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# EMPOWERED LEARNER

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## LEARNING HOW TO LEARN

LEARNING SCIENCE HAS  
A LOT TO SAY ABOUT  
HOW THE BRAIN WORKS.  
ARE SCHOOLS GETTING  
THE MESSAGE?



### CHOICE PD

HOW PERSONALIZING  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
HELPS INSPIRE EDUCATORS,  
SPREAD GOOD PRACTICE

### STANDARDS SPOTLIGHT

3 WAYS THE EDUCATION  
LEADER STANDARDS DEVELOP  
EMPOWERED LEADERS

# CHOICE PD

How personalizing professional development helps inspire educators, spread good practice

By Jennifer Snelling





When Kathryn McGrane heard a co-worker describe the concept of flipped learning, the fifth grade teacher at Illinois' DuJardin Elementary had a feeling it could help engage her students and empower them in their own learning. She followed her instinct, researched the method and began using it in her own classes with great success.

McGrane didn't stop there. She was so enthused about what she'd discovered that she and Jennifer Eggert, instructional technology coach for DuJardin's district, teamed up to present a session called "Mixing Up Math," open to teachers in the district. Based on that interest, they followed up with an edcamp on flipped learning and opened McGrane's flipped classroom for observation so teachers could get a feel for how it worked. Although the sessions were optional, teachers received some professional development credit.

Remember the old days of professional development where the best thing about the experience was the doughnuts? The most effective continuing education is not an event imposed upon teachers, but rather an active experience around something the teacher wants to learn more about. After all, educators know their students and can

tell when an idea comes along that will be effective.

Just as schools are personalizing education for their students, many are encouraging their educators to chart their own learning path. This shift is leading to several changes in professional development for educators, including more learning options that count for credit, more voice and choice in what they learn, and more flexibility around when and how professional development takes place.

"The days of sit-and-get PD are gone, and if they're still here, they're not effective or meeting the needs of our teachers," Eggert says. "The same expectations need to be held for teachers as for students."

#### What makes effective PD?

Eggert has experimented with lots of modes of professional development in her district. She's tried edcamps, speed dating, virtual course studies and students leading the teachers – all in an effort to find more effective methods of reaching kids.

How does she know what's working? Feedback from teachers. Eggert regularly surveys her teachers on their goal, purpose,

what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. With that feedback in mind, she designs the PD.

The good news is that in districts such as Eggert's that provide flexibility in credentialing, the options are seemingly endless. That's also the bad news. For educators, sorting through those options to find high-quality opportunities that will meet their needs can be a time drain for the already overworked. While finding relevant and applicable professional development that teachers want is key, quality and research-based content is equally important.

Edtech leaders like district librarians, curriculum coordinators or innovation coordinators can be called on to curate opportunities that meet the district's objectives.

#### Room to explore

Teachers appreciate the opportunity to explore learning they consider relevant to their students. For that reason, a lot of PD is incorporating an explore component, a mini-lesson or goal-based learning activities enhanced by resources like videos or articles, so teachers can be inspired by what

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other educators are doing. The additional resources also allow teachers to go back and learn at their own pace or review.

Effective professional development focuses on what educators are trying to do for kids. Rather than an edtech class about what to click on, the use of tools are embedded in learning about higher-level concepts, curriculum and how to help students reach goals.

In addition, teachers are asked to do rather than passively receive information. Instead of watching a slideshow, teachers might be expected to research a concept and implement it in the classroom.

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has shaped professional development with the big picture in mind. The district developed its vision by asking how to be relevant to digital age learners and how to create equity for economically disadvantaged kids, says Cynthia Braley, principal at Coldwater Canyon Elementary School.

In 2012, the school had 850 kids and only 90 computers; it's now 1:1. It became 1:1 in 2018, but had laid the groundwork with a districtwide redesign of professional development based on the ISTE Standards for Educators. That's a big change for a school like Coldwater Canyon.

Braley didn't wait for the district to direct her to PD; she found classes to learn about the possibilities the new technology offered her school. After learning how to use the technology, she came back and told her teachers that a re-evaluation was coming.

The district now supports the school by offering grade-level support teams with a tech-savvy teacher, an instructional technology facilitator who is available upon request; once-a-month technology PD with school site experts; and visits to practitioner schools. The goal isn't to pressure teachers who weren't comfortable with or excited about the technology.



Instead, there are multiple opportunities for continuing development.

Coldwater Canyon's fifth grade English learners improved their fluency by 15 percent after two years of 1:1 devices.

"Everyone here has a growth mindset," says Braley. "And we are seeing results from what we're doing, including continuing improvement in math scores."

### The shift to flexible PD

Of course, flexible, personalized PD is a dramatic shift for some districts and educators. Texas's Lufkin Independent School District didn't get on board right away, says Rafranz Davis, executive director of professional and digital learning in the rural district.

"The shift we have taken has been a big dose of crazy when you talk about rural schools, which operate very systematically," she says. "PD happened after school until 6. We found through data and common sense that people weren't showing up. We were reaching fewer and fewer teachers. When you're done teaching at the end of the day, even if it's something you want to learn, it's a beat down to have to stay to learn it."

Instead, Lufkin ISD now does a two-day conference before school starts for all teachers. The sessions are 85 percent teacher led, with more than 200 sessions to choose from. While there are some required sessions built in, teachers have lots of choices, most of which honor the expertise already in the district. During the school year, Lufkin shifted to offering PD at lunchtime and offers personalized learning communities, online learning and the option for teachers to use a form to submit any education they participate in outside of district learning.

Of course, there has to be a balance of flexibility and accountability to ensure educators are getting training that continues to grow their practice. Missouri's Parkway School District offers a lot of online pro-



fessional development that's developed in-house, based on the interest of educators.

The district also offers continuing education credit for certifications or micro-credentials that educators seek out, including ISTE U courses or ISTE Certification for Educators.

ISTE U is an online professional learning hub where teachers can take courses on critical edtech topics to build their skills and earn continuing education credits.

ISTE Certification is a competency-based, device-neutral certification based on the ISTE Standards for Educators. The certification combines face-to-face and online pedagogy-focused professional development with a competency-based evaluation to help educators rethink and redesign learning with technology.

"Philosophically, we are in a shift," says Bill Bass, ISTE board president and innovation coordinator at Parkway School District. "We're trying to instill that professional development happens through conversations, library newsletters, Twitter chats and professional learning networks."

Parkway's personalized professional learning system is tiered to ensure the

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district can verify evidence of learning, not just participation, as well as encourage the sharing of that learning. In order to receive credit, educators provide, on a case-by-case-basis, evidence of learning, implementation, impact in the classroom and sharing. Some credit is awarded for evidence of learning, generally a 300- to 500-word description of the learning, with the most credit given for evidence of sharing with other educators.

“We strive for a balance of overall goals and personalized learning,” says Bass. There are some things that we want our teachers to know, but we also want to give them the academic freedom and opportunity to make learning their own. We want to make sure they’re walking away with a change in thinking.”

Parkway provided more than 150 teacher hours last summer around technology alone. That included 375 online classes for teachers with a more than 75 percent completion rate.

### Share what you know

Training from one teacher to another is emerging as one of the most effective ways to influence professional development. Like Parkway, Sun Prairie Area School District uses a staff-initiated online platform to submit for credit if a teacher wants to learn something specific for his or her classroom.

“It’s about growing networks of people and connecting to make sure they have opportunities to learn at their fingertips,” says Curt Mould, director of digital media,

innovation and strategy at Sun Prairie Area School District in Wisconsin. “We don’t say no to anything if you can validate the need and connect it to what the learners in your classroom need.”

These networks can include social media, podcasts, professional learning networks and word of mouth. At a winter celebration a few years ago, Jacquie Gouldthorp, associate principal at Sun Prairie’s Creekside Elementary, had a conversation with principal Jillian Block about their hopes and dreams for students. When the subject of project-based learning (PBL) came up, it sparked a plan to do some site visits at other schools in Wisconsin that already included PBL practices.

The two sent staff members to multiple sites, and a community of PBL experts quickly developed. The concept of learner profiles also emerged from those visits – a method that lets students identify who they are as learners and report on their strengths and learning goals.

Students at Creekside now lead parent-teacher conferences using their learner profiles. As a result, kids are excited for the conferences and parents have an increased home-school connection.

“We get people out to schools and outside of our district so they can ask tough questions and look at it through somebody else’s eyes,” says Mould. “We want to inspire the thinking and give people on-the-ground experience for what that looks like. As thinking and learning grows, we have peer-to-peer sessions within our districts.”

Parkway School District also encourages voluntary small cohort groups that focus on a specific topic during six to eight, three-hour early-release days over the course of the year. This allows teachers to build a network of people across schools to come together with a common learning interest. Taking the concept of peer-to-peer support even further, Parkway requires that these teachers share their learning with teachers outside the cohort.

“We’re seeing a lot more transfer and spreading of ideas, making that topic something they own instead of something we as developers are providing to them,” says Bass. “Discovery and exploration are embedded in best practices and design principals.”

### Virtual PLNs

Professional learning networks on social media have also changed the PD landscape. Whether a Pinterest board or a Twitter chat, these PLNs are teacher-driven and meet teacher needs.

Eggert, who didn’t have a Twitter account just four years ago and only uses it professionally, can’t imagine her life without it. Now she’s not just working with teachers in her building, she’s sharing ideas with teachers from around the world.

“We’re all here to help our kids grow and that can be in so many different ways,” she says. “Why not share ideas and help each other achieve this super intense and awesome mission?”

The real question is if changing how PD is done results in improved learning outcomes for students. While the evidence is still primarily anecdotal, there’s little doubt that educators who are inspired are more inspiring to students.

“PD is the key to making positive change in schools,” says Bass. “Just like with kids, learning for adults occurs in lots of different ways. Discovery and exploration become a mindset that we take into the classroom.”

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