

# Professional Learning

## Evaluation Report (2023-24)

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Division of Research, Assessment  
and School Improvement  
**Loudoun County Public Schools**

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## Background Information

The [Division of Professional Learning and School Support](#) within the Department of Teaching and Learning in Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) provides leadership and coordination in administering a variety of professional learning programs to the school division which is consistent with Goal Area Action 2.1 (Ongoing Growth and Development) of the [One LCPS: 2027 Strategic Plan for Excellence](#) (LCPS, 2022). The Offices within the Division include Instructional Technology, Instructional Design and Innovation, and Professional Learning and School Support.

The Instructional Technology Office provides support to district initiatives that improve teaching and learning through the meaningful integration of instructional technologies. The Instructional Technology Team, along with the Instructional Technology Facilitators in each school, provides professional development to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills necessary to leverage the technologies available in their classroom.

The Office of Instructional Design and Innovation works with the content offices to align the instructional vision of LCPS within the development of curriculum and curriculum-aligned professional learning. The office promotes the development of resources aligned to the LCPS [Instructional Framework](#) and the outcomes of the LCPS [Profile of a Graduate](#). The primary goal is to oversee the design, coordination, and delivery of K-12 curriculum-based professional learning opportunities for all school and division staff.

The Office of Professional Learning and School Support supports teachers and teams in schools at all levels to enhance teacher practice and student learning. Instructional Coaches support the implementation of the LCPS Profile of a Graduate to promote deeper learning for all students. The Instructional Coaches use the knowledge they have gained in professional learning throughout the year. Specifically, they use skills learned in the following professional learning sessions: [Adaptive Schools](#), [Cognitive Coaching](#), and [Fierce Conversations](#).

## Evaluation Focus

This study was a formative evaluation that documented the implementation and outcomes of the Professional Learning program during the 2023-24 school year. Using the program logic model as a guide, the evaluation team developed the following questions:

1. To what extent does school- and division-level professional development enhance LCPS staff members' abilities to meet student needs?
2. In which topics would LCPS staff members like to receive additional professional development?
3. What is the sentiment that school-based staff feel towards professional learning?
4. What is going well in regards to school-based professional learning?
5. What might be some improvements that could be made in regards to professional learning?

6. What are some barriers keeping school staff from receiving the professional learning that would be relevant to them?
7. What support is school-based staff receiving to implement the professional learning that they attended?
8. How do school-based staff find out about professional learning opportunities? What would be helpful in regards to communication?
9. What are some incentives for school-based staff that could be offered for engaging in professional learning?
10. What characteristics of professional learning are the most engaging for school-based staff?

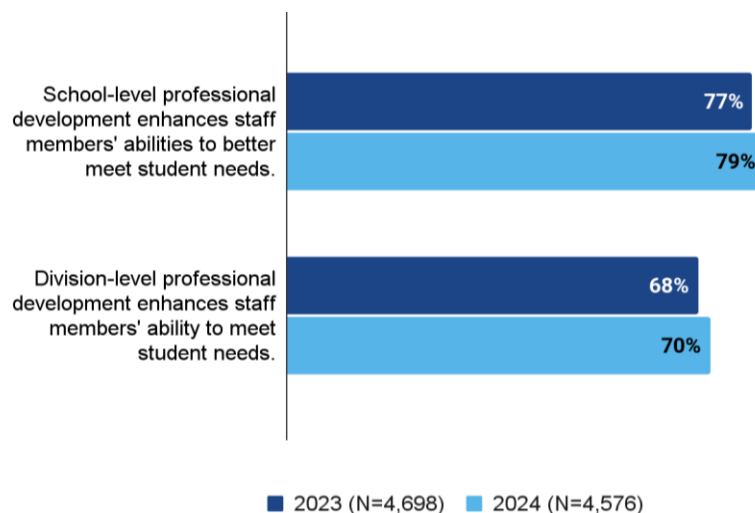
To address these evaluation questions, the following data were collected and analyzed: (a) annual school-based staff stakeholder surveys and (b) focus groups with school-based staff (see Appendix A: Evaluation Methodology).

## Results

### 1. To what extent does school- and division-level professional development enhance LCPS staff members' abilities to meet student needs?

School-based staff members are asked to complete a stakeholder survey every year. Two of the survey questions inquire about the impact of both school- and division-level professional development. Approximately three out of four staff members who took the survey indicated that both school- and division-level professional development enhances their ability to meet student needs. However, agreement for school-level professional development is nine percentage-points higher than division-level professional development.

**Figure 1:** About three out of four school-based staff indicated that school- and division-level professional development enhances their ability to meet student needs.

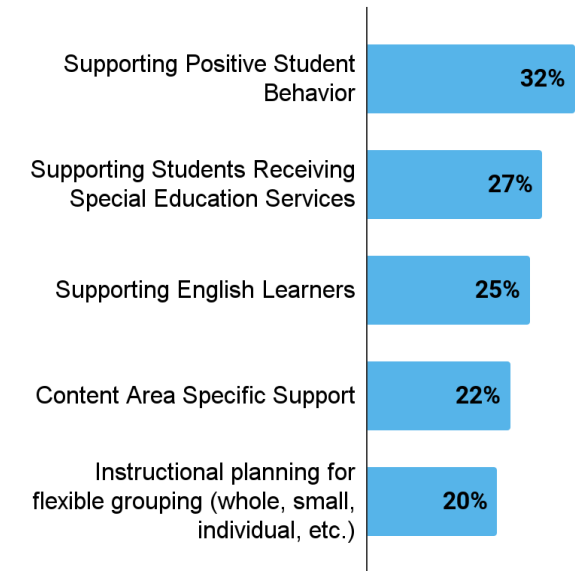


Source: 2023 and 2024 Annual School-Based Staff Stakeholder Surveys. Note: Percent responding Agree/Strongly Agree.

2. In which topics would LCPS staff members like to receive additional professional development?

One of the questions on the School-based Staff Annual Stakeholder Survey asks about the topics in which staff members would like to receive additional training. The chart below shows the top five topics in which staff members would like to receive professional development. Approximately one-third of the staff members who took the survey indicated they would like to receive professional development in supporting positive student behavior.

Figure 2: Among the top topics in which school-based staff would like to receive professional development, supporting positive student behavior was ranked highest.



Source: 2024 Annual School-Based Staff Stakeholder Survey (N=4,042). Note: Data from the 2023-24 school year were excluded from analysis as the options differed.

3. What is the sentiment that school-based staff feel towards professional learning?

The focus groups with school-based staff started with participants being asked to share one word that captures how they felt about professional learning in LCPS. Sentiment analysis was used to analyze the one word responses using the AFINN dictionary (Al-Shabi, 2020) which assigns each word a value of negative five to positive five. The average sentiment value of the one-word responses was -1.91, indicating a predominately negative perception of the division’s professional learning.

#### **4. What is going well in regards to school-based professional learning?**

Participants indicated they liked that there were a lot of professional learning options and the ability to choose their professional learning. They also enjoyed the opportunity to meet and collaborate with people who are in similar positions across the division. They expressed that professional learning provided by outside professionals or central office experts was helpful. Finally, they named specific professional learning courses they found to be particularly useful, which included Adaptive Schools, Cognitive Coaching, Fierce Conversations, Inquiry in the Classroom, and [LETRs](#) training.

#### **5. What might be some improvements that could be made in regards to professional learning?**

Participants indicated the professional learning sessions were too short and provided an introduction rather than the ability to dive deeper into topics. They indicated that having fewer, longer sessions would help them to gain a deeper understanding and would help them to retain the information. Sessions also did not include the ability to discuss implementation with peers and lacked follow up to ensure the strategies were properly implemented. Participants also said the topics are repetitive from year to year and not always relevant to their roles. When a session is being provided by an outside expert, participants recommended that a content expert from the division be in the room to help provide context around the application to the division.

The timing of when staff members are able to sign up for sessions on Professional Development Days was also expressed as a concern. Participants indicated the slots to new sessions get filled quickly resulting in them having to attend sessions that may not be relevant to their needs. Participants also said that both asynchronous and virtual sessions could provide them with more options.

#### **6. What are some barriers keeping school staff from receiving the professional learning that would be relevant to them?**

Participants indicated the amount of time they have available can serve as a barrier to their professional learning. They also said there can be too many topics and resources can be hard to find. They expressed a desire to have follow-up conversations after the sessions and to be able to discuss topics from recent sessions during their Collaborative Learning Teams (CLTs) to help with implementation.

Participants also said the professional learning location can be a barrier due to the distance they need to travel. Some participants said school leadership can be a barrier indicating a principal would not allow them to attend professional learning sessions. Finally, the repetition of topics was named as a barrier to relevant professional learning.

## **7. What support is school-based staff receiving to implement the professional learning that they attended?**

Some participants indicated that support was being provided by coaches, instructional facilitators and colleagues while others indicated there was little support provided after the professional learning sessions. In some cases, participants expressed that even though there were observations, minimal feedback was provided on what was observed. Participants also mentioned they needed to be proactive in reaching out for needed support.

## **8. How do school-based staff find out about professional learning opportunities? What would be helpful in regards to communication?**

Participants indicated they receive information about professional learning via:

- Email
- Word of mouth
- Schoology
- Through the Division Instructional Facilitator
- Office of Professional Learning website
- Principal
- Department chair
- Professional Development Days
- Google
- Colleagues out of state
- Organizations
- Conferences
- Newsletters
- Content offices
- Staff meetings
- LCPS GO apps

Participants also indicated they feel like they have to search on their own if they are looking for professional learning opportunities outside of the division. Some participants indicated they did not always know what type of professional learning was available.

## **9. What are some incentives for school-based staff that could be offered for engaging in professional learning?**

Participants shared the following incentives for engaging in professional learning:

- Money
- Counting towards licensure
- Provided over the summer (with pay for the time)

- Swag
- Coffee
- Food
- Graduate credit
- Choice
- Knowing the dates in advance

In addition to these incentives, participants expressed it would be beneficial to have substitutes so they could attend sessions during the school day.

## **10. What characteristics of professional learning are the most engaging for school-based staff?**

Finally, participants were asked to share their favorite professional learning event in which they participated. The following reasons were provided for why they chose their favorite experience:

- Hands-on
- Taught through multiple sessions
- Relevant
- Interactive
- Smaller group setting
- Collaborative
- Ability to immediately implement strategies
- Off-campus
- Participation with other educators
- Taught by a professional/expert
- Follow-up meetings to discuss implementation.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Evidence collected from annual school-based staff stakeholder surveys and focus groups with school staff yielded insights into the strengths of the Professional Learning program and potential areas of growth for the 2024-25 school year. More specifically, analyses of the data highlighted the following strengths: (a) high levels of agreement that professional development (both school- and division-levels) enhances the ability of staff to meet student needs, (b) plentiful options for professional learning in general, (c) satisfaction with the opportunities to collaborate across the division, (d) helpfulness of outside professionals and central office experts, and (e) utility of division-based professional learning opportunities such as Adaptive Schools, Cognitive Coaching, and Fierce Conversations.

Potential areas of growth included: (a) negative sentiment toward the division's professional learning in general, (b) communication about professional development



opportunities, (c) follow up with staff and provide support after the professional development session, and (d) use survey data to identify professional development topics.

It is important to note that the evaluation design used to develop the research questions is subject to change as the work of Professional Learning program staff is integrated with other division initiatives. Consequently, the implementation and outcomes of the programs may similarly evolve given the nature of continuous improvement.

After sharing the aforementioned results with the Division of Professional Learning and School Support, the evaluation team developed the following recommendations for continued improvement:

1. **Increase school-level professional development:** Since school-level professional development received higher agreement rates than at the division level, consider increasing the frequency and variety of the school-level sessions. Tailoring these sessions to the specific needs of each school, by collaborating with the Office of School Improvement and working across the departments, could further enhance their effectiveness.
2. **Focus on the most popular topics:** Given that approximately one third of staff members expressed a desire for professional development in supporting positive student behavior, prioritize this topic in upcoming sessions. Additionally, ensure that the other top-requested topics are addressed to meet staff needs. Determine how to incorporate these topics into the countywide Professional Development Days, as well as provide opportunities for staff to learn both from experts in the field and from each other.
3. **Improve communication and accessibility:** Enhance the communication channels for professional learning opportunities. Ensure that all staff members are aware of available sessions and how to access them. Consider using multiple platforms (emails, newsletters, intranet, PowerSchool) to disseminate this information. Also consider assembling a cross-departmental workgroup to develop a structure that ensures that all staff know how to locate professional learning relevant to their needs.
4. **Follow-up support and coaching:** Enhance the effectiveness of professional learning by ensuring that staff members receive ongoing support and coaching to implement new skills and strategies. Develop a timeline for follow-up sessions after each professional learning event and schedule regular check-ins to discuss progress and address any challenges.
5. **Offer incentives:** Introduce incentives for engaging in professional learning. Explore career pathways for teachers who want to remain in the classroom yet continue to grow their practice.

6. **Foster collaboration:** Encourage collaboration by creating more opportunities for staff to meet and share best practices. This could be through professional learning communities (PLCs), CLTs, or collaboration opportunities with colleagues across the division.
7. **Provide high-quality professional learning opportunities:** Ensure the professional learning offered is high quality by providing intentional and strategic support to the providers of professional learning.
8. **Evaluate and adjust:** Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning through the use of surveys and other feedback mechanisms. More importantly, use these data to make continuous improvements to the program.

## Appendix A: Evaluation Methodology

To facilitate the collection of evidence, evaluators from the Research Office followed a collaborative approach (Patton, 2013) in which key stakeholders from the Division of Professional Learning and School Support participated directly in the planning and implementation of the evaluation. After updating the program logic model and questions in the evaluation design, the evaluation team selected the following data collection methods: (a) annual school-based staff stakeholder surveys and (b) focus groups with school-based staff.

### Annual School-Based Staff Surveys

School-based staff members in LCPS are asked to complete a stakeholder survey every year. Two of the questions inquire about the impact of both school- and division-level professional development on staff member's abilities to meet student needs. In addition, one of the questions asks about the topics in which staff members would like to receive additional training. Data from the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years were collected and analyzed, resulting in over 4,000 responses on average to each question.

### Focus Groups

The Division of Professional Learning conducted a series of focus groups in May and June of 2024 to gain feedback on what was going well and opportunities for improvement (see Appendix B). Instructional coaches provided recommendations for the schools that would participate in the focus groups. Once the schools were identified, principals recommended staff members (with a variety of perspectives) that should participate. A total of six focus groups, representing each school level, were conducted that included staff members from two elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. A total of 35 staff members participated in the focus groups. A notetaker captured the conversation during each focus group session.

The focus group notes were provided to the Research Office for thematic analysis. Sentiment analysis was also conducted on the one-word responses collected at the beginning of the discussions. To determine how the respondents felt about professional learning in general, the [AFINN dictionary](#) (Al-Shabi, 2020) assigned each word a value of negative five to positive five.

## Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

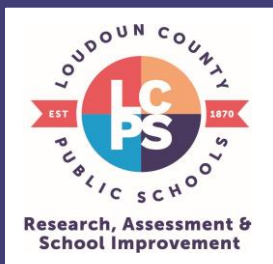
1. Please share one word that captures how you feel about professional learning in Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS).
2. What is going well in regards to professional learning in LCPS?
3. What are some improvements that could be made in regards to professional learning in LCPS?
4. What are some barriers keeping you from receiving professional learning that would be relevant to you?
5. What support are you receiving to implement professional learning you attended? Who is providing that support?
6. How do you find out about professional learning opportunities? What would be helpful in regards to communication?
7. What are some incentives that could be offered for engaging in professional learning?
8. Please share your favorite professional learning in which you participated. What was the professional learning and what made this your favorite one?

## References

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