

Evaluation Brief

U.S. Department of Education
Office of the Under Secretary
Planning and Evaluation Service



TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN TITLE I SCHOOLS: RECENT EVIDENCE FROM THE NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL SURVEY OF SCHOOLS

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEF

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, promotes high-quality professional development to improve the teaching of academic subjects in order to help all children meet student performance standards.

This evaluation brief addresses the general question: *What is the status of professional development in Title I schools?* The brief uses data from school years (SY) 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 to examine professional development at the school level and the teacher level. At the teacher level, the brief discusses the content, duration, and perceived effects of professional development; professional development for teaching special populations of students; and less traditional forms of professional development (e.g., mentoring programs) and the duration and perceived effects of these forms of professional development. At the school level, it describes what policies exist regarding the inclusion of and support for teacher aides in professional development activities.

This study found that only about half of teachers said that professional development led them to change their teaching practices, although those who participated in activities such as common planning time and formal mentoring on an ongoing basis

and for a longer duration were more likely to say that their teaching improved.

However, most teachers of students from special populations did not participate in professional development to address the needs of special population students. They felt less well prepared to address the needs of these students compared with how well prepared teachers were to teach their main subject area or to teach to content standards. Many schools included teacher aides in professional development, although few districts had career ladders that offered them opportunities for advancement. Finally, most teachers said that they would like the chance to participate in additional professional development activities.

DATA

This evaluation brief reports on data obtained through the National Longitudinal Survey of Schools (NLSS), a nationally representative survey of principals and teachers in Title I Schools in SY 1998-1999. Designed and conducted by Westat, the principal and teacher surveys of the NLSS were first fielded during SY 1998-1999; schools that remained in Title I status were followed for the next two

through SY 2000–2001¹. The surveys focus on whether and how schools are implementing standards-based reforms and the provisions of Title I. The total sample size for the NLSS was 1,507 Title I schools. The total number of responding schools was 1,081 in SY 1998-1999 and 987 in SY 1999-2000; the total number of responding teachers was 2,657 in SY 1998-1999 and 5,414 in SY 1999-2000.²

It should be kept in mind that the analyses reported here are based on survey data, which rely on respondents' self-reports. Self-reports may reflect socially desirable responses. In addition, the findings generally present sub-group comparisons among variables of interest and are not meant to suggest causality.

ONLY HALF OF TEACHERS REPORTED THAT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES LED THEM TO CHANGE THEIR TEACHING PRACTICES

Teachers who received professional development in a given content area were asked what impact it had on their teaching practice: whether it confirmed what they were already doing, led them to change their teaching practice, or had little or no impact (Exhibit 1). Teacher reports regarding the impact of professional development on their instruction were relatively consistent across topic areas.

Only about half of the teachers receiving professional development in a given area reported that it led to a change in their teaching practice; less than 10 percent of

¹In 1998-1999 the NLSS sample was nationally representative of Title I schools. The sample was not refreshed and consequently is not representative of all Title I schools in subsequent years.

²The section on professional development on the teacher survey was matrix sampled in SY 1998-1999. Thus, only half of all teachers in the full NLSS sample answered this section in SY 1998-1999; hence the sample of teachers is smaller than in SY 1999-2000.

teachers reported that the professional development had had little or no impact; and about 40 percent reported that it confirmed what they were already doing.

The only deviation from this pattern was professional development around integrating educational technology into the classroom. In this area, teachers were significantly less likely to report that the professional development confirmed what they were already doing compared with other professional development topics (21 percent compared to approximately 40 percent).³ This difference may be due to the fact that many teachers may have limited experience in integrating educational technology into the classroom.

Overall, 57 percent of teachers who participated in such professional development reported that it led them to change their teaching practice while 22 percent of participating teachers reported that it had little or no impact on their teaching practice.⁴

³ Throughout this brief, “significant” is used in a statistical sense, to indicate that the difference between two estimates is significant at a 0.05 probability level or better.

⁴This is similar to what we found in SY 1998-1999. Compared with the other professional development topics, teachers ranked professional development in the use of technology as the most effective in terms of causing them to change their teaching practices, with 65 percent reporting that it had had an impact on their teaching practice. About 14 percent reported that it had had little or no impact, and 21 percent that it had confirmed what they were already doing. However, the wording of the question was slightly different, asking about professional development in the use of technology, rather than integrating educational technology into the classroom.

Exhibit 1. Teacher Reports about Participation in Professional Development Activities and Effect on Teaching Practice, SY 1999-2000

	Participated in Activity	Effect of Professional Development		
		Changed teaching practice	Confirmed teaching practice	Little or no impact
Percentage of teachers				
Teaching the subject area in your main teaching assignment	78.0	51.7	44.1	4.2
Teaching to content standards in reading	79.0	51.4	39.8	8.7
Teaching to content standards in mathematics	66.0	52.9	38.6	8.4
Integrating educational technology into your classroom	71.5	57.4	20.5	22.0
Use of student assessment techniques	57.0	51.9	39.2	8.8
Use of the research-based model adopted by your school	75.6	52.5	38.3	9.2

Exhibit reads: 78.0 percent of teachers in Title I schools reported that they had received professional development to teach the subject area in their main teaching assignment. Of those teachers who received professional development in the subject area of their main assignment, 51.7 percent reported that this led them to change their teaching practice; 44.1 percent reported it confirmed their teaching practice; and 4.2 percent reported that it had little or no impact.

Source: NLSS Teacher Survey, SY 1999-2000, Section D, Q. TD1C, TD1D

Notes: Questions were asked only of teachers who reported receiving professional development in the past 12 months.

Questions regarding content standards were asked of teachers who taught the specific subject and were familiar with content standards.

Question regarding the use of research-based model adopted by the school was asked of teachers in schools that had adopted such models.

TEACHERS ENGAGED IN ACTIVITIES FOR A LONGER DURATION WERE MORE LIKELY TO REPORT THAT THE ACTIVITY IMPROVED THEIR TEACHING PRACTICE “TO A GREAT EXTENT” THAN TEACHERS ENGAGED FOR A SHORTER DURATION

More than 40 percent of teachers who participated in common planning time and formal mentoring relationships reported

that participation had improved their classroom teaching “to a great extent,” compared with 26 percent who participated in a network of outside teachers. The only significant difference between reports of teachers in the highest-poverty and lowest-poverty secondary schools was regarding the effect of participating in a network of teachers outside the district on improving teaching (39 percent versus 21 percent).

Exhibit 2. Teacher Reports about Changes in Teaching Practice Due to Participation in Different Types of Professional Development Activities, by Frequency of the Activity, SY 1999-2000

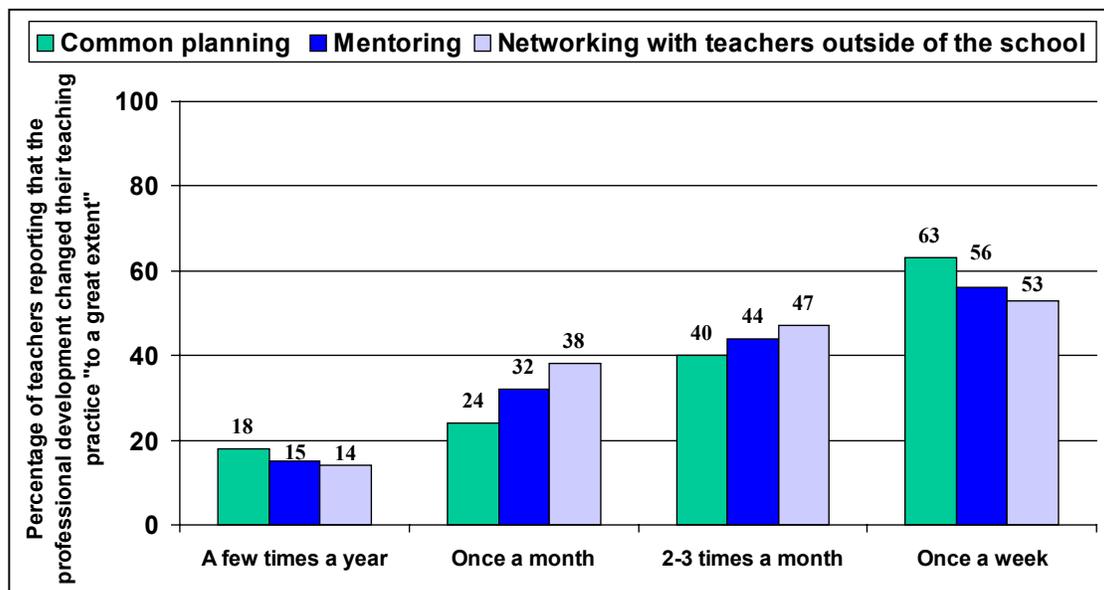


Exhibit reads: 18 percent of teachers who participated in common planning a few times a year reported that it changed their teaching practice “to a great extent.”

Source: NLSS Teacher Survey, SY 1999-2000, Section G, Q. TD2A

A link between duration and perceived effectiveness was found. Teachers reported greater improvement in teaching practices for activities that were ongoing and frequent than activities that were of a short duration. Exhibit 2 shows that, of the teachers who reported engaging in common planning time a few times a year, approximately 18 percent reported that it improved their teaching practice “to a great extent.” This figure compares to 24 percent of teachers who engaged in the activity once a month, 40 percent of those who engaged in the activity 2-3 times per month, and 63 percent of those who engaged in the activity on a weekly basis. All these differences were significant, and the same trend holds for mentoring and networking activities.

TEACHERS IN THE HIGHEST-POVERTY SCHOOLS WERE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO REPORT THAT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THEIR CONTENT AREA WAS ONGOING THAN TEACHERS IN THE LOWEST-POVERTY SCHOOLS

Prior evaluation studies have shown that professional development is likely to be high quality (i.e. result in changing teacher practice) when it is sustained and intensive and promotes coherence in teachers’ professional development (Garet et al., 1999, 2001; Parsad et al., 2001).

In SY 1998-1999, teachers receiving professional development in a number of areas were asked about the frequency of the activity: one-time activity; ongoing activity this year; or ongoing, multiyear activity.

A greater percentage of teachers in the highest-poverty schools (47 percent in elementary and 61 percent in secondary) reported receiving ongoing, multiyear professional development in subject area content than teachers in the lowest-poverty schools (27 percent in elementary schools and 32 percent in secondary schools). [Exhibit 3] Forty percent of the highest-poverty elementary school teachers reported that professional development for strategies to teach to content standards was an ongoing, multiyear activity compared with only 20 percent of elementary teachers in the lowest-poverty schools; this difference was significant. Teachers in the highest-poverty schools were more likely to report that the professional development focused on strategies for using assessment results was ongoing and multiyear (29 percent in elementary and 40 percent secondary schools) compared with teachers in the lowest-poverty schools (16 percent in elementary and 9 percent in secondary schools). These differences were significant.⁵

In SY 1999-2000, overall, teachers receiving professional development in their content area reported an average of 34 hours of professional development in their content area. This figure increased significantly from the 22 hours in SY 1998-1999. Secondary teachers in the highest-poverty Title I schools reported significantly more professional development in their content area compared with secondary teachers in the lowest-poverty Title I schools (39 versus 22 hours).

Teachers in schools that adopted research-based comprehensive school reform models reported receiving about 28 hours of professional development in the use of the model. Elementary teachers in the highest-poverty Title I schools with models reported significantly more professional development in the use of the model compared with elementary teachers in the lowest-poverty Title I schools with models (33 versus 18 hours).

⁵ We investigated whether the difference between the highest-poverty schools and the lowest-poverty schools could be explained by the fact that a greater percentage of the highest-poverty schools were in need of improvement under Title I, and consequently may have received increased professional development. However, we found that the relationship was driven by poverty and not in-need status. For example, the same difference exists between the highest-poverty and the lowest-poverty schools for schools not identified as in need of improvement.

Exhibit 3. Teacher Reports about the Duration of Professional Development Activities by Poverty Status, SY 1998-1999

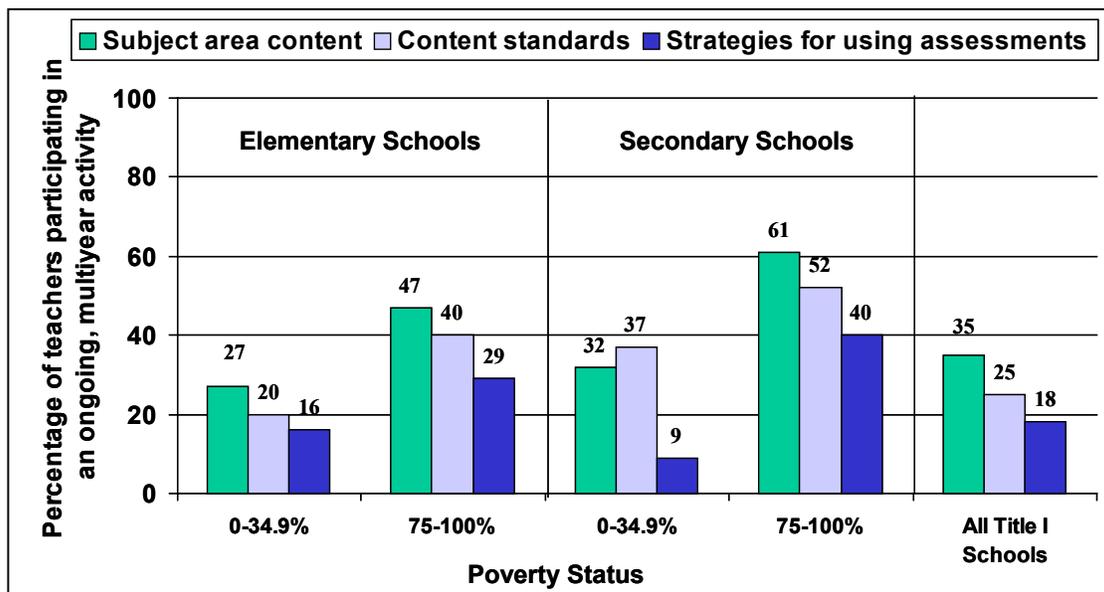


Exhibit reads: 27 percent of teachers in the lowest-poverty Title I elementary schools who received professional development in their subject area content reported that this professional development was an ongoing, multiyear activity.

Source: NLSS Teacher Survey, SY 1998-1999, Section D, Q. TD1A

Note: Questions were asked only of teachers who reported receiving professional development in the specified content area in the past 12 months.

TEACHERS WHO RECEIVED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF SPECIAL POPULATIONS OF STUDENTS REPORTED MUCH HIGHER LEVELS OF TEACHER PREPAREDNESS THAN THOSE WHO DID NOT RECEIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

About 52 percent of the teachers of students with limited English proficiency and 56 percent of teachers of migrant students who had received professional development in these areas reported being well prepared, compared with only 14 and 19 percent of those who did not participate in such professional development. These differences were significant.

Compared with the over 80 percent who felt well prepared to teach the subject area in their main assignment or the three-quarters who felt well prepared to teach to content standards, a much smaller percentage—only about 30-39 percent—of teachers of special population students reported feeling well prepared to address their needs.

Exhibit 4 shows the percentage of teachers of special population students who reported that they felt prepared “to a great extent” to address the needs of these students. In addition, we also show the same data disaggregated by whether or not they had received professional development in the specific area.

Exhibit 4. Teacher Reports about the Extent to Which They Felt Well Prepared to Address the Needs of Special Population Students, by Whether Teachers Received Professional Development in that Area, SY 1999-2000

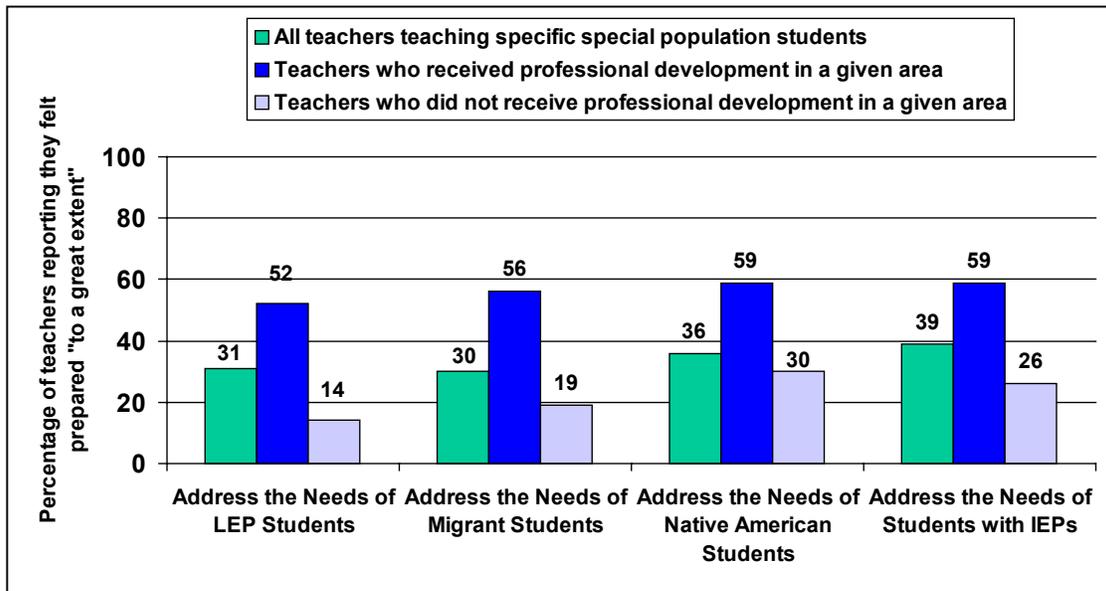


Exhibit reads: 31 percent of all teachers of students with limited English proficiency reported that they felt prepared “to a great extent” to address the needs of such students. This was true of 52 percent of teachers of students with limited English proficiency who received professional development in this area and 14 percent of teachers of these students who did not.

Source: NLSS Teacher Survey, SY 1999-2000, Section D, Q. TD1B, TD1C

Notes: Questions were asked only of teachers who reported receiving professional development in the past 12 months.

Questions were asked of teachers who reported teaching specific special population students, with the exception of the question relating to students with IEPs, which was asked of all teachers who reported receiving professional development in the past 12 months.

WHILE A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS INCLUDED TEACHER AIDES IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES, FEW DISTRICTS HAD CAREER LADDERS FOR TEACHER AIDES

In SY 1999-2000, 89 percent of the principals reported that teacher aides were included in professional development activities. This was essentially unchanged from SY 1998-1999.

Because teacher aides are widely used in Title I schools and are involved in direct instructional activities, there is considerable interest in helping teacher aides receive more education and

professional development.⁶ Almost all the principals in Title I schools reported having teacher aides in their schools.

The percentages of teacher aides included in professional development were much higher in the highest-poverty schools—41 percent in elementary and 70 percent in secondary schools, compared with 25 percent and 13 percent in the lowest-poverty elementary and secondary schools respectively. The difference was significant at the secondary level.

⁶See Kirby, McCombs, Murray, Naftel, and Berends (In review) for details on the use of teacher aides in Title I schools.

While a large percentage of the schools included teacher aides in their professional development activities, few districts had career ladders for these aides, according to principals (Exhibit 5). Overall, in SY 1999-2000 about 30 percent of principals in schools that had teacher aides and included them in professional development activities reported that their district provided career ladders for teacher aides.⁷

About a quarter of the schools offered funding or release time for aides to take higher education courses. About 18 percent of principals reported that their schools offered release time for the teacher aides to take a class or study for their high school diploma or GED, while less than 10 percent offered funding for high school diploma or GED classes.

Compared with the lowest-poverty schools, the highest-poverty schools were generally more likely to provide support for teacher aides through these various means. Many of these differences were significant, particularly at the secondary level.

MORE THAN HALF OF TEACHERS REPORTED WANTING ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Compared with teachers in the lowest-poverty Title I secondary schools, a significantly higher percentage of secondary school teachers in the highest-poverty settings reported that they would have liked additional professional development in SY 1998-1999 (69 percent compared with 50 percent).

Of those who desired additional professional development and had not received it in a given area, training in the

⁷It is difficult to compare trends over time because the comparable question in SY 1998-1999 was asked of all principals who reported having teacher aides at their school, while in SY 1999-2000, the question was asked only of principals who reported having teacher aides at their school and that they were included in professional development activities.

use of technology and training for strategies to teach low-achieving students were the most popular preferred options (83 percent each). About 74 percent of the teachers who responded to this particular set of items would have liked professional development in instructional strategies and subject area content. About 60-68 percent of these teachers said they wanted professional development in teaching to content standards, approaches to assessment, using assessment results, and strengthening parent involvement.

CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned earlier, the analyses reported here are based on survey data that rely on respondents' self-reports, which can be subject to socially desirable responses. However, the data do provide interesting information regarding teachers' perceptions of their professional development. We conclude with three highlights from the data analysis.

First, only half of teachers who received professional development on various topics reported that the professional development changed their teaching practice.

Second, like other evaluations, we found a link between duration and perceived effects of professional development. Teachers engaging in certain activities for a longer duration were more likely to report that it changed their teaching practice than teachers who had engaged in the activities for a shorter period of time.

Third, teachers in the highest-poverty schools appear to be receiving more on-going, multi-year professional development experiences than teachers in the lowest-poverty schools. However, there is opportunity to increase such professional development for all teachers, as less than half of teachers in the highest-poverty schools and less than a third of teachers in the lowest-poverty schools received on-going, multi-year professional development in their content area.

Exhibit 5. Principal Reports about the Professional Development Opportunities for Teacher Aides in their School, SY 1999-2000

	Title I Elementary Schools		Title I Secondary Schools		All Title I Schools
	Lowest-poverty (0-34.9%)	Highest-poverty (75-100%)	Lowest-poverty (0-34.9%)	Highest-poverty (75-100%)	
Percentage responding "yes"					
Are teacher aides included in your professional development activities? ^a	79.8	87.4	91.6	92.9	89.3
Percentage of schools with teacher aides that include them in professional development activities					
Does your district support educational improvement for teacher aides through: ^b					
Career ladder for teacher aides?	24.5	40.9	12.6	70.2	30.0
Funding for higher education classes?	20.0	36.0	5.9	37.5	25.5
Release time for classwork or studying for higher education courses?	14.3	25.8	24.3	37.8	24.6
Release time for classwork or studying for a high school diploma or GED?	15.5	17.3	3.9	58.6	18.3
Funding for high school diploma or GED classes?	1.7	14.6	2.1	17.7	8.9

Exhibit reads: 79.8 percent of principals in the lowest-poverty Title I elementary schools reported that teacher aides are included in their professional development activities.

Source: NLSS Principal Survey, SY 1999-2000, Section G, Q. PG3, PD20

Notes: ^aQuestion asked of principals who reported having teacher aides at their school.

^bQuestions asked of principals who reported having teacher aides at their school and that they were included in professional development activities.

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