

WHAT PRINCIPALS SHOULD LOOK FOR IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



As principals, we all want the same thing from professional development: we want it to make a difference. Not just a good day. Not just positive evaluations. Not just teachers walking out saying, “That was interesting.”

We want to see changes in classrooms. We want to hear richer discussions among PLC teams. We want students more engaged in learning. We want teachers to feel more confident and capable in their craft.

Yet too often, professional development is judged by what happens during the presentation rather than by what happens after it. The best professional development doesn’t end when the presenter leaves the building. That’s when the real work begins.

So, as you plan your professional learning this year, here are five questions every principal should ask before investing in professional development.

1. Does it align with our school’s greatest needs?

Every school has unique strengths and unique challenges. Professional development should never be selected because it’s popular or because another school had success with it. Instead, it should directly address the goals your school is working to achieve.

Ask yourself:

Will this help solve a problem we’re actually facing?

Does it support our school improvement plan?

Will it move us closer to the vision we have for teaching and learning?

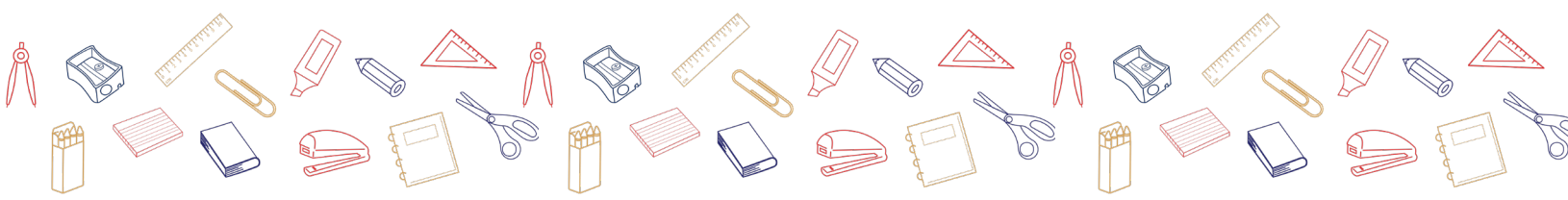
The best professional development is never one-size-fits-all. It is intentional, focused, and connected to the work already happening in your school.

2. Will teachers be able to use it tomorrow?

Teachers don’t need more information. They need practical strategies they can implement immediately. Professional development should answer the question every educator is quietly asking:

“How will this help me when I walk into my classroom tomorrow morning?”

The strongest learning experiences combine research with practical application. Teachers should leave with new ideas, new tools, and the confidence to try them. When teachers experience immediate success, momentum begins to build.



3. Is there a plan for implementation?

This may be the most overlooked question of all. Even the best professional development loses its impact if there isn't a plan for what happens next. Learning requires repetition. Reflection. Practice. Coaching. Conversation.

Without those elements, even the most inspiring presentation becomes little more than a notebook full of good intentions.

As principals, we should be asking:
How will teachers continue this work?
How will we measure implementation?
How will we celebrate progress?
What support will teachers receive after the training?

Professional development should be viewed as a process, not an event.

4. Will it strengthen our culture?

Professional learning isn't only about instructional strategies. It's also about people. Great professional development strengthens trust among colleagues, encourages collaboration, and reminds educators why they chose this profession.

When teachers leave feeling valued, supported, and connected to one another, they're more likely to remain engaged in the work. Schools with strong cultures don't happen by accident. They are built intentionally through shared learning experiences that unite a staff around a common purpose.

5. Will this investment still matter six months from now?

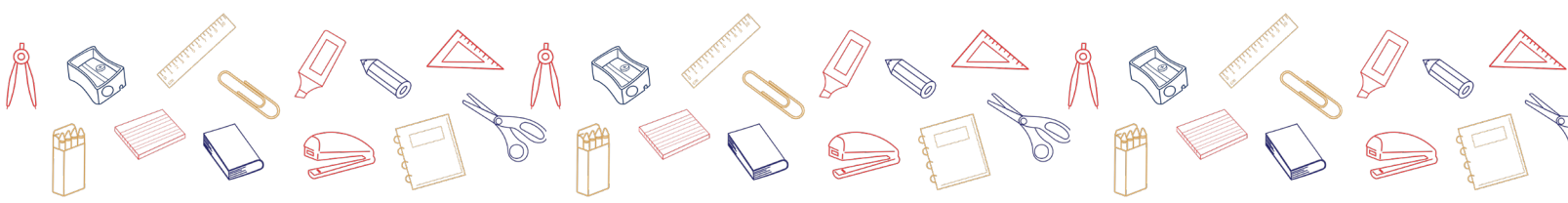
This is perhaps the most important question. Professional development represents a significant investment of time, energy, and financial resources. Before saying yes, ask yourself:

"Will my teachers still be talking about this in February?"
Will they still be using what they learned?
Will students be benefiting from it?
Will it have become part of our culture?

If the answer is yes, you've likely found professional learning worth investing in.
If the answer is no, it may simply be another good presentation that fades with time.

The Principal's Greatest Responsibility

One of the greatest responsibilities of school leaders is creating an environment where teachers continue to grow. When teachers grow, students benefit. When teachers feel supported, they remain in the profession longer.



When teachers collaborate, schools become stronger. Professional development is not about filling calendars. It's about building capacity. It's about creating confidence. It's about helping every educator become a little better than they were yesterday.

As you evaluate professional learning opportunities this year, don't simply ask whether the presenter is engaging or whether the topic sounds interesting. Ask whether this experience will create lasting change. Because the best professional development isn't remembered for what was said that day. It's remembered for the difference it continues to make long after the day is over.

Reflection Question:

As you look at your professional development plan for this school year, which opportunity has the greatest potential to create lasting change and what will you do to ensure that learning continues long after the session ends?

Ready to Evaluate Your Professional Development Plan?

As you prepare for the months ahead, ask yourself one final question: Is our professional development simply filling the calendar, or is it truly changing classroom practice?

If you'd like an objective conversation about your school's professional learning priorities, I'd be honored to help. Whether we ultimately partner together or not, I'd be happy to discuss your goals, share ideas, and help you think through a professional development plan that best serves your teachers and students.

Sometimes one conversation is all it takes to gain clarity. If you're ready to explore what's possible for your staff, let's schedule a time to talk.

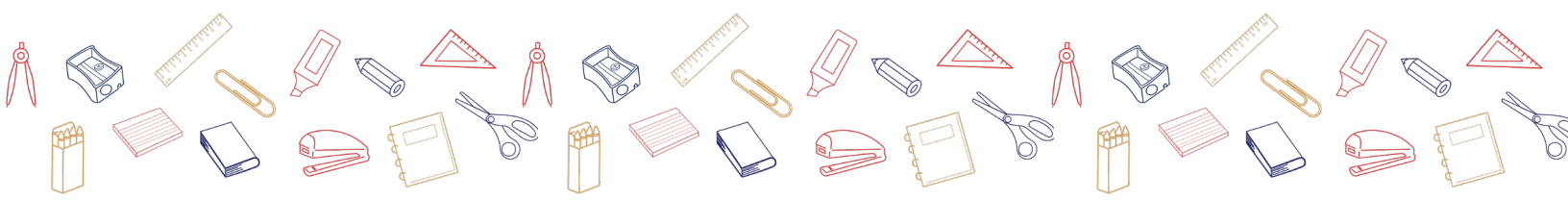
School Challenge

Take a look at your professional development calendar for this year. Now ask yourself these three questions:

Which professional development experience has the greatest potential to change classroom practice, not just inspire teachers for a day?

How will you know if teachers are implementing what they've learned 30, 60, or even 90 days after the training?

What structures are in place to support, coach, and celebrate that implementation?



Professional development shouldn't end when the presenter walks out the door. Lasting growth happens when learning is revisited, discussed, practiced, and supported over time.

This month, challenge yourself and your leadership team to identify one way you can extend the impact of every professional learning experience beyond the day of the training. Small, intentional follow-up creates the momentum that leads to lasting change.

Practical Recommendation

Schedule a 15-Minute "Implementation Check-In."

Two to three weeks after any professional development session, gather your teachers or PLC teams for a brief conversation focused on one simple question:

"What is one strategy from our recent professional learning that you've tried, and what impact has it had on your students?"

As each teacher shares, celebrate successes, discuss challenges, and encourage colleagues to learn from one another. This simple practice reinforces that professional development is not a one-time event but an ongoing journey of growth.

When principals consistently follow up on learning, they send a powerful message: "What we learn together matters, and how we implement it matters even more." Fifteen intentional minutes can transform a great training day into lasting instructional change.

Next Step

Choose one upcoming professional development opportunity and create a follow-through plan before the training ever begins. Ask yourself:

How will teachers implement this learning?

When will we revisit it?

How will we know it's making a difference for students?

Then schedule a 30-day follow-up conversation with your staff or PLC teams before the professional development takes place.

Remember, the most successful professional development isn't defined by what happens on the training day. It is defined by what teachers are still doing weeks and months later. Plan for implementation, and you'll maximize both your investment and your impact.

Finally don't forget to download the attached document that we have provided you for this month's look at YOUR professional development

