



**Creating High Quality
Professional Development
Opportunities in
Gifted Education**

Ohio Department of Education

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OFFICE FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN – GIFTED SERVICES

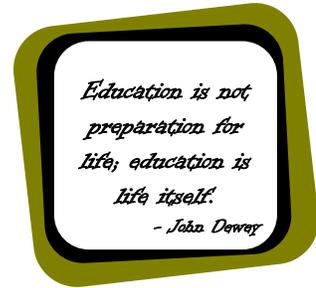
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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to define High Quality Professional Development (HQPD) as it relates to gifted education. It begins with an overview of professional development and proceeds to the five-step process districts may use to implement professional development with general education teachers who have gifted students in their classes.



This document was designed to be used by anyone interested in understanding or implementing professional development. The intended audience for this work includes personnel responsible for district professional development plans, such as local professional development committees (LPDC), administrators and gifted coordinators. Individual teachers may also find it useful to understand the process of HQPD as they design their own individual professional development plans.

Background

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) stipulates that all teachers participate in high quality professional development (HQPD) each year. Further, Title IX, Section 9101 (34) of NCLB requires that the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), using data supplied by school principals, report the numbers of teachers participating in HQPD. To satisfy the reporting requirements, teachers must certify their participation by answering "yes" to three questions:

1. Was the professional development (PD) activity focused on skills and knowledge needed to support higher levels of student achievement?
NCLB includes PD activities such as:
 - Teaching the subject matter and academic content standards;
 - Improving classroom management;
 - Using research-based strategies;
 - Meeting the needs of limited English proficient (LEP) students and special needs students;
 - Utilizing data and assessments; and
 - Involving parents.
2. Did the PD activity align with the goals of the district's Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan as developed by district stakeholders?
3. Was the PD activity sustained and ongoing? That is, was it designed with follow up to ensure the knowledge and skills were acquired and then implemented in the classroom (for example, follow-up activities, measures to evaluate increased teacher effectiveness and improved student academic achievement)?

The state of Ohio is committed to creating a world-class educational system for all children. Policy to support this movement has established a standards-based system that applies to student learning as well as clearly defined expectations for teachers and school leaders. To this end, the Ohio Educator

Standards Board has created the Standards for Ohio Educators, which includes a definition for professional development. A full copy of the report and standards can be found on the Ohio Department of Education Web site, www.ode.state.oh.us, keyword search: *HQPD*.

Six standards define High Quality Professional Development (HQPD) in Ohio:

1. HQPD is a purposeful, structured and continuous process that occurs over time.
2. HQPD is informed by multiple sources of data.
3. HQPD is collaborative.
4. HQPD includes varied learning experiences that accommodate the individual educator's knowledge and skills.
5. HQPD is evaluated by its short- and long-term impact on professional practice and achievement of all students.
6. HQPD results in the acquisition, enhancement or refinement of skills and knowledge.

Evaluating professional development according to these standards is not based on quantity of time but the quality of the experience. Gifted education staff can provide leadership to the district by being informed about opportunities and knowing how to add the necessary supports for teachers to implement strategies in gifted education throughout the year.

Professional development, as defined in these standards, is aligned with the requirements for gifted staff to work collaboratively with general education teachers to meet the curriculum and instruction needs of gifted children.

HQPD is an ongoing process that is measured in terms of change in knowledge that ultimately affects instruction. Gifted education staff in the district can provide support by sharing knowledge about gifted education and helping teachers to implement strategies that are most appropriate for gifted students.

In addition to the federal requirements, the Operating Standards for Identifying and Serving Gifted Students (Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) 3301-51-15) specify that general education teachers who have gifted students clustered in the classroom must participate in professional development on gifted education. Therefore, professional development offered by the district must include topics in gifted pedagogy. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to those who wish to create high quality professional development that satisfies both state and federal specifications.

Identifying Current Practices

Traditionally, professional development has been defined in terms of workshops and meetings where groups of educational professionals came together to learn new information or instructional techniques. Historically, professional development workshops spanned one day or less and were organized around special topics of interest to the staff. More recently, professional development has become a purposeful process by which committees make decisions about in-service schedules based on specific

criteria, such as those defined in continuous improvement plans. The real goal of the new regulations is to provide structure for teacher training to best meet the needs of students. In most cases, *what* we study in professional development is not different from before, but *how* we engage participants may be vastly different. Districts have to be very specific about the opportunities offered to teachers, focusing on student testing and deficiencies. As a result, the needs of gifted and advanced students who may be earning acceptable grades and test scores, but not learning to full potential, rarely make it onto the list of topics. To guarantee that training includes topics about all students, Gifted Coordinators should be involved with the district team that plans the professional development.

The point of this section is to review current practice and find ways to incorporate available opportunities into a plan that satisfies all needs. Many professional development options are available for teachers, and it takes just a small amount of planning to make sure the experiences satisfy the requirements for HQPD. For example, having the opportunity to attend a state or national conference on gifted education is an excellent beginning, but by itself, does not satisfy the standards outlined by the Ohio Educator Standards Board. However, if this experience is just one in a series of lectures or workshops on a specific topic that will be attended throughout the year, the case could be made for including a one-hour session on the individual professional development plan (IPDP). Creating a plan that can be supported is vital to the process.

Individual professional development plans are designed and managed by district level committees, but there are common practices that should be followed. One such practice is that each plan must include learning goals that describe the purpose of the activity. Each goal should include a statement of action that defines how learning will occur. Next, there should be a description of an area of practice. The final component of the learning goal will be the product or skill that will document the outcome desired. Following are typical goals related to gifted education:

- Become skilled at using curriculum-compacting to meet the needs of gifted students in the classroom.
- Explore the concept of challenge and complexity to adapt curriculum for gifted students.
- Study differentiation techniques and create new learning activities for all students in the classroom.
- Learn more about the social and emotional needs of gifted students in order to create a more supportive classroom.

Similarly to student learning goals, educator learning goals should be outcome-based and measurable. Goals should be guided by the current assignment and a desire for additional training or knowledge acquisition. Being reflective will help guide the plan toward purposeful learning. Using a simple technique like a K-W-L (what do you know, what do you want to know, what have you learned) list is a good place to start. Educators should ask themselves three questions: What do I know about curriculum for the gifted? What do I want to know about gifted education? What do I need to know about the gifted students in my classroom?

Those who are not part of the district planning process can begin by obtaining a schedule of the professional development opportunities to be offered in the district for the upcoming year. Educators should find topics that pertain to their individual needs—for example, teaching gifted students—looking for general sessions like “differentiation” and specific techniques like the Socratic Method. They can compare the district’s offerings to their own current knowledge base and interest in professional growth, thinking about how they can mix and match opportunities like one-day meetings, licensure courses, online options and mini-courses. Finally, they should seek out the district’s gifted education staff for consultation and find ways to collaborate to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the gifted students.

If an educator *is* part of the planning team that creates the PD for the district, a detailed plan for creating high quality experiences for teachers is provided.

Five Steps to Implementing HQPD for Gifted Students

1. Create a Learning Community

The first step in implementing HQPD is to identify the facilitators and participants. Facilitators should be gifted education staff members, or those with extensive knowledge of gifted education, who will be responsible for organizing and implementing the professional development. Gifted Coordinators are charged with providing support to staff. Gifted Intervention Specialists (GIS) may also support professional development efforts and may work in consultation with teachers for up to 25 percent of instructional time. Regardless of who provides the professional development, it is an excellent opportunity for gifted education personnel and other staff to work collaboratively and make an impact on the general school culture.

The Operating Standards for Identifying and Serving Gifted Students (OAC 3301-51-15) requires that teachers who have gifted students clustered in their classrooms have professional development and ongoing support in the area of gifted pedagogy. Therefore, the participant group should include any teacher who will be assigned a cluster of gifted students as well as other interested staff. As school administrators and other professional staff have important roles in gifted education, professional development opportunities in gifted education should not be limited to teachers. Differentiated professional development opportunities should be provided to principals, guidance counselors, school psychologists and curriculum leaders to maximize the impact of training on district practice. Districts must be sure that all participants understand the requirements of participating in HQPD and, particularly, its ongoing nature of it.

A learning community adds purpose, structure and collaboration and enhances the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Learning communities are groups of individuals who come together for a common goal and share experiences as they learn about a specific topic, in this case, gifted education. The learning community concept takes professional development beyond the

traditional workshop configuration by adding a networking component that fosters collaboration. Group members share goals and work together to accomplish them. The group also creates a fluid structure for the professional development that fosters individual or small-group support. Creating a learning community with the participants gives them a network upon which to rely and encourages ongoing commitment to learning.

There is no set structure for a learning community. It should be organized to fit within the cultural framework of the district and be flexible enough to fit into a schedule that is easily accessed by group members. Some communities are more formal, with set meetings on fixed dates. Others are more fluid, with meetings planned by group consensus. While it is helpful and timely to use online options such as e-mail and discussion boards to keep the group updated on information, it is important to make time for face-to-face networking. Teaching is a hands-on profession, and training teachers should include demonstrations of skills and discussions of real-life applications. Finally, the forming of a learning community satisfies the standards requiring HQPD to be collaborative and to include varied learning experiences that accommodate the individual educator's knowledge and skills.

2. Define the Intent

While the overall intent of professional development that meets the requirements of OAC 3301-51-15 is to provide support in gifted education pedagogy, it is still important for the group to define the specific topics to be covered. Each member of the group will come with a unique set of experiences and varied background knowledge on gifted education. Each person will have a specific reason for participation. Ask group members to bring copies of their individual professional development plans to share or to complete as a result of the group's work. A clear understanding of the needs of the participants will guarantee that the opportunities planned are interesting and purposeful. This step will satisfy the standards requiring HQPD to be purposeful, structured and informed by multiple sources of data.

Defining the intent and determining the knowledge level of the group can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Districts may choose to send out formal pre-tests that measure knowledge or conduct a brainstorming session that results in a list of current practices. Inventories, surveys and questionnaires can be completed in a face-to-face setting, put in mailboxes or sent as attachments to e-mail. The choice of format depends on the accepted practices of the district.

At this point, the facilitator should use her or his expertise to help the group define appropriate pedagogy in gifted education. Facilitators should be well-versed in gifted curriculum and instruction and also understand the needs of gifted students. In addition, it is helpful if the participants understand their own teaching styles and how they interact with the learning preferences of the student in the classroom.

When identifying the topics for the PD plan, the facilitator should try to maintain a balance between knowledge and skills. Topics that are based on specific techniques that can be infused into the curriculum are always more successful than general, theory-based ideas with no direct tie-in to the daily

schedule. Altering current lesson plans may be a more efficient use of time for experienced teachers, while new teachers may appreciate being given time to create new lessons or units. Always keep in mind that the purpose of the PD is to provide teachers with the tools they need to work with gifted children.

3. Investigate Opportunities and Resources

After the group determines the specific topics that will be investigated, the facilitator should begin collecting information about opportunities and resources for the group. The goal of this exercise is to identify a wide array of information to meet the varied learning styles of the participants. This process addresses the requirement of HQPD for using multiple sources of data and includes varied learning experiences to accommodate individual needs as described in the standards.

In this brochure, we have defined an opportunity as any formal gathering organized to instruct a group of participants. The facilitator should begin by looking for meetings or workshops that focus on the topics chosen. Start locally by reviewing district, ESC or county calendars. Next, branch out to state-wide venues and then to national organizations. Look for special-topic courses at colleges and universities across the state. Check with local, state and national organizations to see if experts in the topic are scheduled or could be scheduled. Also think about local talent and how to showcase teachers who are implementing the ideas being investigated. Finally, investigate online options. Webinars and video conferences are becoming very popular because they are cost effective ways to interact with national experts. Naturally, this is an option only for facilitators who have the requisite technology support.

When searching for resources, keep an open mind about format so the learning preferences of participants can be accommodated. For the purposes of this discussion, the reference to resources is limited to teacher resources only. Later, the need for student or content resources will be addressed. There are traditional sources like textbooks for background information and workbooks that guide implementation. Trade books also are a good source for understanding the experiences of someone in a similar situation. Consider adding biographies or phenomenological accounts. Visual materials (videos, DVDs) also are good sources for information. Many commercially-prepared training materials include paper and video resources that can be used a part of or as a whole program. There is an abundance of technology-based resources that can be incorporated into any professional development plan. The internet contains primary and secondary sources useful for knowledge acquisition and lesson planning. In addition to books and other paper resources, consider adding software titles to the district's professional development library.

One of the most comprehensive programs for professional development is the ODE Javits Project, I-GET-GTEd. This is a Web-based repository of information that can be modified for use with groups of varying sizes. There are materials for traditional face-to-face workshops as well as options for small groups or individuals to access the material for independent study. The Web site is organized according to modules of information specifically targeted to groups of school personnel: parents, administrators, school psychologists, school counselors and general education teachers. Each

module contains information about gifted education, including identification, programming (differentiation, acceleration, WEP) and social/emotional needs. The information is presented in multiple formats including video, text and interactive discussions. The teacher module contains materials on specific differentiation strategies that can be incorporated into a plan for ongoing support to classroom teachers. Access to the Web site is free to districts with gifted education staff members who have participated in a regional training session. E-mail gifted@ode.state.oh.us for more information.

4. Make a Schedule

Creating a schedule raises the question of time requirements. HQPD is not defined by time, but by quality of the experience. HQPD should be ongoing, which means it is not restricted to any time frame, but it should be part of the life-long learning process for the teacher. For this project, the facilitator will create a schedule for the year. There should also be a discussion with the participants about how this professional development program fits into the overall plan they have for continuous progress in their professional lives.

The schedule should include time for formal and informal meetings as well as accommodations for whole-group, small-group and individual needs. Effective professional development includes time for knowledge acquisition, opportunities for practicing new skills and follow-up support or coaching. It is best to begin with a formal overview session that includes workshop time to plan implementation. The purpose of this opening session is to impart the requisite knowledge of content and skills needed, so teachers can provide instruction to gifted students. Next, the schedule should allow time for participants to practice new skills in the classroom. Facilitators should be available to provide support to participants during the practice phase. Follow-up whole-group or small-group information sessions could be arranged to provide clarification. These additional sessions could be differentiated for the participants based on prior knowledge or anticipated skill acquisition needs.

Another way to organize the schedule is to use a layered approach. The underlying activity for the year will be that the participants are working in classrooms providing differentiated instruction to gifted students. Supporting that will be whole-group or small-group workshops on content and skills needed to teach gifted students. An additional layer will be the coaching provided by the facilitator, who will meet individually or in small groups to provide individual assistance. The final layer will be the networking that comes with being a member of the learning community for professional development.

When planning the schedule, be flexible about how and where the activities occur. For example, some groups use an online format to define their learning community. Information and materials are kept on a Web site and communication is via email or discussion boards. Other groups have informal lunch meetings or gather after school. The most important considerations are to understand the culture of the group and each individual's interaction with the material and with each other. Proper planning at this step will guarantee compliance with standards requiring HQPD to be purposeful, structured and a continuous process that occurs over time.

5. Celebrate Success

The final step in the HQPD process should be to identify avenues for the group to share accomplishments. This process addresses the standards for evaluating short- and long-term impact on professional practice and the acquisition, enhancement or refinement of skills and knowledge.

Evaluating effectiveness during HQPD is a formative process and should include a plan for participant reflection. Among the indicators of success are changes in behavior and practice as witnessed in lesson plan appraisals and classroom observations. Student achievement is also a data point that can be used to evaluate changes in instructional practice. Teachers should also be encouraged to reflect on practices as they occur. The facilitator is a valuable resource during this process, but the importance of peer review cannot be ignored. Encouraging peer-to-peer evaluation will reinforce the ongoing and sustainable nature of HQPD because group members will learn to rely on each other for support beyond the time period allotted for the professional development.

The final evaluation is to determine what further skills are required and to plan future professional development. Bearing in mind the requirement that HQPD is continuous, educators are never really finished learning. After all, how can teachers create a passion for learning in their students if they do not model that they, themselves, are life-long learners?

The Final Evaluation

Evaluating the effectiveness of professional development is two-fold. First, it is necessary to establish that the experience was productive and met the needs of the participants. Facilitators also may be interested in knowing if the participants have learned what was intended for them to learn. Ultimately, facilitators must evaluate whether the professional development program has met the requirements of HQPD outlined by the Ohio Educator Standards Board, which was discussed earlier in this work. To help facilitate this practice, the following rubric describes Exemplary, Adequate and Needs Revision categories of evaluation for each of the six standards.

Standard 1: High Quality Professional Development is a purposeful, structured and continuous process that occurs over time.

Exemplary:

- Clearly focuses on and aligns with teaching assignment and certification areas;
- Includes a continuous process of planning, implementation, reflection and evaluation; and
- Shows a progression of learning in a specific area.

Adequate:

- Focuses on an area related to the assignment or certification area; and
- Includes several connected events.

Needs Revision:

- May articulate a single goal; and
- Includes one or two unrelated events.

Standard 2: High Quality Professional Development is informed by multiple sources of data.

Exemplary:

- Analyzes school, district, state and/or national data to focus PD content;
- Demonstrates use of research to select PD content and process; and
- Studies current research to inform PD choices.

Adequate:

- Examines some data to make PD decisions;
- Examines some research to select PD content and process; and
- Makes some use of current research to inform PD choices.

Needs Revision:

- Rarely collects and/or uses data for PD decisions;
- Shows no evidence of research to select PD content and process; and
- Rarely references research in planning PD.

Standard 3: High Quality Professional Development is collaborative.

Exemplary:

- Provides ongoing opportunities for educators to work together;
- Utilizes educator learning teams; and
- Supports teaming and co-planning time.

Adequate:

- Provides some meeting opportunities for educators to work together; and
- Occasionally uses learning teams.

Needs Revision:

- Rarely provides participants opportunities to meet; and
- Allows few, if any, opportunities for work in learning teams.

Standard 4: High Quality Professional Development includes varied learning experiences that accommodate individual educators' knowledge and skills.

Exemplary:

- Includes a variety of learning experiences;
- Reflects a logical sequence of experiences; and
- Clearly analyzes the educator's professional knowledge, strengths and weaknesses to develop targeted goals for professional growth.

Adequate:

- Attempts to vary learning experiences;
- Attempts to structure a sequence of PD opportunities; and
- Shows some evidence of analysis of the educator's professional knowledge, strengths and weaknesses to develop goals for professional growth.

Needs Revision:

- Provides uniform, unvaried learning experiences;
- Lacks an appropriate, progressive structure of experiences or provides only single-day events; and
- Shows no use of analysis of the educator's professional knowledge, strength and weaknesses to develop goals for professional growth.

Standard 5: High Quality Professional Development is evaluated by its short- and long-term impact on professional practice and achievement of all students.

Exemplary

- Clearly provides evidence of a method of evaluation of the activity;
- Includes charting of periodic review of practice and impact; and
- Includes evaluation after every event, with plans revised accordingly.

Adequate

- Shows some evidence of a method of evaluating the activity;
- Includes charting of an annual review of progress; and
- Includes charting of evaluation of events.

Needs Revision

- Uses a general evaluation instrument, or none at all.

Standard 6: High Quality Professional Development results in the acquisition, enhancement or refinement of skills and knowledge.

Exemplary

- Clearly seeks evidence of new skills and knowledge; and
- Clearly supports and advances the leadership capabilities of the educator.

Adequate

- Attempts to identify new skills and knowledge; and
- Shows some evidence of support and advancement of the leadership capabilities of the educator.

Needs Revision

- Rarely seeks evidence of new skills and knowledge; and
- Shows no evidence of the support and advancement of the leadership capabilities of the educator.

Conclusion

Implementing professional development that is high in quality should be the goal of every district. Gifted educators in the state of Ohio, by virtue of their training, are uniquely positioned to provide ongoing support to districts regarding the educational, social and emotional needs of gifted students. Ultimately, good professional development is characterized by these three points:

- HQPD is not measured in the quantity of time but the quality of the experience.
- HQPD is about collaboration and should include time to address individual needs of the participants through partnership with more experienced colleagues.
- HQPD is an ongoing process that is measured in terms of change in knowledge that ultimately affects instruction. Learning is a life-long process.

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