



Professional Learning Considerations for Montana Educators

Reasons for Professional Learning

There are many reasons why you may be considering a professional learning opportunity. Adults typically engage in learning to solve a problem (Ozuah, 2005). Perhaps you are looking for new teaching techniques or need to determine how to reach a student in a different way. Maybe you are looking for additional renewal units for re-licensure. Or, perhaps you are working toward salary advancement. Certain considerations should be made before choosing the professional learning opportunity that is aligned with your specific needs.

High-Quality Professional Learning

Administrative Rule of Montana [10.55.714](#) outlines the criteria for high-quality professional learning. Montana's Consolidated State Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) should also be considered, along with your school's ESSA status level of either universal support, targeted support, or comprehensive support. More information about the designations can be found on the [OPI's ESSA website](#).

When considering professional learning opportunities, consider the following questions. Does the professional learning opportunity...?

- Align with district educational objectives?
- Focus on teachers as central to student learning?
- Focus on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement?
- Respect and nurture the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community?
- Reflect proven research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership?
- Enable teachers to develop further experience in subject content, teaching strategies, use of technology, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards?
- Promote continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools?
- Require substantial time (ongoing and sustained) and other resources?
- Provide time for collaborative planning by those who will participate in and facilitate that development?
- Provide time for evaluation on the impact of the professional development on teacher effectiveness and student learning with the results of the assessment guiding subsequent professional development?
- Factor into a coherent long-term plan?
- Meet the guidelines of appropriate, robust, and effective at improving educators' instructional practices and interventions to address every student's learning needs?

Grounded in Evidence

It is likely that you have experienced professional learning that may be more focused on innovation rather than evidence. After all, it can be difficult to know what strategies and procedures are a passing fad. Some professional learning is often focused on research-based strategies and practices; however, evidence-based professional learning is now an essential component of many of the educational guidelines and statutes.

Some evidence-based professional learning practices have been identified. The practices are proven to improve student outcomes. "Examples include:

- **Reflective Practice:** Professional learning that includes reflective practice. There are numerous studies in the medical and education fields on the efficacy of implementing a reflective step in professional learning. Many professional development programs and systems include a step or section on reflective practice, where the learner (teacher) deliberately takes time to reflect on something that they have learned or observed and adapt teaching strategies according to reflection in order to improve outcomes.
- **Coaching:** Coaching is a common evidence-based practice across many occupations, and education is a field where a great deal of research has been conducted and evidence has been produced" (SETDA, 2019).

Professional Learning and Your School District

Each school district has specific rules regarding professional learning. Some schools offer more district-directed professional learning than others. Administrative Rules of Montana [10.65.101](#) and [10.65.103](#) explain how Pupil Instruction-Related (PIR) Days are calculated. "A maximum of seven PIR days may be counted with a minimum of three of the days being used for instructional/professional/in-service development/training." The PIR days require the participation of each professional staff member for a total of six hours for each approved PIR day. Therefore, your district may require 16 or more hours of district-directed professional learning, and depending on the topics of the professional learning, you may or may not earn OPI renewal units for your attendance.

School districts may also further clarify what professional learning opportunities are deemed appropriate for salary advancements. These policies are typically outlined in your district's Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

Districts are required to develop yearly Professional Development Plans. If you plan on engaging in a professional learning opportunity for salary advancement that is outside of the district's Professional Development Plan, it is best to contact appropriate district personnel to ensure that your professional learning opportunity meets the criteria established by the district.

Specific Licensure Requirements

Depending on your license, you will need to engage in professional learning that meets certain requirements. The requirements for each licensure type are available on the [OPI's Licensure website](#).

References

- Ozuah, P. O. (2005). First, There Was Pedagogy and Then Came Andragogy. Retrieved October 31, 2019, from <http://ojs.library.einstein.yu.edu/index.php/EJBM/article/view/90/90>.
- SETDA. (2019). Professional Learning: Evidence-Based Practices. Retrieved November 17, 2019 from <https://www.setda.org/priorities/professional-learning/evidence-based/>.