, Martin and Kroeger (2008) note that groups of people share beliefs through "sense-making" conversations that focus on finding solutions. Focussing on solutions, in turn, helps participants develop a sense of collective agency and self-efficacy (Klassen and Chiu 2010). Professional development is likely to be of a higher quality if it involves a significant amount of time, incorporates scheduled opportunities for collaboration and is sustained through a series of follow-up activities that unfold over a year or more (Nelsen and Cudeiro 2009; Garet et al 2001; Guskey and Yoon 2009; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, Orphanos 2009). To be effective, professional development must also (a) take into account the varied needs of teacher-learners and (b) be pursued or conducted cyclically, such that teachers receive instruction, have opportunities to practise, receive feedback, observe modelling and engage in ongoing professional reading (Nelsen and Cudeiro 2009).

During the 2009/10 school year, public education system stakeholders in Alberta collaborated in developing *A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions* (2010), which details the conditions and commitments

Ideally, professional development should take into account the context of the participants, be planned collaboratively, give teachers job-embedded practice in implementing new strategies and provide participants with opportunities for reflection.

that must be in place before a school or jurisdiction implements an initiative. One of the questions in the survey drew on the guide to list 12 conditions considered essential to effective professional development and then asked respondents to rate, using a four-point scale, the extent to which each of those conditions was evident in their area. As Figure 6 shows, most respondents indicated that the specified conditions were generally in place and evident in their area. The conditions that respondents rated as most evident were "supported by employers" (3.28) and "supports school-improvement goals" (3.3). The conditions that respondents deemed to be least evident were "is organized collaboratively among stakeholders" (2.64), "is embedded in the workday" (2.72) and "is offered at a variety of times" (2.7).

2B i) How evident are the following essential conditions for professional development in your local area? Please consider the following statements and select a rating for each statement. In my local area, professional development . . .

Statement	Rating
a) is embedded in the workday	2.72
b) is offered at a variety of times	2.7
c) is supported by employers	3.28
d) supports professional growth plans	3
e) supports school improvement goals	3.3
f) is available through a variety of media (video . . .	2.83
g) is selected by the teacher	2.77
h) is organized collaboratively . . .	2.64
i) promotes collaboration at the school level	2.94
j) utilizes local teacher expertise	2.96
k) enhances opportunities for networking	3.04
l) sustains formal and informal learning communities	2.85

Figure 6

Professional Learning for Informed Transformation: The 2010 Professional Development Survey

2B ii) How evident are the following essential conditions for effective professional development in your local area? Please consider the following statements and select a rating for each statement. In my local area, professional development . . .

a) is embedded in the workday

b) is offered at a variety of times

c) is supported by employers

d) supports professional growth plans

e) supports school improvement goals

f) is available through a variety of media (video . . .

g) is selected by the teacher

h) is organized collaboratively . . .

i) promotes collaboration at the school level

j) utilizes local teacher expertise

k) enhances opportunities for networking

l) sustains formal and informal learning communities

Rarely or not evident   Sometimes evident   Often evident   Consistently evident

Figure 7

With reference to Figure 7, only 17 per cent of respondents reported as consistently evident the essential condition that "professional development is embedded in the workday." In the case of the condition "professional development is selected by the teacher," 12.8 per cent of respondents reported that this condition was consistently evident. In all, 73.9 per cent of respondents reported that the condition "professional development utilizes local teacher expertise" was either often evident or consistently evident. Fully 91.5 per cent of respondents reported as either often evident or consistently evident the condition "professional development is supported by employers." However, 31.9 per cent of respondents indicated that the condition "professional development supports professional growth plans" was only sometimes evident. In all, 89.3 per cent of respondents reported that the condition "professional development supports school improvement

goals" was often evident or consistently evident. With reference to the condition "professional development is available through a variety of media," 29.3 per cent of respondents reported that this condition was either rarely evident or sometimes evident, 48.9 per cent stated that this condition was often evident and 21.3 per cent stated that this condition was consistently evident. The fact that various conditions received such a range of ratings suggests that jurisdictions vary widely in their approach to professional development.
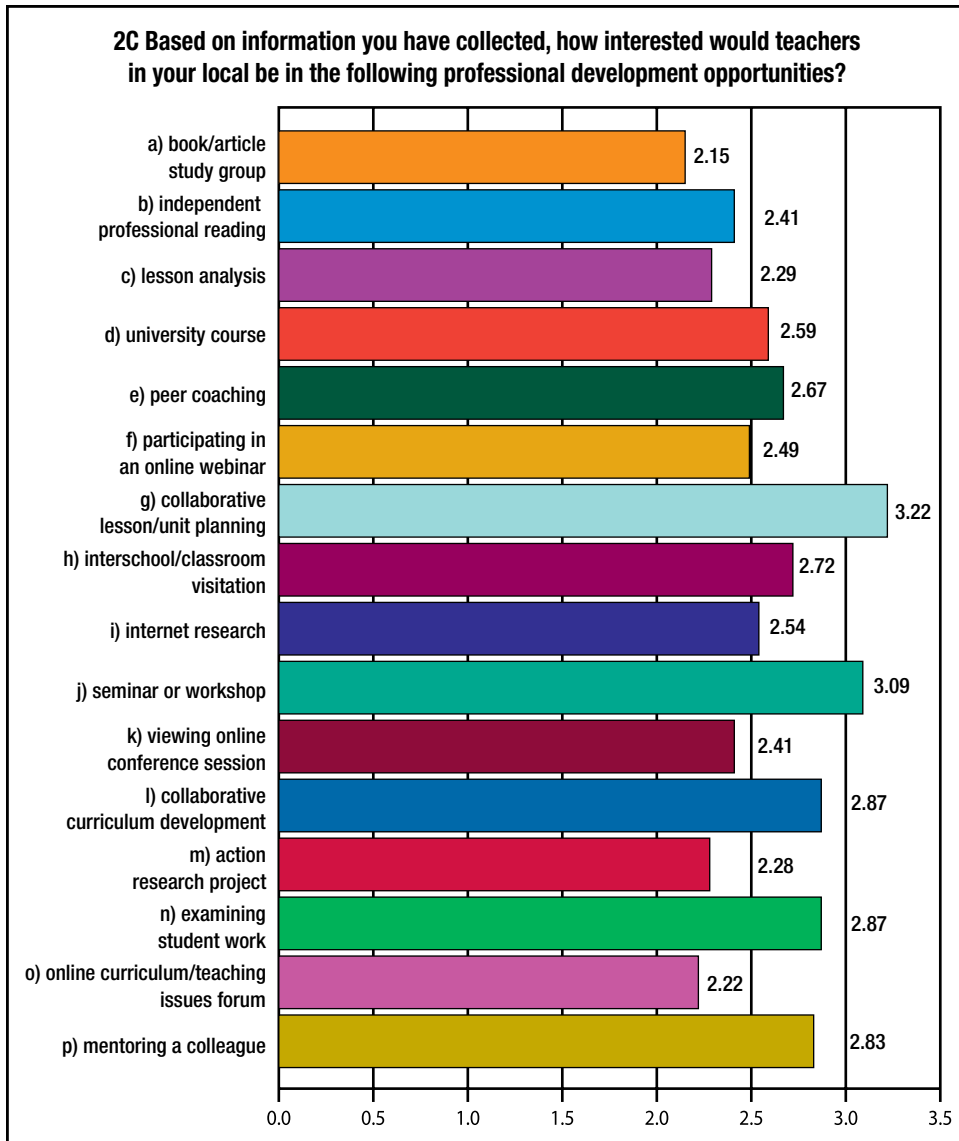
F. Teachers' Interest in Professional Development Activities

The survey presented participants with a list of possible professional development activities and asked them to rate the degree to which teachers in their area were interested in each. The selected activities were drawn from *A Guide to Comprehensive Professional Development Planning* (2005) and its companion, *A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions* (2010), both of which were developed collaboratively with input from representative stakeholder groups. As a result, the activities presented are likely ones to which most teachers in Alberta can relate. This question acknowledges that teachers, like students, have different learning styles and, as a result, respond best when offered a choice of professional development activities (Clary and Wandersee 2009; Huber 2010; Jones, West and Stevens 2006; Ferriter 2010). Furthermore, teachers have different needs depending on the stage of their career. The availability of new technologies allows teachers to hold professional conversations and collaborate on projects without being in the same physical location (Huber 2010).

Figure 8 illustrates the average rating that each suggested activity garnered on a four-point scale. Respondents rated "collaborative lesson planning/unit planning" as being of most interest to teachers (3.22) and "book/article study group" as being the least (2.15).

In general—and this is consistent with the literature on effective professional development—respondents reported that teachers would be the most interested in activities that involve working with others: "collaborative lesson/unit planning," "collaborative curriculum development," "interschool/ classroom visitation," "peer-coaching" and "mentoring a colleague." Although some researchers (Clary and Wandersee 2009) argue that technology can play a valuable role in facilitating professional development, respondents gave relatively low ratings to activities (such as "viewing online conference sessions," "Internet research," "online curriculum/teaching issues forum" and "participating in an online webinar") in which technology is the primary or only medium. Even though some researchers (including Darling-Hammond and Richardson 2009) have downplayed workshops and seminars as an ineffective form of professional development, 84.5 per cent of respondents rated "seminar or workshop" as being of considerable or high interest to teachers in their area. The comparatively high rating accorded to

In general—and this is consistent with the literature on effective professional development—respondents reported that teachers would be the most interested in activities that involve working with others.

2C Based on information you have collected, how interested would teachers in your local be in the following professional development opportunities?

Opportunity	Rating
a) book/article study group	2.15
b) independent professional reading	2.41
c) lesson analysis	2.29
d) university course	2.59
e) peer coaching	2.67
f) participating in an online webinar	2.49
g) collaborative lesson/unit planning	3.22
h) interschool/classroom visitation	2.72
i) internet research	2.54
j) seminar or workshop	3.09
k) viewing online conference session	2.41
l) collaborative curriculum development	2.87
m) action research project	2.28
n) examining student work	2.87
o) online curriculum/teaching issues forum	2.22
p) mentoring a colleague	2.83

Figure 8

Workshops can be an effective form of professional development if they include flexible activities and entry points, responsive grouping patterns, generate respectful discussion and model instructional strategies.

workshops and seminars may reflect teachers' comfort with these familiar forms of professional development.

Little and Paul (2009) suggest that workshops can be an effective form of professional development if they include flexible activities and entry points, responsive grouping patterns, and respectful discussion, and model instructional strategies. Interestingly, 76 per cent of teachers expressed considerable or high interest in "examining student work." When teachers work with each other to examine student work and develop curricula, resources and plans, they all benefit from the collective expertise, regardless of their career stage (Garet et al 2001; Behrstock-Sherratt and Coggshall 2010; Moore and Berry 2010).

Respondents gave comparatively low rankings to such activities as "independent professional reading" and "university course." One reason may

be that only some teachers have consistent access to the resources necessary to support such significant undertakings. The data concerning the time and resources that jurisdictions allocate to professional development suggest, for example, that some teachers do not have access to the kind of sabbatical leaves that they need to pursue additional university education. Of the 35 respondents who commented on sabbatical leave, 24 indicated that teachers in their area had access to leaves of this kind. However, some boards put a cap on the number of leaves they will grant in a year and/or reduce the salaries of the recipients to anywhere from 55 per cent to 75 per cent. Eleven respondents reported that their board had no provisions for sabbatical leave. With respect to short-term study leaves, 13 respondents indicated that teachers had access to such leaves while eight respondents indicated that such provisions were not available in their area. Chung Wei, Andree and Darling-Hammond (2009) observe that high-performing educational jurisdictions in Europe and Asia assist individual teachers to undertake action research and share their findings, an approach that can benefit the practice of all teachers.

G. Individual Growth Plans

One of the questions in the survey asked teachers to rate, on a three-point scale, the amount of autonomy that teachers in their area enjoy with respect to developing and meeting the goals of their professional growth plan. In Alberta, a ministerial order requires all teachers to develop and pursue an annual growth plan, which forms an integral part of the professional supervision and evaluation process. In developing a growth plan, teachers identify elements of their own practice that they wish to enhance and then set goals and define a process for meeting these goals. As Figure 9 shows, fewer than half of respondents reported that the teachers in their area enjoy a high degree of autonomy in developing and implementing their own growth plans.

Respondents were also asked to describe the top three successes and the top three challenges that teachers experience in developing their professional growth plans. Forty-three participants responded to this question, submitting 254 discrete comments
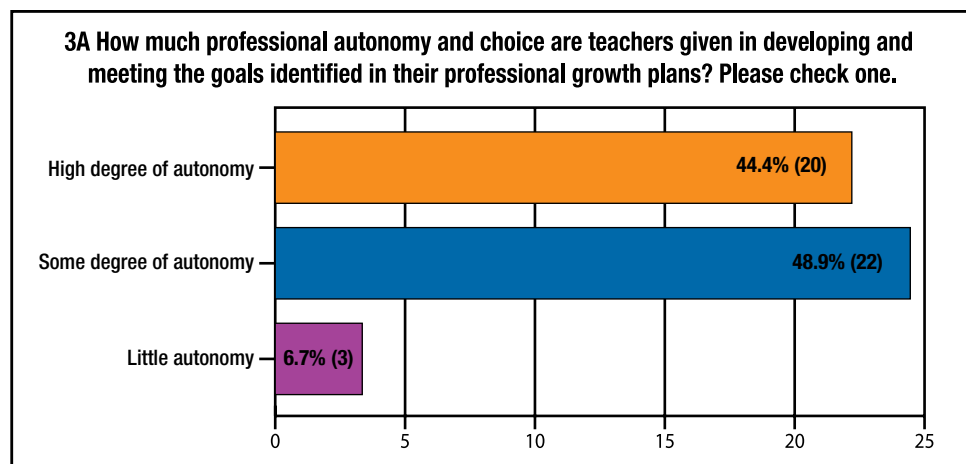
> *Fewer than half of respondents reported that the teachers in their area enjoy a high degree of autonomy in developing and implementing their own growth plans.*

3A How much professional autonomy and choice are teachers given in developing and meeting the goals identified in their professional growth plans? Please check one.

High degree of autonomy — 44.4% (20)
Some degree of autonomy — 48.9% (22)
Little autonomy — 6.7% (3)

Figure 9

Professional Growth Plan Successes

The instances of success cited by respondents cluster around six key themes:

1. Teachers appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, whether by mentoring, peer coaching or drawing upon local expertise.

2. Having autonomy when pursuing professional goals stimulates learning and growth.

3. Teachers value the support of school administrators who take an interest in the professional growth of their staff and encourage them to engage in reflection.

4. The availability of funding (particularly individually directed funds) and leave time are important factors in enabling teachers to pursue goals and attend professional development events.

5. Professional learning communities have a positive effect on practice and school culture.

6. A plethora of professional development opportunities and events exists, displaying an almost bewildering range of emphases and initiatives.

Professional Growth Plan Challenges

The challenges that respondents cited with respect to professional growth plans centred on many of the same themes as emerged in the analysis of successes, except that the themes were now stated in negative terms.

-   Many respondents noted that teachers lack time to attend events, engage in professional reading, collaborate with colleagues and systematically implement new ideas. Some also noted that they seldom attend professional development events during class time because they do not have the time required to prepare plans for supply teachers. Many others remarked that they lack the time necessary to engage in reflection, follow up on goals and attend review meetings with their administrators. As a result they had difficulty keeping the growth plan a living document.

-   Closely related to the time challenge was the challenge of securing release time during the school day. Respondents attributed this challenge to a shortage of funding or, in some cases, of substitute teachers.

-   Some respondents reported that teachers in their area felt pressured to align their own professional goals with the goals of the school or jurisdiction. In such cases, teachers felt that they had lost ownership of the process.

-   A significant challenge for some teachers is geographic isolation. Such teachers not only have fewer opportunities to collaborate with others teaching the same subject but also face higher travel costs to attend events. Isolation is of particular concern to CTS, second language and fine arts teachers, who are sometimes the only such specialist in their geographic area.

Overall, only 44.4 per cent of respondents reported that teachers have a high degree of autonomy and choice in pursuing the goals of their growth plans. By contrast, 48.9 per cent indicated that teachers have some degree of autonomy, and 6.7 per cent reported that teachers have little autonomy.

Some respondents reported that teachers in their area felt pressured to align their own professional goals with the goals of the school or jurisdiction. In such cases, teachers felt that they had lost ownership of the process.
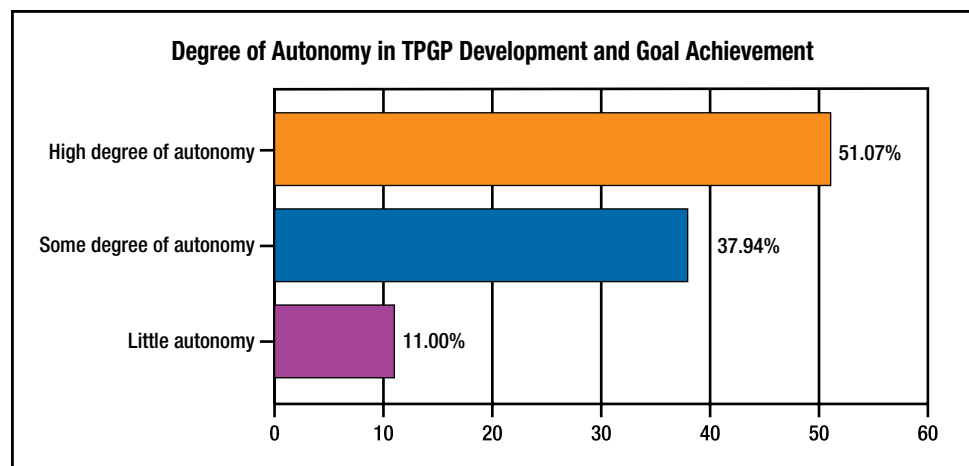
These findings are troubling when compared with those of the 2009 survey (which reported combined 2008/09 data) in which approximately 51 per cent of respondents indicated that teachers had a high degree of autonomy and choice, 49 per cent indicated that teachers had some autonomy and none indicated that teachers had little autonomy. In other words, teachers no longer feel as confident as they once did that they are in control of their own growth plans.

The PD survey noted that boards lack resources and, as a result, primarily choose to use what few resources they have to accomplish their own goals rather than to support teachers in pursuing their individual professional goals. Respondents also noted that they often do not have as much time as they would like to collaborate with stakeholders.

Teachers no longer feel as confident as they once did that they are in control of their own growth plans.

Comparing Data on Growth Plans

The findings of the 2010 PD Survey with respect to how teachers view growth plans are consistent with the results of the Association's 2010 Member Opinion Survey (MOS). Conducted in March 2010, MOS was administered to a random sample of 10 per cent of the full- and part-time teachers in each Alberta school board. One question in the MOS asked respondents to indicate how important their annual growth plan was to them and how much autonomy they had in developing it. A total of 23.48 per cent of respondents to the MOS reported that their growth plan was very important to them, 48.59 per cent said that their growth plan was somewhat important to them and 27.9 per cent said that their growth plan was of little importance to them. Teachers having up to 10 years of experience were more likely than their longer-serving colleagues to rate their annual growth plan as very or somewhat important.

As Figure 10 shows, with reference to the autonomy they had in developing their growth plan, 51.07 per cent of MOS respondents indicated that they had a high degree of autonomy, 37.94 per cent said they had some degree of autonomy and 11.00 per cent said they had little autonomy. (The comparable figures from the PD survey are 44 per cent, 48.9 per cent and 6.7 per cent, respectively.) School administrators and teachers having combined classroom and administrative responsibilities were more likely than classroom teachers to report a high degree of autonomy.
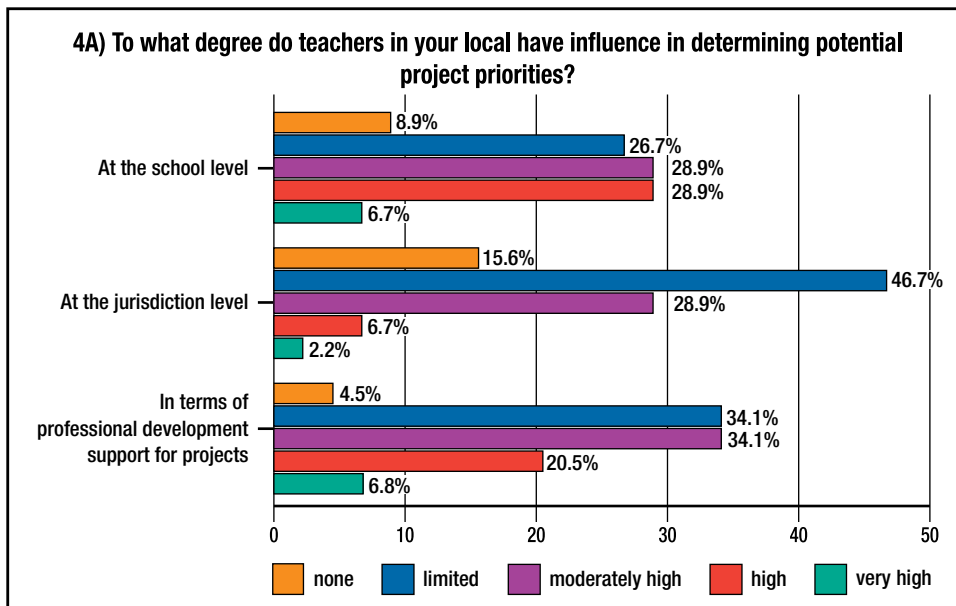
Degree of Autonomy in TPGP Development and Goal Achievement

High degree of autonomy — 51.07%

Some degree of autonomy — 37.94%

Little autonomy — 11.00%

0   10   20   30   40   50   60

Figure 10

Professional Learning for Informed Transformation: The 2010 Professional Development Survey

H. AISI Projects and Professional Development

In Alberta, school jurisdictions can obtain additional funding from the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) grant program. The purpose of these grants, which are administered on a three-year cycle, is to support innovative projects in the field designed to improve student learning. According to the *AISI Handbook*, the essential elements for school improvement are "collaboration, shared leadership, support of those who will implement the projects, and meaningful involvement of the school community" (AISI Education Partners 2008, 2). Based on this observation, it would be expected that those involved in implementing school improvement projects would play an important role in determining the parameters and priorities of these initiatives. However, the PD survey suggests that teachers have only limited influence in setting AISI priorities. As Figure 11 shows, 46.7 per cent of respondents believe they have only a limited influence in determining project priorities at the jurisdiction level. Even more troubling, 8.9 per cent of respondents reported having no influence at the school level and 15.6 per cent reported having no influence at the jurisdictional level. On a more encouraging note, 27.3 per cent of respondents indicated that they had either a high or a very high degree of influence with respect to deciding what professional development support would be available for projects. In terms of influencing project priorities at the school level, 57.8 per cent of respondents ranked the degree of teachers' influence as either moderately high or high.

Even more troubling, 8.9 per cent of respondents reported having no influence at the school level and 15.6 per cent reported having no influence at the jurisdictional level.

Figure 11

Participants were also asked to suggest how the AISI initiative could be improved at the school, jurisdictional and provincial levels. Many respondents noted that support for AISI projects in their area was occurring at the expense of other forms of professional development. Others remarked that teachers still had little or no say in determining the direction of AISI projects at the local level. On the other hand, some respondents reported that, with this cycle of AISI, stakeholders appeared to be playing a more prominent role in setting AISI priorities and processes. Many respondents remarked that school administrators play a key role not only in determining the extent to which teachers can influence the direction of projects but also in securing professional development to support projects. Several respondents remarked that the cyclical nature of the funding leads to discontinuity. As one respondent put it, "Our priorities don't shift that drastically every three years." Another respondent stressed the importance of "focusing on *one* project only." These comments suggest that, with its cyclic nature, AISI lacks coherence, which many experts have argued is crucial in implementing effective professional development projects (Darling-Hammond and Richardson 2009; Hirsh and Killion 2009; and Garet et al 2001).

According to *A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions*, the key to implementing successful initiatives is to involve all partners early on in the planning stage. Doing so helps to ensure that the various activities fit together coherently, thereby increasing the chances that the people who are expected to implement the initiative—in this case, teachers—will buy in to it and feel a sense of agency.

I. Professional Development Programs for Specific Teacher Groups

The final section in the PD survey asked respondents to describe the professional development opportunities available in their area for the following subgroups: teachers new to the profession, part-time and substitute teachers, new and veteran administrators, teachers aspiring to administrative positions, and teachers new to the province or the country.

Beginning Teachers

Teachers new to the profession have unique learning needs during their first three or four years of practice. According to the literature, beginning teachers prefer learning that is practical, relevant and tailored to their needs, and includes opportunities for modelling and feedback (Behrstock-Sherrat and Coggshall 2010; Moore and Berry 2010). Mentorship and induction programs and peer-coaching partnerships are particularly suited to the needs of new teachers (Garet et al 2009; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree and Richardson 2009).

Following is a summary of what respondents had to say about the availability of mentorship programs for new teachers.

- Many ATA locals and jurisdictions in Alberta support beginning and early-career teachers and they often share the costs of such programs. Most respondents, for example, reported that locals and jurisdictions share the cost of sending teachers to the ATA's Beginning Teachers' Conference. In 14 cases, the local bears the full cost, and in three cases the jurisdiction pays for the teacher to attend.
- Twenty five of 44 respondents reported that their jurisdiction had some form of mentorship program. These programs ranged anywhere from a series of seminars to an attempt to pair mentors and protégées, to the assignment of a full-time teacher to mentor new teachers throughout the division.
- Respondents noted that informal mentorship also occurs at the school level. Seven respondents reported that, in their area, principals or other teachers mentor beginning teachers, and two respondents noted that the ATA local had a mentorship program.
- Only four PD chairs stated that their area had no mentorship program for early-career teachers.

In 2008, the Association embarked on a five-year longitudinal study to identify the causes of teacher attrition in the early years and to identify induction practices that might help new teachers become committed, long-term professional educators (Servage 2008). Figure 12, excerpted from that study, summarizes the value that participants in that study attached to mentorship programs (Servage 2008, 43). Although the study is in its early stages, preliminary findings suggest that mentorship programs are most effective when: the person being mentored and the mentor have a chance to work together informally to establish a rapport; the mentorship focuses on specific teaching problems that the protégé is encountering; and the mentorship program includes structured time during the day when the mentor and the protégé can meet (Servage 2008, 48). The results of the PD survey confirm the observation that mentorship programs are most successful when they involve supporting structures.
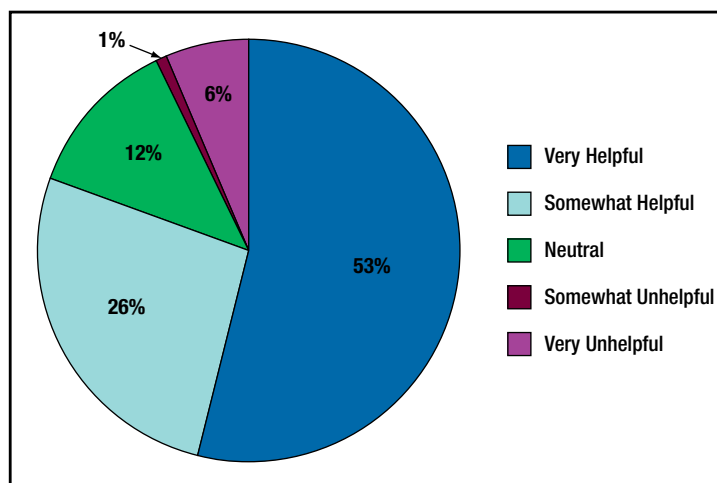
Mentorship programs are most effective when the person being mentored and the mentor have a chance to work together informally to establish a rapport.

Figure 12

Servage (2008, 25) also found that most beginning teachers believe that they would benefit by having an opportunity to work with a mentor for more than one year. Fifty-two per cent of the participants in the beginning teachers study regarded working with a mentor as a high priority and 32 per cent rated it a moderate priority. Table 1, excerpted from Servage's study, shows the extent to which beginning teachers value various kinds of professional development activities. Respondents to the beginning teachers survey appear to value online professional development opportunities more than did participants in the PD survey.

PRIORITY	High	Moderate	Low	Not at All
Refining and implementing professional growth plan	30%	60%	8%	2%
Taking graduate courses for university credit	6%	15%	27%	53%
Participating in a subject area/specialization group	42%	39%	16%	3%
Collaborating in a professional learning community	84%	15%	2%	0%
Working with a mentor teacher	53%	32%	14%	0%
Using online resources, or collaborating online	53%	40%	6%	2%

Table 1

Serving the professional development needs of beginning teachers throughout their induction period may be the key to retaining more new teachers in the workforce and increasing their sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Professional development that is considered and consistent and that involves hands-on, practical and timely collaboration at the school level is likely to have the greatest impact on beginning teachers. High-quality mentorship programs are important not only in nurturing the emerging workforce but also in creating a culture of professional learning from which all teachers, regardless of the stage at which they are in their career, can benefit.

Substitute Teachers

Substitute and part-time teachers constitute a subgroup that includes teachers new to the profession, teachers who work on an occasional basis and retired teachers (Clark, Antonelli, Lacavera, Livingstone, Pollock, Smaller, Strachan and Tarc 2007). In their book *Beyond PD Days: Teachers' Work and Learning in Canada*, Clark et al note that substitute teaching, because it involves a wide range of assignments, constitutes a valuable learning experience. However, this kind of learning tends to be one way because the substitute teacher has limited opportunity for dialogue with the classroom teachers whose students, lessons and materials they share. The Association attempts to meet the unique learning needs of substitute teachers by organizing an annual conference for substitute teachers.
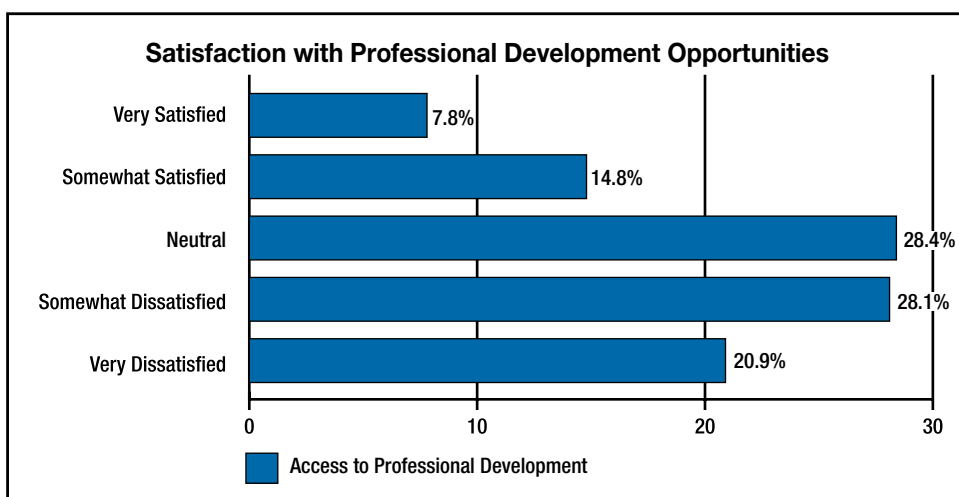
Respondents to the PD survey noted that, while part-time teachers generally enjoy similar access to professional development as their full-time colleagues, substitute teachers tend to have only limited access to professional development.

- Although substitutes were often invited to attend locally sponsored institute days and, in some cases, joint or jurisdictionally sponsored professional development events, they generally had to do so on their own time and at their own expense.
- Locals often provide substitutes with financial support to attend the Substitute Teachers Conference and other Association-sponsored events, and they invite substitutes to attend teachers' conventions.
- Few respondents identified professional development activities specifically designed to address the unique learning needs of substitute teachers.

What professional development chairs in this survey had to say about support for substitute teachers is consistent with the findings of a recent study of substitute teachers in Alberta:

> Whether they were substitute teaching by necessity or by choice, respondents wanted more access to professional development. A number of teachers, for example, were unfamiliar with SmartBoards and wanted to be trained on how to use them. Many of those seeking permanent positions stated that they wanted to be evaluated and to receive ongoing professional development. Several respondents expressed a desire for paid professional development days. In some cases, substitute teachers were expected to pay for their own professional development. Many respondents reported feeling "out of the loop" with respect to professional development and wanted to receive communications about upcoming opportunities (Arkinson, Couture and Servage 2010, 8).

Figure 13, excerpted from Arkinson, Couture and Servage (2010), suggests that few substitute teachers are satisifed with their professional development opportunities.

If substitute teachers are to remain fully engaged in the profession and if their skills are not to atrophy in the period between their pre-service training and full-time service education stakeholders must do more to meet their needs.

Satisfaction with Professional Development Opportunities

Very Satisfied	7.8%
Somewhat Satisfied	14.8%
Neutral	28.4%
Somewhat Dissatisfied	28.1%
Very Dissatisfied	20.9%

Access to Professional Development

Figure 13

If substitute teachers are to remain fully engaged in the profession and if their skills are not to atrophy in the period between their pre-service training and full-time service education stakeholders must do more to meet their needs. Because substitute teachers have a breadth of experience, they should

be treated as valuable members of the professional learning community. In considering future workforce needs, education stakeholders need to commit resources and develop structures to support the continued professional development of substitute teachers.

Teachers New to the Country or Province

Only two respondents reported having professional development programs in their area designed to address the unique needs of teachers new to Canada or to Alberta. This finding suggests that targeted professional development for teachers new to the country or province is largely absent.

- Many respondents noted that teachers new to the province are often directed to the same professional development program as other teachers. Teachers who have previous teaching experience, for example, are often encouraged to attend a Beginning Teachers' Conference or to get involved in a mentorship program for new teachers.

- Of the first-time applicants to the Teacher Qualifications Service in 2009/10, 43 per cent had taken some or all of their teacher preparation outside of the province or the country.

In their discussion of the learning needs of internationally educated teachers (IETs), Clark et al (2007, 104) note that the record of such teachers in meeting provincial licensing requirements in Ontario is "dismal and disastrous." They go on to observe that only 20 per cent of IETs in Ontario found teaching jobs and, of those jobs, 57 per cent were occasional. Some IETs volunteer in schools in order to gain a better understanding of the educational system. However, Clark et al (2007) point out that such informal learning, while valuable, would be more effective if it occurred in conjunction with formal professional development designed to help these new teachers make sense of Canadian culture and to acquaint them with policy, legislation and other formal documents. In organizing professional development for IETs, planners need to take into account the various cultural and language barriers that these teachers face, including an unfamiliarity with specialized professional language and understandings/assumptions.

Administrators: Veteran, New and Aspiring

Administrators require specialized professional development. Furthermore, the professional development available to administrators must reflect the amount of leadership experience that they already have. Beginning administrators or those aspiring to administrative positions will have considerably different needs than those of experienced administrators. In addition to serving as model pedagogues, principals are expected to manage the day-to-day functions of the school, understand and support teachers in their endeavours across many curricula, supervise teachers and support their learning, respond to jurisdictional priorities and policy, and manage complex relationships within the school and community of stakeholders (see *The Principal Quality Practice Guideline: Promoting Successful School Leadership in Alberta* 2009; Lindstrom and Speck 2004).

Survey responses suggest that professional development opportunities for new and veteran administrators and for those aspiring to administration in Alberta tend to be offered by the jurisdiction or to be designed for large groups of administrators. No jurisdictions appear to take a job-embedded approach to professional development for administrators. The survey revealed the following trends:

- Professional development opportunities for administrators tend to take the form of conferences and retreats. Some jurisdictions have informal mentorship programs.
- Many administrators leave the jurisdiction and sometimes the province or the country to meet their professional development needs.
- Few local professional growth opportunities exist for administrators.
- About 54 per cent of respondents indicated that their jurisdiction funds some type of cohort leadership development program for aspiring administrators.
- About 26 per cent of respondents reported that their area had no or minimal support for new administrators.

When asked what postsecondary education and professional development opportunities had helped them most in preparing for their role as administrators, most respondents to a survey that the Association undertook in 2009 stated that the graduate courses or their master's program had been the most useful (ATA 2009b). The same respondents stated that they had also benefited from events organized by such groups as the Council on School Administration of the Alberta Teachers' Association. A few respondents mentioned that they had benefited significantly from on-the-job training, from mentoring offered by their school division and from peer meetings. Administrators stated that they would benefit from more opportunities to attend research symposia, undertake professional readings and access professional development on practical topics.

The PD survey suggests that the professional development needs of school administrators are addressed, for the most part, through collective activities that occur outside the school community. Clearly, more research is needed on how professional development opportunities for administrators could be embedded in schools and how professional learning communities could be restructured to better meet the needs of administrators.

Administrators stated that they would benefit from more opportunities to attend research symposia, undertake professional readings and access professional development on practical topics.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Alberta Education is currently developing a new vision for Alberta's education system—a vision that is being guided by such consultative initiatives as *Speaking Out*, *Inspiring Education*, *Inspiring Action* and *Setting the Direction*. The government is also reviewing the *School Act* and other legislation relating to education. Alberta Education has already published some documents describing how Alberta's education system will change. Adapting to these changes will require a great deal of resilience on the part of teachers. The conclusions that follow attempt to take these emerging changes into account.

Designing for the Complexity and Diversity of Teaching and Learning

Teachers should have access to professional development opportunities that are based on fundamental principles of adult learning, including the axiom that one size does not fit all.

Teachers should have access to professional development opportunities that are based on fundamental principles of adult learning, including the axiom that one size does not fit all. Ferriter (2010) observes that "the structure of professional programs in most schools sends a conflicting message about the importance of meeting learners where they are" (73). The PD survey suggests that, far too often, professional development resources fail to consistently address the specific needs of individual teachers. Teachers' efforts to meet their unique needs are sometimes stymied by a lack of time, by a scarcity of funding or by pressure to adopt the goals of the greater body. As this study has demonstrated, when teachers perceive professional development as something done to them in an effort to fulfill other people's agendas, they quickly become cynical and resistant (Kragler, Martin, Kroeger 2008). To meet the demands of a rapidly changing education system, professional development must be designed to address teachers' unique needs. Only then will they be able to help bring about the changes envisioned.

- Professional development planners must design and safeguard structures that make possible complex and meaningful professional learning opportunities that take into account the learning styles and needs of the participants.

- Because teachers' needs evolve throughout their career (Darling-Hammond and Friedlander 2008), professional development must be designed in a way that takes into account the stage at which teachers are in their career and their area of specialization (including administration).

- To ensure a stable workforce, the transfer of knowledge and planned succession, stakeholders must address the needs of beginning teachers by offering hands-on, practical and timely site-based activities in collaboration with other professionals. Such collaborative activities will help new teachers translate theory into everyday practice.

Professional Learning for Informed Transformation: The 2010 Professional Development Survey

- Stakeholders must allocate resources to develop professional development opportunities that address the unique needs of such subgroups as substitute teachers and teachers new to the province or the country.
- The education system needs to develop enveloped, equitable funding structures to create professional development programs that address the complex learning needs of teachers.

Enhancing and Sustaining the Professional Culture of Learning

If professional growth plans are to continue to be meaningful, teachers will need more autonomy in developing them and equitable resources to support them. Furthermore, informed transformation cannot occur unless adequate professional development becomes a fundamental condition of practice. Education partners should allocate resources—to support individual teacher growth activities and ensure their growth goals are not subsumed by jurisdictional and ministry school improvement initiatives. Further strategies for enhancing the professional culture of learning include:

- Establish parameters for providing dedicated and embedded professional development time.
- Acknowledge the time that teachers need to undertake all the tasks required of them and ensure that they have dedicated time to undertake professional development.
- Value and support professional development structures that encourage research and reflection and provide teachers with opportunities to share their pedagogical approaches and practical knowledge with others.
- Provide teachers with more support in pursuing their individual professional growth goals.

Coordinating Coherent Professional Development

In the limited body of well-designed research studies on professional development efficacy (see Guskey and Yoon 2009), effective professional development programs share several elements. They "include workshops focused on the implementation of research-based instructional practices, involve active-learning experiences for participants and provide teachers with opportunities to adapt the practices to their unique classroom situations" (Guskey and Yoon 2009, 496). They involve cyclical, embedded learning opportunities based on observation and coaching (Nelsen and Cudeiro 2009). Such opportunities help teachers address problems of practice by encouraging them to share knowledge, engage in reflective practice and assess the impact of their work (Hirsh and Killion 2009). Effective professional development must be coherent, focussed on content knowledge and involve active learning (Darling-Hammond and Richardson 2009).

Professional development must be designed in a way that takes into account the stage at which teachers are in their career and their area of specialization (including administration).

Transforming the education system will required professional development that focuses on content and research-based teaching and learning strategies and includes embedded opportunities for reflection and collaboration. Alberta is poised to move into an era of systematic transformation to improve learning outcomes for students. However, such transformation will occur only if policy makers make teachers' learning a priority.

The results of the 2009 and 2010 PD surveys reinforce the need for teachers to take professional responsibility. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) suggest that the *Fourth Way* will be characterized by excellent teachers, powerful professionalism and lively learning communities. Gordon Thomas, the Association's executive secretary, has this to say about the path ahead:

> If informed transformation is to succeed, Alberta's teaching profession must become fully self-governing. The principle of a self-regulating profession that works to enhance the growth and practice of its members will be a fundamental pillar of progressive education reform in the years ahead. The Association remains committed to advancing the professional growth of its members, which its regards as a key element to improving Alberta's K–12 sector.

Although teachers are optimistic that their conditions of practice will improve in a way that will foster professional growth, many obstacles remain. This study has revealed, for example, that some teachers feel overwhelmed by competing initiatives. Professional development should build on existing professional learning strengths in the system, and stakeholders and service providers need to coordinate their initiatives so that teachers do not feel overloaded. Guskey (2009) observes that when teachers try to implement multiple innovations, it is impossible to clearly ascertain the success of any of them. The same rule undoubtedly applies to professional development programs. A coordinated approach to effective professional development includes a shared vision, strong leadership, sound research and evidence, sufficient resources and adequate time.

Strategies that will help education stakeholders to support teacher learning include:

• Build and support structures to develop a shared vision for professional development.

• Coordinate professional development opportunities that include interactive, continuous and reflective learning.

• Share responsibility by allocating sufficient time and money to plan and enact collaborative professional development.

To truly gauge the social return on investment of teachers' professional development, brave and innovative professional development will seek to identify challenging to measure, but highly prized improvements, and may include assessment of teachers' sense of self-efficacy, gains in knowledge transfer and succession planning, artifacts reflecting the priority of professional development, and evidence of authentic collaboration leading to greater reflective practice in the profession.

Transforming the education system will required professional development that focuses on content and research-based teaching and learning strategies and that includes embedded opportunities for reflection and collaboration.

As we move down the path of informed transformation, it is imperative that education partners continue to build the capacity of the teaching profession to respond to the learning needs of students. This will involve moving away from the view that investments in professional development are about achieving short-term gains in student achievement. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009 b) describe these types of school improvement efforts and policies as leading to "addictive behaviors" that seldom address the systemic factors that cause students to fall through the cracks. In this 'third way' paradigm, driven by "the persistence of presentism," teachers' energies in these schools are directed toward satisfying externally imposed mandates.

In order to meet the opportunities and challenges afforded by the growing complexity and diversity of Alberta classrooms, informed transformation will include a renewed commitment to professional responsibility built on trust. As a result of this shift, efforts to measure the impact of professional development on student learning will be transformed into a focus on building the efficacy of teachers and a shared commitment to create school cultures where professional learning is a foundational element of the conditions of practice for teachers. Through research initiatives such as the PD survey, the Association remains committed to advancing these efforts.

Effective professional development requires a shared vision, strong leadership, sound research and evidence, sufficient resources and adequate time.

References

Alberta Education. 2009. *The Principal Quality Practice Guideline: Promoting Successful School Leadership in Alberta.* available online at http://education.alberta.ca/admin/resources.aspx. Accessed October 14, 2010.

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement. "AISI Clearing House." http://www.teachers.ab.ca/For%20Members/Professional%20Development/Resources/Pages/AISI%20Clearing%20House.aspx. Accessed July 3, 2010.

AISI Education Partners. 2008. *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement: AISI Handbook Cycle 4, 2009–2012.* Alberta Education, 1–27.

Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). 2005. *A Guide to Comprehensive Professional Development Planning.* Edmonton, Alta: ATA.

____. 2009a. *Professional Growth and Innovation in Alberta Schools—A Status Report: The 2009 Professional Development Survey.* Edmonton, Alta: ATA.

____. 2009b. *Leadership for Learning: The Experience of Administrators in Alberta Schools.* Edmonton, Alta: ATA.

____. 2010. *A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions.* Edmonton, Alta: ATA.

____. 2010. *The Experience of Substitute Teaching in Alberta Schools.* Edmonton, Alta: ATA.

____. 2010. *Member Opinion Survey.* Edmonton, Alta: ATA.

____. 2010. *The Courage to Choose—Emerging Trends and Strategic Possibilities for Informed Transformation in Alberta Schools 2010–2011.* Edmonton, Alta: ATA.

Arkison, B, J C Couture and L Servage. 2010. *The Experience of Substitute Teaching in Alberta Schools.* The Alberta Teachers' Association.

Behrstock-Sherratt, E, and J G Coggshall. 2010. "Realizing the Promise of Generation Y," *Educational Leadership* (May): 28–34.

Chung Wei, R A Andree and Linda Darling-Hammond. 2009. "How Nations Invest in Teachers—High Achieving Nations Treat Their Teachers as Professionals." *Educational Leadership* 66, no 5 (February): 28–33.

Clark, R, F Antonelli, D Lacavera, D W Livingstone, K Pollock, H Smaller, J Strachan, and P Tarc. 2007. "Beyond PD Days: Teachers' Work and Learning in Canada." Ontario Teachers' Federation.

Clary, R M, and J H Wandersee. 2009. "Can Teachers Learn in an Online Environment?" *Kappa Delta Pi Record* 46, no 1 (Fall): 34–38.

Darling-Hammond, L, and D Friedlander. 2008. "Creating Excellent and Equitable Schools—The Right Design Features and Policies Can Promote Exceptional High Schools on a Broad Scale." *Educational Leadership* 65, no 8 (May): 14–21.

Darling-Hammond, L, and N Richardson. 2009. "Teacher Learning: What Matters?" *Educational Leadership* 66, no 5 (February): 46–53.

Darling-Hammond, L, R Chung Wei, A Andree, N Richardson and S Orphanos. 2009. "State of the Profession." *National Staff Development Council* 30, no 2 (Spring): 42–50.

Ferriter, W M. 2010. "Why Teachers Should Try Twitter." *ASCD* (February): 73–74.

Garet, M S, A C Porter, L Desimone, B F Birman and K Suk Yoon. 2001. "What Makes Professional Development Effective? Results From a National Sample of Teachers." *American Educational Research Journal* 38, no 4 (Winter): 915–45.

Guskey, T R. 2009. "Closing the Knowledge Gap on Effective Professional Development." *Educational Horizons* 87, no 4 (Summer): 224–33.

Guskey, T R, and K Suk Yoon. 2009. "What Works in Professional Development?" *Phi Delta Kappan* (March): 495–500.

Hargreaves, A, and D Shirley. 2009a. T*he Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Corwin.

_____. 2009b. "The Persistence of Presentism." *Teachers College Record* 111, no 11. Available online at www.tcrecord.org/ExecSummary. asp?contentid=15438. Accessed July 15, 2009.

Hart, D, and D W Livingstone. 2009. "Rising Educational Expectations: Trends and Limits in Times of Economic Downturn." *Education Canada* 49, no 3 (Summer): 4–7.

Hirsh, S, and J Killion. 2008. "Making Every Educator A Learning Educator." *Education Week*: 1–3.

Hirsh, S, and J Killion. 2009. "When Educators Learn, Students Learn—Eight Principles of Professional Learning." *Phi Delta Kappan* (March): 464–69.

Huber, C. 2010. "Professional Learning 2.0." *Educational Leadership* (May): 41–46.

Jenlick, P M, and K Kinnucan-Welsch. 1999. "Learning Ways of Knowing Through Communities of Professional Development." *Journal for a Just and Caring Education*, *5*(4): 367–86.

Jones, P, E West and D Stevens. 2006. "Nurturing Moments of Transformation in Teachers—Comparative Perspectives on the Challenges of Professional Development." *British Journal of Special Education* 33, no 2: 82–90.

Killion, J, and C Williams. 2009. "Online Professional Development 2009." *Multimedia and Internet at Schools*: 1–3.

Klassen, R M, and M M Chiu. 2010. "Effects on Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Job Satisfaction: Teacher Gender, Years of Experience, and Job Stress." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 102, no 3: 741–56.

Kragler, S, L Martin and D C Kroeger. 2008. "Money Down the Drain: Mandated Professional Development." *Journal of School Leadership* 18, no 5 (September): 528–50.

Levin, B. 2009. "Build a Relationship Between Research and Practice." *Phi Delta Kappan* (March): 528–29.

Lezotte, L. W. 2005. "More Effective Schools: Professional Learning Communities in Action." In R P Dufour, R Eaker and R Dufour (eds.), *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities* (pp 177–92). Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Service.

Lindstrom, P H, and M Speck. 2004. *The Principal as Professional Development Leader.* Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

Little, C A, and K A Paul. 2009. "Weighing the Workshop: Assess the Merits with Six Key Criteria for Planning and Evaluation." *National Staff Development Council* 30, no 5 (December): 26–30.

Moore, R, and B Berry. 2010. "The Teachers of 2030." *Educational Leadership* (May): 26–39.

Murgatroyd, S. 2010. "Informed Transformation—Change is Possible, But First We Need Change." *The ATA Magazine* (Summer): 28–29.

Nelsen, J, and A Cudeiro. 2009. "Lasting Impression—Targeted Learning Plan Has a Maximum Impact on Teacher Practice." *National Staff Development Council* 30, no 5 (December): 32–35.

Sergiovanni, T J. 1999. "The Story of Community." In J Retallick, B Cocklin and K Coombe (eds.), *Learning Communities in Education* (pp 9–25). London, New York: Routledge.

Servage, L. 2008. *Beginning Teachers Longitudinal Study: Working Conditions and Supports for Alberta's New Teachers* (ATA, unpublished).

Torff, B, and D Sessions. 2008. "Factors Associated with Teachers' Attitudes about Professional Development." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 35, no 2 (Spring): 123–33.

THE Future

It's why teachers teach

This publication is part of an ongoing series of research updates published by the Alberta Teachers' Association. Further background information about the research studies cited in this publication is available from the Alberta Teachers' Association, 11010 142 Street, Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1; phone 780-447-9400 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (elsewhere in Alberta).