



Indicator: Teachers are required to make individual professional development plans based on classroom observations. (5161)

Explanation: Classroom observations may be made by the principal or by other teachers (peer-to-peer). They provide excellent information to inform each teacher’s professional development plan. Some professional development is provided for a whole faculty, or a subject area or grade level, but each teacher also hones his or her own practice through a personal professional development plan.

Questions: Do your teachers develop individual professional development plans? Are classroom observations used to inform the teachers’ plans? What process is used for obtaining the classroom observations, discussing the results, and formalizing the results in the plan?

According to Danielson (2011), to assess the quality of teacher practice, it is essential to have a consistent shared definition of good teaching. “Everyone in the system—teachers, mentors, coaches, and supervisors—must possess a shared understanding of this definition. Having a common language to describe practice increases the value of the conversations that ensue from classroom observations” (p. 37). And it is important to have skilled evaluators who can recognize classroom examples of the different components of practice, interpret that evidence against specific levels of performance, and engage teachers in productive conversations about their practice. These evaluators need to be able to assess teachers accurately so teachers will accept their judgments as valid, and the public has confidence in the results.

According to the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the National Staff Development Council, and the Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010), some states and school districts require teachers to develop individual professional development plans that require approval. Individual professional development plans should be aligned with district and school goals for student achievement and teachers’ classroom responsibilities, including curriculum, instruction, and student assessment. Too often individual professional development plans can fragment efforts to bring about schoolwide improvement. Even when state or district policy requires individualized professional development plans, teachers should be encouraged to work collaboratively to maximize the benefits of their learning.

In a 2013 interview with *Education Week* (Rebora, 2013), Danielson said, “I think the Common Core rests on a view of teaching as complex decision making, as opposed to something more routine or drill-based. That’s a view I’ve always taken as well. It requires instructional strategies on teachers’ parts that enable students to explore concepts and discuss them with each other, to question and respectfully challenge classmates’ assertions. So I see the Common Core as a fertile and rich opportunity for really important professional learning by teachers, because—I don’t know now how to say this nicely—well, not all teachers have been prepared to teach in this way. I see that as one of the enormous challenges facing the Common Core rollout.”

When asked how much she would let teachers experiment when implementing the Common Core, Danielson said she personally would let them experiment quite a bit, because the Common Core State Standards only describe what students will learn, and there are many ways to achieve those goals. “This is a rich opportunity for good professional learning—and for teachers to work together and maybe watch videos of one another teaching, then pause the video and talk about how or why particular decisions were made. I think implementation of this will be more productive if it’s done through groups of teachers working together or with a principal or instructional coach or team leader—as opposed to having a principal say, ‘This is the way it has to be.’ It seems to me that, given the opportunity for deep professional learning work, teachers will have the expertise in this at least as much as principals or other school leaders. I mean, they’re the ones who are going to be able to say, ‘This is what Common Core looks like in algebra,’ or ‘This is what it looks like in 3rd grade reading class.’”

References and Resources

- American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, National Staff Development Council, and Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Advancing high quality professional learning through collective bargaining and state policy – An initial review and recommendations to support student learning*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.
- Danielson, C. (2011). Evaluations that help teachers learn. *The Effective Educator*, 68(4), 35–39.
- Rebora, A. (2013). Charlotte Danielson on teaching and the Common Core. *Education Week*. Retrieved from http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2013/03/13/ccio_danielson_teaching.html
- Redding, S. (2006). *The mega system: Deciding, learning, connecting*. Lincoln, IL: Academic Development Institute. Retrieved from www.adi.org.
- Redding, S. (2007). Systems for improved teaching and learning. In H. Walberg (Ed.), *Handbook on restructuring and substantial school improvement* (pp. 99–112). Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation and Improvement. Retrieved from www.adi.org.
- Walberg, H. (Ed.) (2007). *Handbook on restructuring and substantial school improvement*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement. Retrieved from www.adi.org.