What is High-Quality Professional Learning?

Evidence continues to confirm the finding that high-quality professional learning (HQPL) is comprised of multiple, interconnected aspects that together positively impact teacher and student outcomes. A Learning Policy Institute study, for example, identified a positive link among professional learning, teaching practices and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M., 2017).

Professional learning is most effective when it supports teachers' day-to-day practice, originating from problems-of-practice (i.e., in teachers' existing instruction, in district-adopted instructional approaches) rather than from general principles and precepts. The professional learning is then grounded in concrete supports, like a strong local curriculum and high-quality instructional resources, which promote integration into classroom instruction (Hill & Papay, 2022).

KDE's definition of HQPL, outlined in Table 1.1 below, represents a synthesis of research on effective professional learning. Districts and schools can use these characteristics as a guide when designing and/or selecting HQPL for teachers and leaders at the local level (Archibald, S., Coggshall, J. G., Croft, A., & Goe, L., 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hill, H., & Papay, J., 2022).

Table 1.1. *Characteristics of High-Quality Professional Learning*

Characteristic	Description
Content-focused and standards-aligned	Deepens educators' understanding of what to teach and how to teach it within the context of the *Kentucky Academic Standards*, local curriculum and high-quality instructional resources.
Equity-focused	Supports educators in effectively engaging all students in rigorous, grade-level appropriate tasks, including students with acceleration needs, English learners and students with exceptional needs.
Considerate of adult learners	Addresses expressed and unexpressed expectations and motivations while attending to mindsets and emotional states, is asset-based, builds on participants' prior knowledge and experience, and invites them to connect learning to meaningful goals and immediately useful actions.
Symmetrical to a vibrant student experience	Is inquiry-based, interactive and collaborative. Involves expert models and practice as educators participate in lessons as learners, plan, internalize, rehearse, observe and reflect with colleagues who teach in the same content area and use the same curriculum.
Uses models of effective practice	Is based on the local curriculum and provides modeling of high-quality instruction that offers educators a clear vision of what evidence-based practices look like. Models may include, but are not limited to, lesson plans, unit plans, sample student work, observations of peer teachers, and video or written cases of teaching.

Provides coaching and expert support	Offers expertise about curriculum, adopted high-quality instructional resources and evidence-based practices, focused directly on educators' and students' individual needs.
Offers feedback and reflection	Provides job-embedded time for educators to intentionally think about, receive input on and refine practice.
Is sustained and continuous	Provides educators with adequate time to learn, rehearse, implement and reflect upon new strategies that facilitate refinement in practice over time.

High-Quality Professional Learning Structures

High-quality professional learning (HQPL) may be delivered in a variety of structures, depending on purpose, content, audience or type of session. Table 1.2 highlights six types of professional learning structures that enable delivery of HQPL. The structures should work in concert to support a coherent professional learning plan at the local level in alignment with local CDIP/CSIP goals.

Table 1.2. *High-Quality Professional Learning Structures*

HQPL Structure	Description	Recommended Occurrence	Recommended Frequency
Workshops	Stand-alone learning experiences designed to teach educators about specific resources, materials or strategies, or to build skills and/or knowledge; may be synchronous and/or asynchronous in design	After school, during the summer, or on assigned professional development days within the school year	Multiple times a year
Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)	Small groups of educators within the same grade-level or content area who grapple with units, lessons, tasks, texts and student work as the object of study. They use cycles of inquiry and employ protocols that support collaborative planning, observation and feedback	During the school day (i.e., planning periods, school/district administrator meetings) and built into alternate school schedules, such as early release days when applicable	Weekly
Communities of Practice	Flexibly formed educator groups who share an instructional concern, set of problems or interest in a topic and meet to facilitate resource sharing, individual and collective goal attainment, collaborative problem solving, evaluation of practices and emergent learning.	Before and after school or during the school day (i.e., planning periods, school/district administrator meetings)	Monthly
Peer Observation	Learning that occurs through observing others or being observed, followed by collegial feedback and discussion to support reflection as a means of professional growth. Effective	Observations during the school day; feedback and discussion may occur	Multiple times a year

HQPL Structure	Description	Recommended Occurrence	Recommended Frequency
	observations are well planned, focused on a specific problem of practice and provide actionable next steps.	before, during or after school	
Coaching	Opportunities for educators to engage in collegial discussion about the individual needs of their practices, and to receive actionable, observation-based feedback from an expert in curriculum and instruction either from their school or through an external partner.	During classroom instruction, with feedback sessions happening during planning periods or immediately following the lesson	Multiple times a year
Consultation	Discussion with experts (HQIR/HQPL providers, state education agency, regional cooperative, etc.) to support professional learning systems design and implementation.	Before, during or after school	Multiple times a year

Professional learning should be led by educators (leaders, coaches, high-quality instructional resource vendor, HQPL providers or teachers) with content and pedagogical expertise and deep knowledge of the standards, instructional shifts and high-quality instructional resources (Rivet Education, n.d.). As outlined in KRS 156.095 and 704 KAR 3:035, schools and districts need to prioritize on-going professional learning that increases educators' understanding of the local curriculum and methods of instruction appropriate for each content area based on individual school plans.

References

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Hill, H. & Papay, J. (2022). *Building better PL: How to strengthen teacher learning*. Retrieved from https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/rppl-building-better-pl.pdf

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