



My name is Stephanie Hirsh, and I am executive director of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), a professional organization of 12,000 educators. For more than 30 years, the Council has been the only national education organization with a laser-like focus on improving the quality of professional development and its impact on teaching and student learning.

I have worked for the Council for the past 20 years and am now in my third year as the Council's executive director. Previously, I was a staff developer in the Richardson Independent School District, an urban suburban school system outside of Dallas, Texas. I also served three terms as an elected school board member in the same school district.

Thank you for this opportunity to share NSDC's recommendations for continuously increasing the effectiveness of all educators. As you are aware, professional development, in one way or another, involves every educator, every year, in every school system. Professional development is an investment of time and money made by school systems to improve teaching that results in increased learning and achievement for students. The federal government has demonstrated its understanding of the importance of professional development by investing over \$20 billion to support professional development and teacher effectiveness activities since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act.

American philosopher John Dewey said: "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must be what the community wants for all of its children." In my view, this statement captures the intent of federal education policy. We must ensure that every student experiences great teaching every day. Unfortunately, we know this is not the case in many communities.

High quality, intensive, sustained professional development is the only strategy we have to ensure that all teachers in the current workforce learn the knowledge and skills necessary to increase student achievement. Unfortunately, too often school systems and schools fail to use professional development in a way that fulfills its potential. Therefore, I propose three specific actions the Congress can take to increase the availability as well as the impact of effective professional development for every educator in our country.

Today, I ask the Committee to begin this process of ensuring effective professional development for all teachers by replacing its current definition in Section 9101 (34) of the No Child Left Behind Act with one that guides school systems to invest in professional development directly linked to the needs of students. There are several problems with the current definition:

- It fails to forge the links between student achievement, professional development, and teacher practice.
- It fails to provide incentives for effective teachers to share their knowledge and skills with their colleagues to ensure all students get the benefit of great teaching,
- It merely offers a laundry list of topics from which school systems must choose without regard to what student and teachers really need.

Senator Reed is a leader in this conversation and will soon introduce a more powerful definition of professional development in an upcoming bill. A compelling federal definition focuses professional development at the school level where the principal and teachers can focus on the specific needs of the students and teachers based on a careful analysis of their students' performance data. It promotes collective responsibility for student learning by grade level or subject area by requiring teachers learn and work together to apply more effective practices in all classrooms. It requires they gather evidence on the impact of their collaborative learning on students' performance and use that information to promote continuous improvement in the teaching and learning cycle. Principals, teacher leaders, university partners, and subject matter experts will partner with teams as they identify specific needs to be addressed in ensuring their students meet performance standards.

This more tightly focused definition of professional development ensures that every teacher improves and every student benefits. It addresses what teachers have for decades told us they need – direct help with the challenges in their classroom – and what recent surveys funded by The MetLife Corporation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have confirmed – according to teachers, collaborative work and learning are keys to continuous schoolwide improvement. It is supported by research as well as international benchmark studies of higher performing countries. It is practiced in leading American companies including Pixar Studios, NASA, Best Buy, and the Container Store. Successful superintendents in Duval County, FL; Johnson County, TN; Long Beach, CA; and Montgomery County, MD attribute their increases in student achievement and closing achievement gaps to professional development systems like the one I am proposing.

Secondly, I ask the committee to require that states and districts using federal funds for professional development conduct evaluations as to its impact on student achievement. This will ensure that states and school systems regularly examine the effects of professional development on teacher practice and student performance. It will reveal where there are problems that require attention as well as successes to be recognized. It will enable the U.S. Department of Education to report to Congress the return on its investment in professional development.

By requiring an evaluation of professional development you will be asking many states and school systems to do something new, but you owe it to teachers, and certainly students, that time and money invested in professional development improve teaching. This will be challenging, but it is necessary. Fortunately, there are some states and districts taking the lead. The chairman's own state of Iowa is one of a few states that already evaluate the impact of professional development in school systems. Other states that have guidance to offer include Florida, Maryland, Missouri, and Georgia.

Finally, I ask the committee to ensure that states and districts use an adequate portion of existing federal funding to implement more effective professional development and document the impact of the investment. By establishing an investment baseline you can ensure that the resources necessary are allocated so every educator maintains the knowledge and skills necessary to support student achievement.

Every year countless parents ask their school principals for one teacher over another. They know the teacher makes all the difference for students. By taking these two important steps with regard to professional development you will be able to say to all parents in your communities that you have placed into law new requirements that will:

- Improve classroom instruction for all students;
- Promote teachers' shared responsibility for all students in a grade level or subject matter;
- Spark innovation in teaching by empowering teachers to work and learn together;
- Systematically spread good practices from classroom to classroom; and
- Ensure federal investments in teacher professional development are focused on improving teaching and student results.

This year you can take significant steps to ensure every teacher has the support he or she needs to become an effective teacher so every student experiences great teaching every day. Thank you for considering these steps and for your invaluable service to our nation's children.