Seven Keys to Effective Professional Development

In this Kappan article, Chicago-based consultants Robin Fogarty and Brian Pete present seven characteristics of effective PD:

• **It is sustained.** Adult learning occurs best when a professional development initiative is sustained over time, with regularly scheduled team meetings to process material and multiple options for all staff to be engaged. There should be a variety of time-slots (summer, after school, Saturday) and formats (collaborative, independent, face-to-face, remote). “When staff sense that this is a major initiative that is not going away,” say Fogarty and Pete, “teachers are more likely to get on board early and to expend genuine effort.”

• **It is job-embedded.** When teachers know they can get support any time they need it, an initiative is much more likely to succeed. “Peer coaching, expert coaching, teacher facilitators, and lead teachers are needed on site in every building,” say Fogarty and Pete. “…The evidence is clear: Coaching makes a difference.”

• **It enlists teacher teams.** “When teachers put their heads together over student-centered concerns,” say Fogarty and Pete, “that team effort can be the most powerful school improvement tool in the school.” But teams need time, support, goals, facilitation, and protocols to function well.

• **Learning is hands-on and interactive.** Teachers learn best when training includes clear expectations, solid content, and pedagogy that involves working with partners, trios, and table teams to think through and apply concepts.

• **Different modalities are used.** Research suggests that PD should use all appropriate channels, including face-to-face, Internet, web-based, book study groups, action research, data analysis, collaborative planning, reflective questioning, seeing model lessons, and engaging in peer dialogues, journaling, and conferencing.

• **It is practical.** Persuading teachers that training will be useful in their classrooms is one of the best ways to get them engaged. But transfer and application also need to be addressed.

• **It is results-oriented.** When a new initiative makes a positive difference in teachers’ classrooms, it has immediate credibility and is much more likely to be sustained.