DODGE COUNTY SCHOOLS



Vision

EDUCATING TODAY'S STUDENTS TO SUCCEED IN TOMORROW'S WORLD.

Mission

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: EVERY STUDENT. EVERY DAY.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MANUAL

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COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The Dodge County School System operates its Professional Learning Program at both the system and site levels. Professional learning activities are prioritized by the Dodge County Curriculum Department, Federal Programs Director, and Special Education Director. Each school also schedules specific professional learning sessions based on its unique needs. At the end of the academic year, a survey is administered to all staff to identify areas where professional learning would be beneficial. The district then schedules professional learning opportunities for those identified areas, in addition to school-based offerings.

Each school's School Improvement Plan, along with the System's Strategic Plan, establishes priorities for the district's Professional Learning Program. Staff needs are identified and assessed through the system's annual needs assessment, administered in the spring, as well as through the teacher and leader evaluation systems (TKES/LKES). Data is analyzed to determine strengths and weaknesses at both the system and school levels.

Training common to all schools or focused on shared topics is coordinated at the system level. Examples of such training include instructional technology, data analysis, SLDS, CPR, and special education services. Coordinating these opportunities ensures a consistent approach while also addressing the unique needs of individual schools.

Professional learning activities depend on state and federal funding. Additional funds for professional learning are requested through the local school system and federal programs. Title II-A funds are used to improve teacher quality by providing training to ensure teachers and paraprofessionals are "highly qualified." Local funds, Title I funds, Special Education funds, and Program Improvement funds are also utilized to fully implement the district's comprehensive program for ongoing professional learning.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROCEDURES

A needs assessment, aligned with system and school goals, is administered to all schools each spring. Several schools may also conduct their own surveys with teachers. The results of these assessments are compiled and presented to the system-level leadership team. Based on the findings, both system-wide and school-specific initiatives are planned. Each school submits a prioritized annual professional learning plan to the system-level Professional Learning Coordinator, from which an activity list is developed and maintained.

Professional learning funds shall be used for activities that enhance the skills and knowledge of all school system personnel, school board members, and school council members, with a direct focus on improving student achievement. Every decision regarding professional learning will be made with the goal of increasing student achievement. When available from the federal government, Title II-A funds may be used to support classroom teachers and school-level

administrators. The following items will be funded only if allocations are received by the school system and budgeted for in that fiscal year.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

1. If awarded to DCSS, professional learning funds shall be expended only for one or more of the following items:

    - Additional compensation for teachers serving as mentor teachers.

    - Costs for teachers and school-level administrators to participate in professional learning activities, including substitute teacher salaries and employee benefits.

    - Travel for professional learning purposes (for teachers and school-level administrators), including travel advances for lodging when the staff member meets established criteria.

    - Professional and technical service fees and expenses for instructors and consultants.

    - Training materials and supplies.

    - Development and implementation of initiatives to assist in recruiting, hiring, and retaining effective teachers.

    - Reimbursement for expenditures incurred by individuals who successfully complete approved conferences, workshops/courses, or GACE testing.

2. Due to limited funds, stipends may or may not be awarded.

3. Funds budgeted for professional learning shall be used only to compensate personnel for activities that align with school and district improvement efforts.

4. Funds budgeted for professional learning should be used primarily for activities that enhance the skills of certified personnel and directly support student achievement or improve school climate.

PROCEDURES FOR EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

1. Participants must complete the professional leave request at least 10 days prior to the requested training, with all required documentation attached.

2. The form must be submitted online to the school administrator and the district Professional Learning Coordinator, where final approval will be granted.

3. If the request is made by a staff member who has no available personal or sick leave days, the professional learning request will be denied.

4. If there is a fee to be paid, requisition forms must be completed. The Professional Learning/Purchasing Secretary will initiate the registration process using a purchase order.

5. Travel advancement requests must be submitted at least 10 days prior to the professional learning, with all required information completed.

6. Expenses will be reimbursed in accordance with Statewide Travel Regulations. Please refer to the Dodge County Travel Procedures Manual for further details regarding meals, mileage, and lodging.

7. Dodge County certified staff are encouraged to serve as instructors and consultants whenever possible. The "train-the-trainer" method will be utilized whenever feasible.

8. All professional learning will require redelivery to the department, grade level, and/or school. Documentation of the redelivery must be submitted to the Office of Curriculum and Professional Learning.

9. If travel advancement was granted but the staff member was unable to attend, the check must be returned within one week of the professional learning date. If the check has been cashed or deposited, the total amount of the advancement must be repaid to the Dodge County School System prior to the next pay period, or the amount may be deducted from the staff member's salary.

DODGE COUNTY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

On July 1, 2017, the Georgia education community transitioned from professional learning centered primarily on workshops—measured by seat time—to a professional learning system grounded in research, best practices, and national standards. Professional learning for certificate renewal must now be continuous, job-embedded, and conducted within the context of a professional learning community (PLC). Georgia no longer uses PLUs for certificate renewal of active educators. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) and the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), in collaboration with educators statewide, designed a professional learning system built around educators learning alongside one another to improve teaching and learning, with a focus on addressing problems of practice.

The Dodge County School System requires all certified employees to participate in job-embedded PLCs. Student achievement will remain the primary focus of most PLCs, while others will be guided by the district's Strategic Plan Goals and School Improvement Plans. These PLCs are intended to foster collaboration and planning across grade levels and academic subjects.

All certified staff will participate in Dodge County's "Big 3" model: within a school week, one day will be designated for data review, one day for professional learning, and one day for collaborative planning. The professional learning day will be organized at the school level, with documentation maintained by administrators. At the end of the school year, this documentation will be submitted to the Office of Professional Learning.

Workshops will serve a secondary role, supporting job-embedded learning. They will be used strategically to introduce new strategies, support implementation of new curricula, improve assessment practices, and address similar needs. Workshops that do not directly connect to educators' work will no longer be used, as collecting PLUs is no longer required.

All certified employees must have professional learning goals or professional learning plans. These goals and plans will be informed by student achievement data, summative evaluation data, school and district goals, and state and federal requirements.

Dodge County Schools Travel Procedures

Dodge County Schools use the State of Georgia Travel Policy as a guide on rates and allowable expenses. It can be found at: https://sao.georgia.gov/travel/state-travel-policy Dodge County Schools does elect to follow a different procedure for meals that what is found in Section Four: Meals and Incidental Travel Expenses of the State travel policy.

How to fill out an Employee Expense Statement. This form should be completed on-line and then printed.

- Fill out the employee information at the top of the expense statement. You must complete all parts, ex., Headquarters, Auto License #....
- The date, departure time and arrival time must be completed for each day you are claiming travel. Identify the location of departure and arrival for each date.
- One month per expense statement.
- Agenda of Professional Learning must be attached to travel reimbursement form.
- **If an expense statement is not completed correctly, it must be returned to the employee.**

Mileage- Mileage allowance is calculated from work location to workshop/conference and return. The reimbursement amount is based on the state policy. Parking fees at conference sites are reimbursable, but require proof of payment.

Meals- Meals are reimbursed at the same rate at the state reimbursement rate for all in-state travel (See 4.3 of the State Travel Policy). For meals allowances on multi-day reimbursement, the following is applied:

Day of Departure			Time of Departure/Arrival	Day of Return		
B	L	D	12:00 am-6:30 am	-	-	-
-	L	D	6:31 am-11:00 am	B	-	-
-	-	D	11:01 am- 1:30 pm	B	-	-
-	-	D	1:31 pm-5:30 pm	B	-	-
-	-	-	5:31 pm-7:30 pm	B	L	-
-	-	-	7:30 pm-11:59 pm	B	L	D

Lodging- Lodging expenses may be reimbursed, or a staff member may be eligible to receive a travel advance to cover the cost of lodging. To receive an advance—after meeting the minimum criteria—a statement from the hotel/motel must be submitted to the Finance Office along with the registration documentation for the conference or professional learning event.

If an advance is not received, the hotel receipt must be attached to the expense statement for reimbursement. The receipt must include the name of the person being reimbursed. When registering for lodging, employees should claim exemption from the local hotel excise tax. The fund code from which the reimbursement will be paid must be entered in the appropriate area.

Lodging will be reimbursed at the state reimbursement rate for the specific area of stay and will be monitored and adjusted in accordance with changes to state policy. The only exceptions to the per diem rates are when conference rates are used and clearly noted on the receipt; in such cases, reimbursement will be made at the nightly conference rate charged. If more than one person shares a room, per diem rates will apply per person.

Timeline for Approval and Payment- All expense statements should be submitted to the Accounts Payable Department **within 45 days of the time the expense incurred.** When this time frame is followed, expense checks should be printed within 10 days. Expense statements received after 45 days may be declined for payment.

All travel expenses must be considered necessary, reasonable, allowable and consistent with the written travel policy and federal program through which it is funded. Policies and procedures are applied consistently to local and federal dollars. Professional learning activities and travel require preapproval for allowability of participant and activity.

Appropriate supporting documentation includes an agenda and, if applicable, a sign-in sheet. For travel related to a professional learning activity, employee will submit all required supporting documentation with travel form.

Terms Used When Thinking about Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)
Glossary of Professional Learning Community Terms

The terms defined below are commonly used in the context of professional learning community literature. In Georgia, the intent of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) certificate renewal rule is to move the focus of professional learning from seat time in workshops to job-embedded continuous learning in professional learning communities (PLCs). There may be other definitions of these terms, but for the purpose of improving teaching and learning in Georgia schools, the expectation is that educators will understand these terms as defined in this document.

Agenda – Used as a way of organizing a meeting so the group gets done everything it intends to accomplish in that meeting. No meeting should be held without first establishing the agenda. Team members should have input in developing the agenda. Agendas should be published in advance of meetings so participants can come prepared, thus creating more effective meetings.

Collaborative Team – Any group of people who work together and meet regularly to focus on common work constitute a collaborative team. Various configurations can be used such as grade level or subject area collaborative teams, or collaborative teams that have a schoolwide focus such as the school's professional learning committee, media committee, strategic planning committee, etc. Team members are responsible to one another. Members carry out assigned roles and bring assigned materials to meetings. High levels of trust are a hallmark of high-functioning collaborative teams.

Collaborative Work - Collaboration means working together to combine knowledge that will be greater than if member worked individually. Collaborative work results in decisions agreed upon by team members and work products that ensure all students have access to the knowledge of the best teachers in the school. Research is clear: student achievement is higher in schools where educators work collaboratively.

Common Assessments – An assessment of student learning that uses the same instrument or common process utilizing the same criteria for determining the value of student work. Often times these assessments are created by the District and are called benchmarks. In a Collaborative Team, common assessments are created by a team of teachers with collective responsibility for the learning of a group of students which are expected to learn the same knowledge and skills. The team developed assessments provide team members with a base line of data which can be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning or identify students who need enrichment opportunities to stretch their learning. This information can then be used to change instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students.

Communication Structures – High-functioning professional learning communities (PLCs) create structures that allow members to know about and participate in the work. Communication structures might include publishing summaries of meetings, calendars, newsletters, routine announcements about learning community work, channels established to recognize accomplishments, regular reporting of data, etc.

Cycle of Work/Learning – Successful collaborative teams use a widely accepted process to guide their work/learning to ensure they are focused on problems of practice and are able to successfully address the particular problem of practice. A typical cycle of work would include

 Examining evidence of student performance – what is the current level of performance?

 Analyzing possible instructional strategies that address student strengths and weaknesses – based in data, what is the most appropriate strategy to use?

 Developing common assessments that will provide data as new strategies are used – what does the data tell us about the effectiveness of the strategies?

 Implementation of the agreed upon instructional strategies and common assessment.

 Analyzing changes in student learning – did the instructional strategy worked?

 Incorporating the new professional learning as the work/learning cycle continues.

Deprivatization of Practice – Teachers make their craft visible to others. Teachers may observe one another, and using a coaching or mentoring process, give and get feedback. Teachers share and collaboratively analyze student work samples. Teachers are not concerned about colleagues knowing about problems of practice and student performance in one another's classrooms.

Empowerment of Teachers – Teachers are viewed as experts capable of making decisions about instruction. At the same time, teachers give up individual autonomy in favor of group autonomy so that collective decisions about teaching and learning are made by teams of experts. Teachers and leaders know the ground rules surrounding empowerment; all parties trust one another to effectively carry out their roles.

Guiding Questions – Agreed upon questions that guide the work of the PLC and its collaborative teams. Guiding questions help maintain the focus on teaching and learning, and remind everyone about issues of equity. When guiding questions are used effectively, the focus is on every child – no child falls through the cracks.

Job-Embedded Professional Learning – The best way to understand "job-embedded learning" is to think about professional learning as "working on the work." The old mindset about professional learning was sitting in workshops (divorced from the work of teaching and learning) rather than working on the working (direct engagement with teaching and learning). After all, the purpose of professional learning is to strengthen the craft of teaching to impact student learning and raise student achievement. Job-embedded means working collaboratively with others within the school as cross-content teams, grade level teams, departmental teams, or some other configuration. In addition, sometimes it is necessary to work with people outside of the school to work on the work. Art and music are fields where teachers may be isolated from others who teach the same content, so working on the work may mean working with similar teachers in other schools and districts.

Professional Learning Community (PLC) – This term describes the culture of a school whereby teachers and leaders seek agreement on shared values, beliefs, and norms and based on these shared values, beliefs, and norms, develop structures, processes, and policies that engage members in common work to resolve problems of practice aimed at improving teaching and learning. The PLC has at its core a focus on student success, use of collaborative processes, a deep sense of trust among members, regular use of data and a common drive to create a school where every child succeeds and achieves at high levels.

Professional Learning Goals – As part of the certificate renewal process, every educator must create professional learning goals. These goals should be balanced between the identified learning needs of the educator and the learning needs of the team, school, and school district. Goals must be based on data, developed by the individual educator with input from colleagues as long as the educator is comfortable in discussing performance with colleagues, and approved by the educator's supervisor.

Professional Learning Plans – Certain categories of educators (induction level teachers and leaders, for example) are required to formalize their professional learning goals into plans that lay out objectives, resources, timelines, etc.

Protocols – Carefully designed processes aimed at arriving at the best conclusions since the protocol controls for time, who speaks, what is to be accomplished, etc. There are several different types of protocols including 1) decision-making, 2) brainstorming, 3) examining student work, 4) team building, 5) discussions, and others. Some protocols are recognized across the nation (Tuning Protocol, for example), but individual educators can create their own. Many protocols can be used by educators as well as by their students. Protocols can be found in books, articles, and on websites. One good source is the National School Reform Faculty website, www.nsrfharmony.org.

Reflective Dialogue - Public conversations focused on teaching practice and student learning. Reflective dialogue builds self-awareness among teachers and leaders and lessens the likelihood of teacher isolation. Reflective dialogue is dependent upon trusting colleagues enough to share challenges and successes.

Response to Intervention (RTI) – The process of teachers changing their instruction based on how well the students responded to it. "Response" is a key word; this moves the teacher to ask, "how can I change instruction to meet student learning needs/" changing instruction DOES NOT mean lowering standards; instead, it means trying a different approach. "Intervention" is another key word – "what actions can I take to meet the learning needs of this student? RTI focuses on meeting the needs of the individual student when usual teaching strategies do not work.

Results Orientation – The PLC has a collective focus on student learning so that, above all else, student learning comes first. Collaborative teams and the PLC as a whole examine data to determine if the work has moved student success forward. Results matter; student learning as measured by student achievement on multiple measure (not just standardized tests) helps tell the story. Other data is important too. For example, has student attendance improved, is the dropout rate lower, are achievement gaps closing, are student succeeding at the next level, etc? The

measure of success in the PLC is results; this is where the focus must be and everyone must understand collaborative work is the vehicle for achieving the desired results.

Shared Mission – Where every member of the school faculty deeply understands and believes in the school's mission. The mission is about teaching and learning. Other things may be important, but none so much as the shared mission. Detailed discussions help faculties institute their shared mission.

Shared Norms – What is "normal" in our school in terms of how we do the business of teaching and learning? Norms develop in every group. The important thing is to guide the development of norm so that all group members have had input into what the norms should be. Toxic learning environments are generally places where norms are not shared by the group. When norms are shared, everyone looks out for everyone else: students don't fall through the cracks, nor do first year teachers because the norms are aimed at success for all.

Shared Values – How much time and effort has been devoted to deciding what we value in our school? Valuing something means protecting it. Valuing means creating policies, processes, and structures that assure what is valued is protected. It is easy to say we value protecting instructional time, but are there policies and procedures in place that actually do that? Or we say we value equity, but when we look at the master schedule do we find that all students have access to the best teachers?

Shared Vision – A vision is not a dream. Instead, vision is what we have all agreed (teachers and leaders, not just the principal) is where we want to see our school go. Visions are dynamic meaning actions must support the vision. Creating a shared vision and then making it become a reality requires collaborative work. Visions are more likely to be achieved when people do work collaboratively.

SMART Goals – Collaborative teams should develop SMART (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) goals to set purposeful goals that relate to their teaching practices based on student data. SMART goals should be specific in clarifying what students should learn and the level of learning during a specified time.

Socialization of new staff – When new people join the staff, they don't know the school's history. They weren't here when the current improvement initiative started, so without carefully planned orientation, they will be out of step with the work that engages the remainder of the faculty. Simply assigning a mentor is not sufficient. There needs to be a carefully planned set of opportunities for new staff to learn about vision and mission, norms and protocols, and all of the other moving parts of the school's culture and learning community.

Systems of Continuous Improvement – Researcher Anthony Bryk and his colleagues created a continuous improvement framework based on years of longitudinal research. The Georgia Department of Education has adopted this framework as the state model for continuous improvement in schools and districts. There are five dimensions that determine improvement; failure in any of the five dimensions diminishes the chances for success in raising student

achievement. The five dimensions include: effective leadership, coherent instruction, professional capacity, supportive learning environment, and family and community engagement.

Teacher Leader – Those teachers who, through formal or informal roles, engage in the process of influencing other teachers, leaders, and others in the school community to improve teaching and learning with the intent of improving student achievement (paraphrase of Jennifer York Barr's definition of teacher leadership). Teacher leaders may engage through formal roles such as coaching, mentoring, leading a grade level team, as a member of a committee, etc., or through informal processes as a member of a collaborative team, through their participation in various types of meetings, and through participation with other teachers in informal leadership activities. Teacher leader effectiveness is enhanced when the teacher leader complete training in a degree or endorsement program based on state teacher leader standards.

Trust – A key ingredient in the success of schools. Do people trust each other by believing in the goodness of their intent, by committing to care out group decisions, by sharing openly about teaching challenges without fear of violations of confidentiality? Trust involves teachers trusting one another, students, leaders, and parents. It also involves each of these groups trusting one another. Trust creates predictability in the learning community so that people can count on one another.

KEY ROLES OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Professional learning communities (PLCs) can be successful only when everyone does their part. Various people have important roles to play. Following is a list that reminds every one of the minimum they must contribute to the success of the learning community.

<u>Director of Professional Learning</u>

 Communicates the vision and expectation for PLCs in all schools at the beginning of each school year.
 Articulates the importance of PLCs to all stakeholders and works to make certain stakeholders understand how and why PLCs operate the way they do
 Holds the district accountable for PLC implementation

<u>District Staff</u>

 Facilitates the district vision for PLCs
 Provides tangible support for schools in PLC implementation and ongoing function
 Actively participates in a district PLC as well as in school PLCs
 Actively analyze data and based on analysis, provide appropriate district support to schools

<u>Principals</u>

 Holds school accountable for PLC implementation expectations
 Leads the school to create a shared mission, vision, and norms that support the development and success of the PLC

 Assures that appropriate organizational structures, including the organization of time, are in place to support the success of the PLC
 Fosters the development of a collaborative school culture aimed at high performance for adults and children
 Collects and process data and report it to support PLC work, and expect all educators to base decisions on school data
 Uses data to monitor progress and make adjustments based on data
 Provides feedback to collaborative teams
 Sets expectations for the role in the PLCs for assistant principals, service field educators such as school counselors, academic coaches and other teacher leaders, etc.
 Engages in the PLC as a learner and as one committed to the work of the PLC

Assistant Principal and/or Teacher Leaders

 Reinforces/advances the shared mission, vision, and norms of the PLC
 In daily work models the vision and expectations of the PLC
 Works with the principal to collect and process data and report it to support PLC work, and expect all educators to base decisions on school data
 Teaches and uses protocols to support the work of the PLC
 Develops and delivers professional learning for the PLC
 Supports the principals work in monitoring progress by collecting evidence of implementation
 Provides coaching/mentoring and other expert help in support of the PLC
 Engages in the PLC as a learner and as one committed to the work of the PLC

Teacher
 Actively participates in the PLC and as a member of a collaborative team
 Consistently participates in agreed upon collaborative work following the established norms and using appropriate structures that support effectiveness in the PLC
 Produces agreed upon data and share data in support of collaborative work
 Works reflectively as an individual and engages in reflective dialogue as a collaborative team member
 Provides professional feedback to collaborative team members
 Advocates for students in support of equitable treatment so that all students have access to the best learning opportunities

Other School Professionals Such as Media Specialists, Counselors and School Social Workers

 Actively participates in the PLC and as a member of a collaborative team
 Consistently participates in agreed upon collaborative work following the established norms and using appropriate structures that support effectiveness in the PLC
 Produces agreed upon data and share data in support of collaborative work
 Works reflectively as an individual and engages in reflective dialogue as a collaborative team member
 Provides professional feedback to collaborative team members
 Advocates for students in support of equitable treatment so that all students have access to the best learning opportunities

 Uses expertise to provide specific support to the PLC and its collaborative teams

<u>Paraprofessional</u>
 Supports the PLC and the work of collaborative teams
 Works with teachers to develop and implement learning materials
 Actively engages as a learner in the PLC

The Professional Learning Community Decision-Making Cycle

