

EducationWeek[®] ONLINE SUMMIT

Blind Spots in Teacher Professional Development

Thursday, October 24, 2019 • 1-3 PM

Professional development (PD) happens every year for every teacher, and yet there's broad agreement among educators that it very often misses the mark. In some places, teachers are turning their districts' attention to longstanding blind spots in PD and helping make training more targeted and meaningful. In this virtual event, Education Week reporters and their expert guests took a deep dive with you, the readers, into some of the most prevalent problems with and oversights in PD, and offered ideas for fixing them.

Thank you to those who joined us for this event, which took place on Thursday, Oct. 24, 2019. Below, you can get all the key reporter takeaways. Additionally, for those who registered ahead of the event date, you can watch the event livestream where the reporters break it all down for you.

www.edweek.org/go/TeacherPDSummit



Implicit-Bias Training: What Is It and Why Do Teachers Need It?

In some districts, teachers are learning about implicit bias in professional development—reflecting on the prejudices they might hold and developing strategies to address them. A district equity team member in Cleveland, Ohio, talked about how this training for teachers can lead to ongoing reflection around bias and equity, and eventually, change in practice. Education Week Reporter Sarah Schwartz moderated this conversation.

Guest: Lisa M. Hunt is a family engagement specialist in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District in Ohio. As a member of the district's equity task force, she leads anti-bias professional learning with teachers and other educators.

Some key takeaways from Hunt and our readers emerged in the chat:

- Create psychological safety: Implicit-bias training can be uncomfortable, because it asks people to confront stereotypes and prejudices they hold. Teachers need to be able to trust each other and facilitators in order to have these conversations. Spending time building relationships first—or asking leaders to share their personal experiences of confronting their own biases—can help build this sense of community.
- Start with leadership: Principals, instructional coaches, and other leaders play a big role in setting expectations and school culture. Starting the anti-bias training with these groups can lead to faster changes in organization-wide practice.
- Don't make it "one and done": It takes long-term planning and follow-up to change habits, especially when it comes to behaviors that might be unconscious. PD leaders need to work with teachers on goals that embed equity throughout their teaching.



Bringing 'Surprise and Delight' to Teacher Training

A former Disney World employee who now trains teachers outside Wichita, Kan., aims to give professional learning “elements of surprise and delight.” She explained how she designs can’t-miss PD sessions that teachers both love to attend and find useful once they return to the classroom. Led by Assistant Editor Alyson Klein, this discussion centered on how districts can use a little “Disney magic” to make their professional development more engaging.

Guest: Dyane Smokorowski is a technology and innovation lead teacher for Andover Public Schools in Kansas.

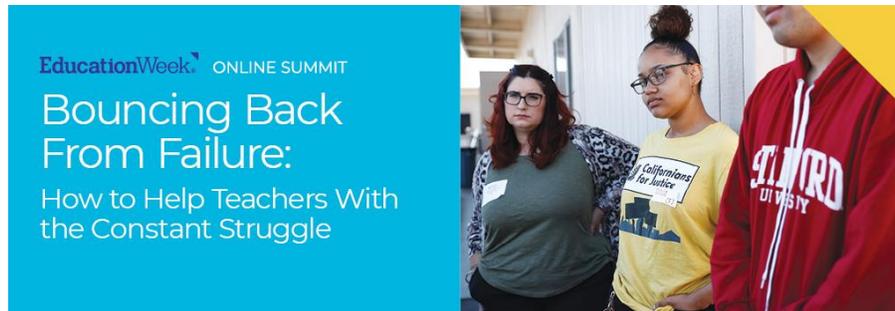
Professional development sessions are often called anything but “surprising” and “delightful.” Readers wanted to get a sense of how Smokorowski brings a Walt Disney sensibility to her professional development workshops.

Smokorowski’s suggestions included:

- Teacher field trips. That’s something that she and her team in Andover do a lot. Smokorowski suggested bringing teachers to hospitals, businesses, and janitorial service agencies. Teachers could shadow an employee for an hour, and then have an active dialogue about what they’ve learned. She also suggested “virtual field trips,” including one example in which her teachers visited an elephant sanctuary.
- Skyping in experts. Smokorowski has brought in experts from around the country to chat with her teachers through video conference. Teachers have adapted that idea for their own

classrooms. For instance, one math teacher brought in a college basketball bracket guru via videoconference to help her students better understand probability.

- Smokorowski also suggested tapping teachers ahead of time to act as a leader in PD discussions and holding teacher focus groups to get an idea of what teachers want from professional development.



Bouncing Back From Failure: How to Help Teachers With the Constant Struggle

Every teacher will experience a lesson gone wrong at some point, but few receive professional development that centers around “failing forward,” or using the experience as an opportunity for growth. In a conversation led by Education Week Reporter Madeline Will, two award-winning educators discussed ways to help teachers develop strategies to bounce back after a bad lesson.

Guests: **Jason Jowers** is the principal of Eno Valley Elementary in Durham, N.C.; **Sarah Brown Wessling** is a teacher-leader at Johnston High School in Johnston, Iowa.

Learning how to fail forward is learning how to model life-long learning for students, Jowers and Brown Wessling said. Here are some of their tips on how school leaders and coaches can foster an environment where teachers are empowered to take risks and make mistakes:

- Principals must create a school culture where teachers do not fear failing, but have the support and coaching needed to take risks in the classroom. Jowers said his philosophy as a school leader is, “Make me pull you back, don’t make me push you.” That gives them the green light to try new things, while knowing that they are not alone in their efforts.
- School leaders also need to be comfortable being open about mistakes, Brown Wessling said. If a principal asks for feedback from the teacher as well, that can help create a trusting relationship.
- Teachers should have the opportunity to come up with innovative solutions and pilot them, Jowers said. And when those ideas are successful, he said he often adopts them school-wide. That empowers teachers to continue to take risks, and those who were reluctant to experiment in the classroom now have an example of what is possible.
- Teachers often feel vulnerable when discussing mistakes or areas they’re struggling in. Brown Wessling said everyone in the school needs to get behind a common goal that is bigger than any one teacher—ideally, the students.



Making PD Work for Teachers of Students With Diverse Needs

Many English-learners and students with disabilities spend most of their days in general education classrooms, but the teachers there often lack training in how to meet their needs. It's an issue that could be tackled at least partly through school and districtwide professional development. In this discussion room, Staff Writer Corey Mitchell moderated a talk with experts that explored how schools can rethink and improve teacher training.

Guest: Janet Eichenberger Hiatt is an ESL/Diversity Consultant with the Heartland Education Agency in Johnston, Iowa; **Jennifer Flores Samson** is an associate professor and chair of special education at the Hunter College School of Education in New York City.

Key Takeaways:

- Teachers often prefer more micro or shorter online professional development sessions. Schools should also allow time for teachers to implement what they have learned in their classrooms then provide follow-up opportunities for reflection and feedback with their professional learning communities.
- Districts should offer pre-assessments to help differentiate support for educators who work with English-learners. The assessments should help districts learn more about teacher preparation in the areas of culture, language acquisition, instruction, and assessment.
- Challenge the idea that "others know better than us." There is expertise that in-house educators have that they can share with their colleagues. The benefit of utilizing or building in-house knowledge is that the experts will be available to teachers for on-going consultation versus traditional professional development that is only offered once or twice.
- Professional development cannot be the responsibility of one or a few individuals. Teacher-preparation standards should emphasize coursework and experiences. School districts and leaders need to provide quality professional development. And teachers need to recognize their own training needs and seek avenues to have them addressed.



Too Many PD Requirements, Too Little Time

Schools are feeling more pressure than ever to train their teachers on a host of non-academic issues—from suicide prevention to food allergies to sexual assault. And that’s in addition to the regularly scheduled academic PD. Many of these requirements are the result of state mandates, set by lawmakers in response to emerging concerns about child well-being. How can schools and teachers juggle it all? In Connecticut, a coalition of unions, education groups, and state education officials worked with state lawmakers to streamline teacher PD requirements.

Led by Staff Writer Evie Blad, this discussion focused on the steps that can be taken on the school, district, and state levels to address and prioritize training requirements.

Guests: **Kate Field** is a Teacher Development Specialist for the Connecticut Education Association; **Patrice McCarthy** is Deputy Director and General Counsel for the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education.

Key takeaways:

- In many cases, state teacher PD requirements build up over time, and lawmakers may not realize how new requirements overlap with some older mandates. For example, trainings related to student mental health, trauma sensitivity, and discipline may all have overlapping elements and themes that could be better addressed in a more holistic training.
- It’s possible to reduce mandates without eliminating them entirely. For example, some mandates may not need to be annual, or they could be required for a small, more tailored group of teachers rather than all educators.
- Giving teachers flexibility and building-level decision making can help increase buy-in for PD and may make it more meaningful, guests said.
- Attendees stressed that their schools are looking for ongoing coaching to accompany PD and to make it more effective.

For more information about the **Blind Spots in Teacher Professional Development**, read the entire report here: www.edweek.org/go/TeacherPD .

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