


Nancy S. Grasmick
State Superintendent of Schools

200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201 410-767-0100 410-333-6442 TTY/TDD

TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Nancy S. Grasmick 

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SUBJECT: ***Ensuring High-Quality Professional Development for All Maryland Teachers.*** The fourth report of the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Advisory Council

PURPOSE:

The purposes of this presentation are to (1) to share the fourth report of the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Advisory Council and (2) to recommend that the State Board accept the report and its recommendations.

BACKGROUND:

High-quality professional learning offers great potential for contributing to teachers' ability to help all students master challenging content. To help us realize this potential, I convened the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Advisory Council in January of 2003. My initial charge to the group included three critical tasks:

- Articulating a Maryland-specific, policy relevant definition of high-quality professional development
- Reviewing teacher professional development programs, policies, and practices across the state
- Offering recommendations for how stakeholders can work together to improve professional development.

The Council's first report, which was submitted in December 2004, presented standards for teacher professional development and offered 19 recommendations for applying the standards in creating a statewide system of high-quality professional development. These standards and the recommendations underscored the Council's conviction that teacher professional development includes a wide variety of professional learning opportunities (e.g., collaborative study, action research, workshops, college and university courses, professional networks, and professional meetings). It follows that responsibility for quality and accountability should be shared by multiple stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders, district staff and leaders, MSDE, colleges and universities, and community members.

In its second report, which was submitted in January 2006, the Council reviewed progress over the first year in implementing 17 of the 19 recommendations included in the first report.

The Council's third report, *The Pursuit of Excellence in Teacher Professional Development*, examined three issues that are critical to ongoing implementation of the teacher professional development standards. First, the Council reviewed statewide use of the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide* and planning framework and concluded that despite considerable progress, there was much work to be done. Recommendations focused on building local and state capacity to apply the standards in planning and providing high-quality professional development.

Consistent with the focus on quality, the Council also looked at the state of the art in evaluating teacher professional development in Maryland. Here, again, the Council found evidence of progress but concluded there was considerable room for improvement. The Council's report called for significant increases in both the quantity and quality of evaluation and urged districts and MSDE to focus their efforts on careful examination of (a) the impact of professional development on teacher knowledge and skills and their application in the classroom and (b) the links between specific changes in practice and changes in student learning.

Third, the Council reviewed the widespread deployment of school-based professional development staff in Maryland schools. The Council's recommendations focused on enhancing state and local infrastructures to support these positions and called for far more extensive preparation of principals and other school leaders to work with staff in these positions. The report also recommended systematic evaluations of their contributions to teacher performance and student learning.

These three reports, the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards, the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide (Updated in November 2008), the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Evaluation guide, summaries of the Council's meetings, and other documents related to the Council's work are available at MSDE's website, www.marylandpublicschools.org. The website also includes the Teacher Professional Development Spending Analysis Tool and user's guide, both of which were developed in response to ongoing questions and requests for information about district spending on teacher professional development. Click on the "Teacher Professional Development" button on the right-hand side of the homepage to access all of these materials.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In its fourth report, the Council examines (a) Maryland programs and policies to support new teachers, (b) how schools and districts find time for teacher professional development, and (c) opportunities for understanding how enrollment in college and university courses contributes to teacher knowledge and skills. Finally, the Council presents policy options for creating a statewide system of high-quality professional development.

- ***Maryland programs to support new teachers.*** After reviewing extensive information on local programs to support new teachers, the Council concluded that there is substantial variation in both the quantity and quality of supports for new teachers, including teachers who are new to the profession and those who have prior experience as teachers, but who are new to the districts. Along with other observers, the Council also notes the lack of a solid research base to support comprehensive induction programs. Nevertheless, the Council remains optimistic about the potential payoffs of rigorous and sustained programs of professional learning tailored to address the needs of new teachers and to ensure that these teachers have the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively help all students learn.

To achieve the twin goals of helping new teachers have the knowledge and skills to be successful and encouraging those who do to remain in the profession, the Council recommends modifying *Title 13A.07.01* of the Code of Maryland Administrative Regulations (COMAR) to require districts to create and maintain comprehensive teacher induction programs and to prepare staff to operate these programs. Specifically, the Council recommends that these programs include the following:

- Orientation programs for all new teachers prior to each school year
- Ongoing support from a highly-trained and skilled mentor teacher
- Frequent and regular opportunities for observing and/or co-teaching with skilled veterans and for follow-up conversations about these observations and experiences
- Ongoing professional development specifically designed to address new teachers' needs and concerns
- Ongoing formative reviews of new teacher performance based on clearly defined standards

The Council goes on to recommend that all teachers new to the district be required to participate in all core induction activities for one year and all teachers who are new to the profession be required to participate in induction activities for up to three years. The Council also recommends that districts consider:

- Reduced teaching assignment for new teachers
- Assignments with little or no responsibility for non-instructional activities other than induction support
- Assignments that do not include classes with difficult groups of students

The Council recommends rigorous biennial evaluations of induction program quality to improve ongoing quality assurance and program improvement efforts. The Council also calls on districts and their college and university partners to take advantage of professional development schools with demonstrated records of success to create pilot projects to test the feasibility of expanding these partnerships to support the transition from preservice preparation to the first three-five years of teaching assignments.

Finally, the Council calls on districts to fully fund comprehensive induction programs and suggests doing so through (a) reallocation of existing resources and (b) taking advantage of new resources from the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* and from Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

- ***Finding time for teacher engagement in high-quality professional development.*** On this issue, the Council concluded that although finding time for professional development is not without challenge, the real challenge is to use available time for *high-quality* professional development. The Council's recommendations related to this issue call on districts to take a variety of steps to ensure that principals, other school leaders, and school-based professional development staff have the knowledge and skills necessary to plan school-based professional development and that they build time into regular school schedules to accommodate professional learning that contributes to improved practice and increased student learning. The Council also recommends that MSDE examine and report on the experiences of the 12 Maryland districts that have opted to introduce and/or improve school-based professional development activities as part of their 2008 comprehensive master plans. (Please see pp. 14-15 of the report for more information about these activities.)
- ***Understanding the contributions of teacher enrollment in college and university courses to professional know and skills.*** In exploring this issue, the Council looked at the kinds of information generated by institutional accreditation reviews and reporting and the mechanisms that are in place to monitor district spending on tuition and related costs. The Council learned that although the accreditation reviews generate substantial amounts of information about candidates' knowledge and skills, the current reporting systems make it difficult to use this information to inform individual districts about their teachers' progress. In addition, the Council learned that districts have made limited efforts to learn about teachers' experiences in college and university courses and to track district spending on tuition.

To address these problems, the Council recommends that districts and colleges and universities work together to strengthen and expand existing partnerships to ensure that college and university courses address teachers' professional learning needs and district priorities in the larger context of efforts to meet accreditation standards. The Council also recommends that districts take more aggressive steps to monitor spending on tuition and related costs. (Please see pp. 24-25 for details about what these steps should include.)

- ***Establishing a system of high-quality professional development.*** Despite its observations about progress in implementing the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards*, the Council remains concerned about the lack of coherence in professional development and the resulting inefficient utilization of resources.

The Council's recommendations in this area echo themes from the Council's 2004 report, which introduced the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards*. In this report, the Council recommends

- Articulating rigorous teaching standards to define good practice and to inform all decisions about professional development content, focus, and spending
- Developing and implementing comprehensive, long-term professional development plans at the state and local levels
- Establishing state and local professional development committees to monitor and report on progress in implementing the comprehensive professional development plans and assess the scope and quality of teacher professional development.

In reviewing the Council's current report, as well as the previous reports, it is important to note that, together, the Council's recommendations and action steps have consistently reflected four themes.

- MSDE plays a critical leadership role by modeling good practice.
- Active collaboration among all stakeholders is key in any effort to improve professional development.
- Continued progress in improving professional development requires extensive capacity building at the state and local levels.
- Implementing most of the Council's the recommendations can be accomplished by improving and expanding existing programs and not necessarily by creating new programs and policy initiatives, although many of the changes will require a commitment of resources.

ACTION:

Accept the 2009 PDAC report.

NSG/cps

Attachment: ***Ensuring High Quality Professional Development for All Maryland Teachers***

