

ED COMMITTEE #1  
November 5, 2007  
**Briefing**

**MEMORANDUM**

November 1, 2007

TO: Education Committee

FROM: Vivian Yao, Legislative Analyst *VY*  
Essie McGuire, Legislative Analyst *EMcGuire*

SUBJECT: **Staff Development**

Today, the Education Committee will receive a briefing on MCPS staff development activities. James Virga, Associate Superintendent, Office of Organizational Development, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), will be present to brief the Committee.

MCPS invests significant effort and resources in staff development, and general information on staff development programs has been presented to the Committee on prior occasions. Because of the size and scope of the staff development program, overview information on staff development has not readily translated into an understanding of the daily operation of staff development activities and how school-based teachers and staff experience and apply these efforts to affect student learning.

The briefing today is intended to focus attention on staff development activities as they relate to job-embedded, school-based experiences. The briefing will also set the stage for opportunities to observe some of these job-embedded, school-based staff development activities through individual site visits for Councilmembers. Committee members as well as other Councilmembers interested in this MCPS function are encouraged to participate. After the site visits conclude, the Committee may wish to reconvene to share observations and continue the discussion on staff development.

## I. STAFF DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW

The Office of Organizational Development (OOD) has primary responsibility for coordinating and implementing staff development programs for MCPS. MCPS invests significant resources and effort to support teachers and other employees at all stages of their careers. MCPS staff emphasizes that these staff development initiatives are strategic to achieving system-wide goals including setting high standards for teaching and learning, consistently applying curriculum, and narrowing the achievement gap. MCPS staff also cites professional development opportunities as important in recruiting new teachers.

### A. PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The Committee has previously discussed overview information on staff development according to five major program areas identified in the MCPS FY08 Program Budget and in the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) Report 2006-4, *A Base Budget Review of Montgomery County Public Schools Staff Development*. These five major staff development programs and the FY08 funds associated with each are:

- **Staff Development Teachers:** (\$19.4 million) This program places a staff development teacher in every school to support teachers and provide job-embedded staff development.
- **Professional Growth System:** (\$15.9 million) This program contains three professional growth systems, for teachers, for administrators and supervisors, and for supporting services staff. It includes consulting teachers to support new and underperforming teachers, new teacher induction and mentoring, and the skillful teaching courses.
- **Support for Professional Development:** (\$4.7 million) This category includes main office coordination for staff development as well as substitute training and the substitute allocation to each school to cover for teachers who are pursuing professional development during the school day.
- **Curriculum Training:** (\$5.3 million) This program provides curriculum-related training to teachers, administrators, and paraeducators.
- **Diversity Training:** (\$1.0 million) This program provides diversity training to all MCPS staff and incorporates diversity training into other professional development opportunities.

The funds identified above are useful as indicators of relative magnitude only. They are drawn from the FY08 Program Budget, which does not reflect either benefit costs or final Council and Board of Education funding approval.

The attached overview information prepared by MCPS reflects a different program organization than the five programs described above. The structure described in MCPS presentation materials is based on support and capacity building for teachers; administrators; support professionals; schools, offices, and teams; and individual advancement. The elements of the five program areas previously discussed are reflected in the descriptions of these efforts. This new organization is helpful to understand how the different programs are targeted to specific efforts, and how they work together. It also shows more program detail within each category.

## **B. BUDGET**

MCPS provided a program budget attached on circle 38 with a corresponding pie chart on circle 39. This area has seen significant funding increases in recent years, beginning with a major initiative that added nearly \$11 million in FY01. The FY08 total for staff development is \$48.4 million and includes a total of 355 positions. This program budget provides a useful summary of the entire effort; it is important to note that not all of these dollars are reflected in the budget of the Office of Organizational Development. For example, the staff development teachers are budgeted in the offices of K-12 Instruction.

Allocating a staff development teacher to each school is the single largest cost element, at \$16.4 million. The overall category of building the capacity of teachers is the largest total effort, at \$28 million and 259 positions. Circle 39 indicates that this is 60 percent of the total budget. The category includes consulting teachers, curriculum training, and skillful teaching classes as major elements.

## **C. POSITIONS**

As noted earlier, the primary purpose of this presentation is to delve beyond the overarching programs and understand how individual teachers, schools, and staff development professionals experience the programs on a daily basis. The presentation will focus on a "week in the life" of seven staff development positions: Staff Development Teachers; Staff Development Specialists; Consulting Teachers; Consulting Principals; Professional Growth Consultants; Curriculum Content Specialists; and Skillful Teaching and Leading Specialists. Circles 36-37 summarize the key roles and responsibilities of these positions, as well as indicating their total numbers and the numbers of staff they work with (when applicable).

## **II. RESEARCH AND QUESTIONS**

Research supports the link between student achievement and quality of teaching. See "New Thinking on Staff Development" attached at circles 40-43. As a result, *Excellence in the Classroom*, a volume of *The Future of Children*, published by the Brookings Institute and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University, suggests that improving the quality of teaching is "crucial to efforts to raise student achievement and narrow achievement gaps."

The way to improve teacher knowledge and skills to have an impact on classroom teaching is less clear. From a national perspective, research in this area is limited; teachers are unenthusiastic about the quality of professional development opportunities; and there is "little evidence that the system of professional development, taken as a whole, improves teaching and learning."

The Brookings and Princeton report does, however, highlight programs that have been demonstrated to improve teaching and learning, and summarizes promising characteristics of staff development programs as follows:

- **Linked to the curriculum and instructional goals of the district and school.**
- **Include substantive content.** Content can be targeted on specific content knowledge, subject-matter-specific instruction, or student learning. Broad programs do not appear to be effective.
- **Sustained over time.** One-day programs, in most cases, are not worthwhile.

The report also identifies **coaching** and **release time for directed collaboration among teachers** as promising forms of professional development.

Another recommendation for policy makers is to ensure that school districts have reliable systems for evaluating the impact of professional development on teaching and learning. See circle 42.

As Councilmembers consider information presented at today’s briefing and observe staff development activities at individual site visits, the following questions may provide a useful framework:

- What effect do activities have on teacher behavior and student learning in the context of MCPS’s overarching goals of high standards for teaching and learning, narrowing the achievement gap and consistently applying curriculum?
- To what extent do MCPS activities include characteristics of research-based programs – (1) linked to curriculum and instructional goals, (2) include substantive content, and (3) are sustained over time?
- What opportunities for staff development include coaching and release time for directed collaboration among teachers?
- How does MCPS evaluate the impact of professional development on teaching and learning?

The packet contains the following attachments:

	<u>Circle #</u>
MCPS Presentation	1-35
OOD Position Chart	36-37
FY08 Professional Development Budget	38
FY08 OOD Budget Pie Chart	39
October 25, 2007 Teacher Magazine Article “New Thinking on Staff Development”	40-43

# Office of Organizational Development

Presentation to the  
Education Committee

November 5, 2007

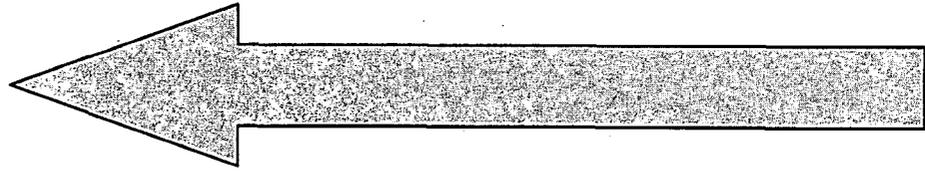
# **Our Mission**



**To develop all staff and  
improve the effectiveness  
of the organization  
to ensure high achievement  
for every student**

# The Path to Achievement

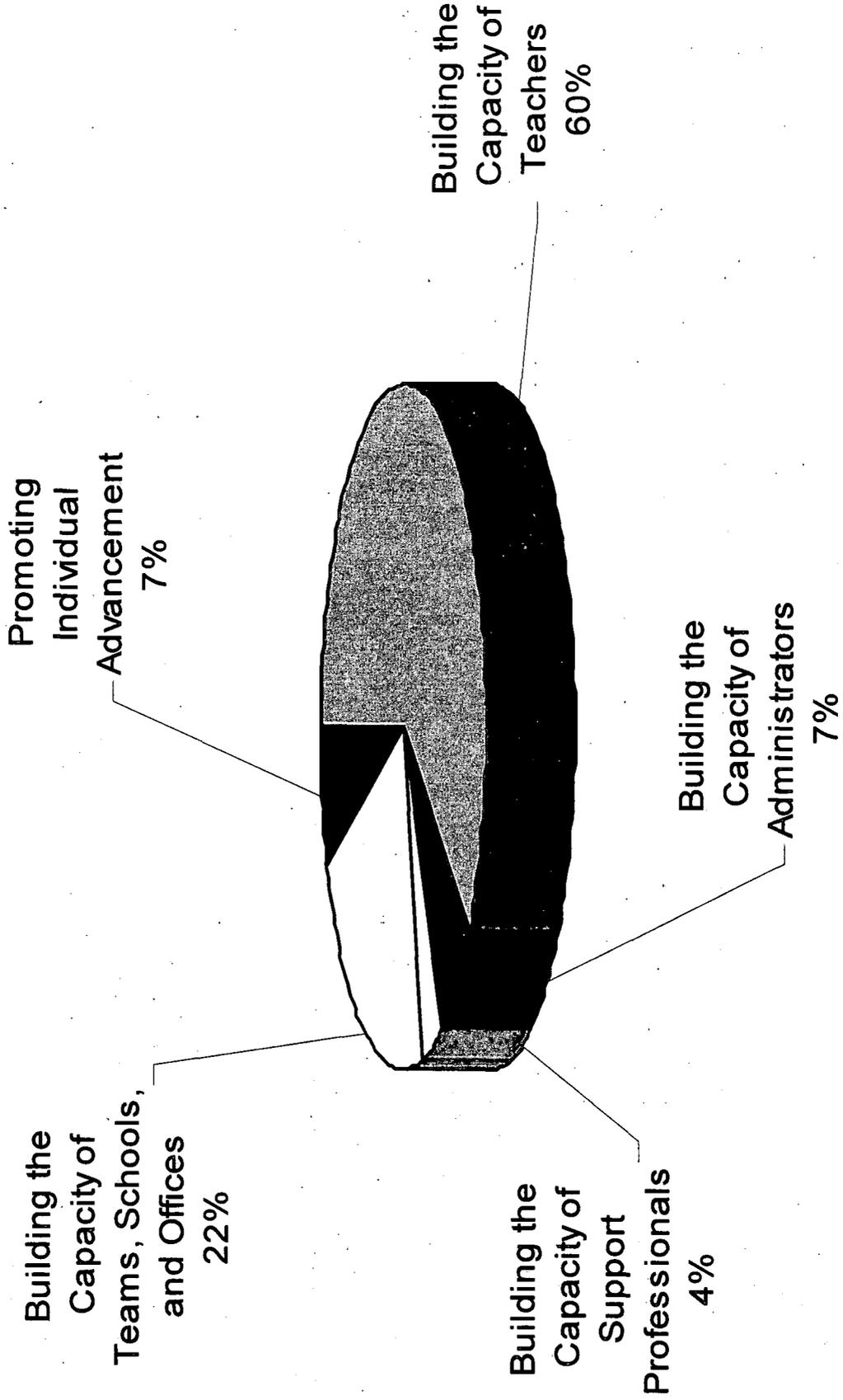


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- ✓ SAT score of 1650 or higher
  - ✓ Participation and performance in Advanced Placement/Honors/IB
  - ✓ Passing the High School Assessments
  - ✓ Completing Algebra 1 in Grade 8
  - ✓ Completing Advanced Math in Grade 5
  - ✓ Reading on grade level by Grade 3
  - ✓ Reading benchmarks in Grades K-2

# Building the Capacity of Staff to Support Student Learning

- Teachers
- Administrators
- Support Professionals
- Teams, Schools, Offices
- Individuals

Office of Organizational Development, FY 2008 Budget  
"Student Learning Drives Our Work"



# What do teachers need to support student learning?

- Supported entry into the profession
- One-on-one coaching from an expert
- Accurate answers to their questions
- Clear understanding of the curriculum
- Effective teaching strategies for diverse learners
- Opportunities for professional growth



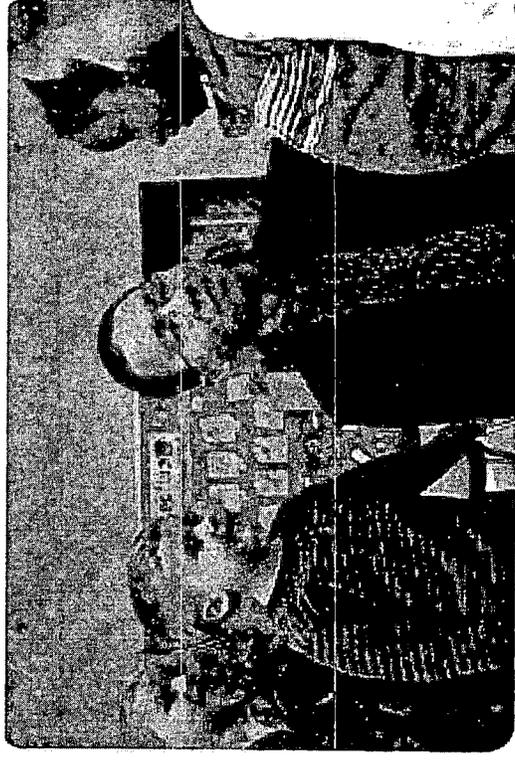
# What do teachers need to support student learning?

- Supported entry into the profession
  - New Educator Induction
- One-on-one coaching from an expert
  - Consulting Teachers, Mentor Teachers
- Accurate answers to their questions
  - Staff Development Teachers
- Clear understanding of the curriculum
  - Curriculum Training (ongoing, job-embedded)
- Effective teaching strategies
  - Studying Skillful Teaching classes
- Opportunities for professional growth
  - National Board certification support

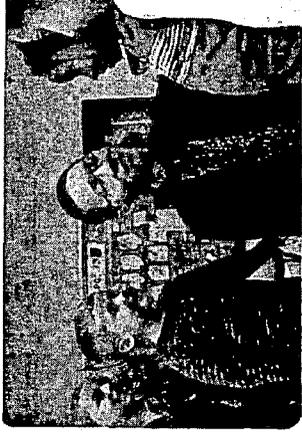


# What do administrators need to support student learning?

- Supported preparation for leadership roles
- One-on-one coaching from an expert
- Clear understanding of supervision and evaluation
- Opportunities for professional growth



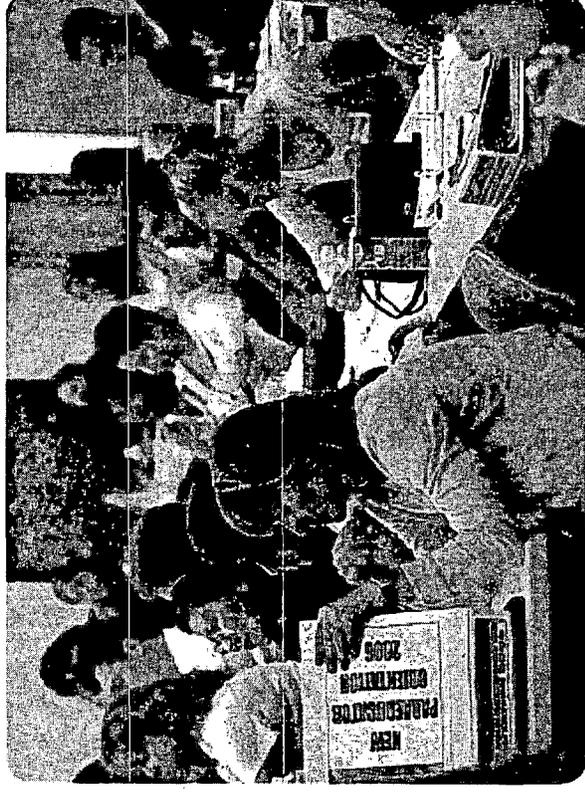
# What do administrators need to support student learning?



- Supported preparation for leadership roles
  - Elementary and Secondary Leadership Development
  - Principal Internship Programs
- One-on-one coaching from an expert
  - Consulting Principals
- Clear understanding of supervision and evaluation
  - Observing and Analyzing Teaching classes
- Opportunities for professional growth
  - A&S Professional Development

# What do support professionals need to support student learning?

- One-on-one coaching from an expert
- Clear understanding of strategies for working with students
- Opportunities for professional growth



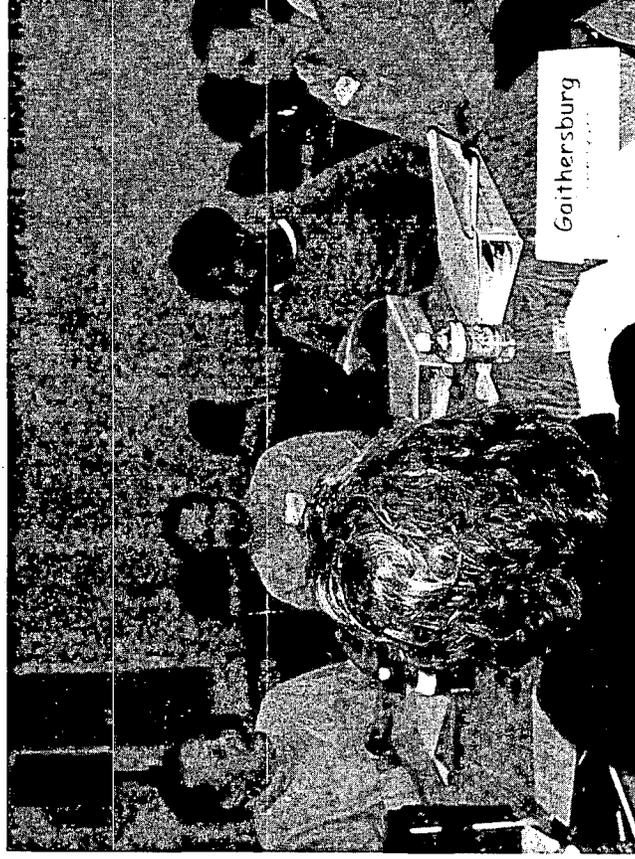
# What do support professionals need to support student learning?



- One-on-one coaching from an expert
  - Professional Growth Consultants
- Clear understanding of strategies for working with students
  - Studying Skillful Teaching classes for Paraeducators
- Opportunities for professional growth
  - Support Professional Training
  - Job-specific professional development for 10-month employees on “No Work, No Pay” days

# What do teams, schools, and offices need to support student learning?

- One-on-one coaching from an expert
- Support for Leadership Teams



# What do teams, schools, and offices need to support student learning?



- One-on-one coaching from an expert
  - Staff Development Specialists (with staff development teachers)
- Support for Leadership Teams
  - Staff Development Specialists
  - Professional Learning Communities Institute
  - School Leadership Team Institute
  - Baldrige Training

# What do teams, schools, and offices need to support student learning?

- Support in closing the achievement gap
- Support for Technology Infusion
- Time for Teams to Support Student Learning



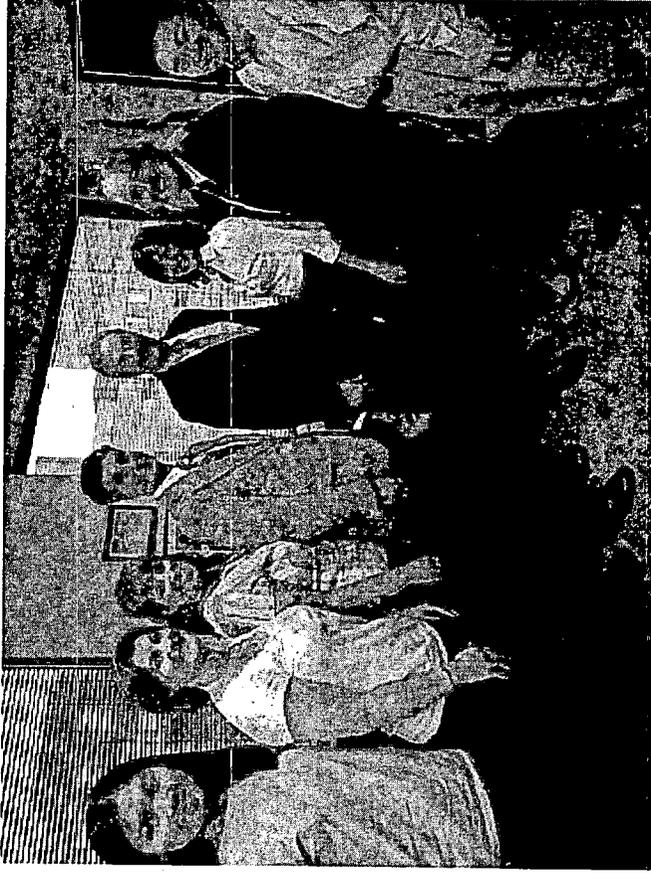
**What do teams, schools,  
and offices need to  
support student learning?**



- **Support in closing the achievement gap**
  - Diversity Training and Development Team
  - Staff Development Specialists (with staff development teachers and teams)
- **Support for Technology Infusion**
  - Technology Consultant Team
- **Time for Teams to Support Student Learning**
  - Staff Development Substitutes

# What do individuals need in order to advance personally and professionally?

- Supported opportunities to engage in learning and personal growth



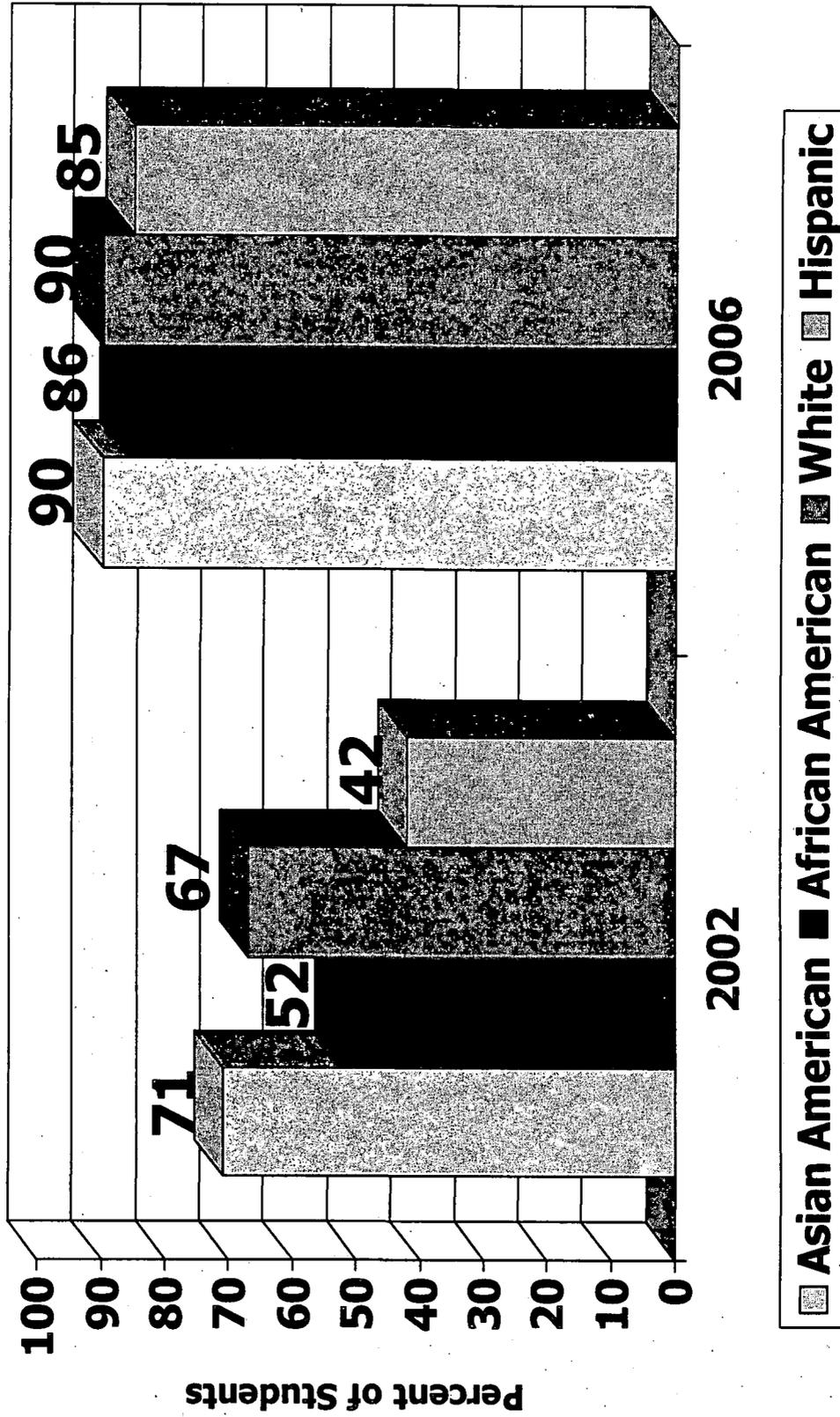
# What do individuals need in order to advance personally and professionally?



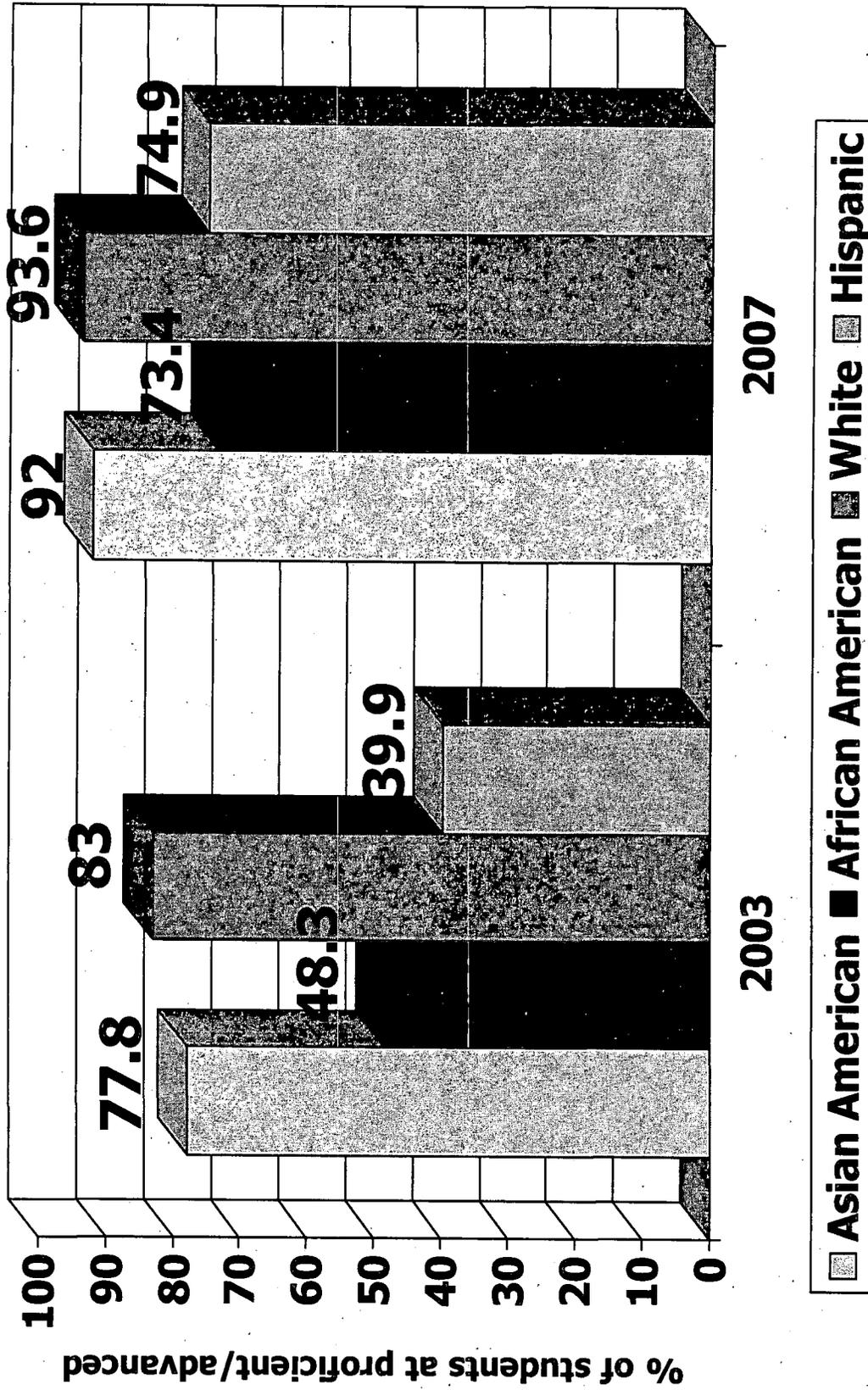
- Supported opportunities to engage in learning and personal growth
  - Tuition reimbursement for teachers, administrators, and support professionals
  - Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses that lead to better skills and career advancement
  - Higher Education Partnerships that support graduate education for employees

**Is our investment in building the  
capacity of staff yielding student  
results?**

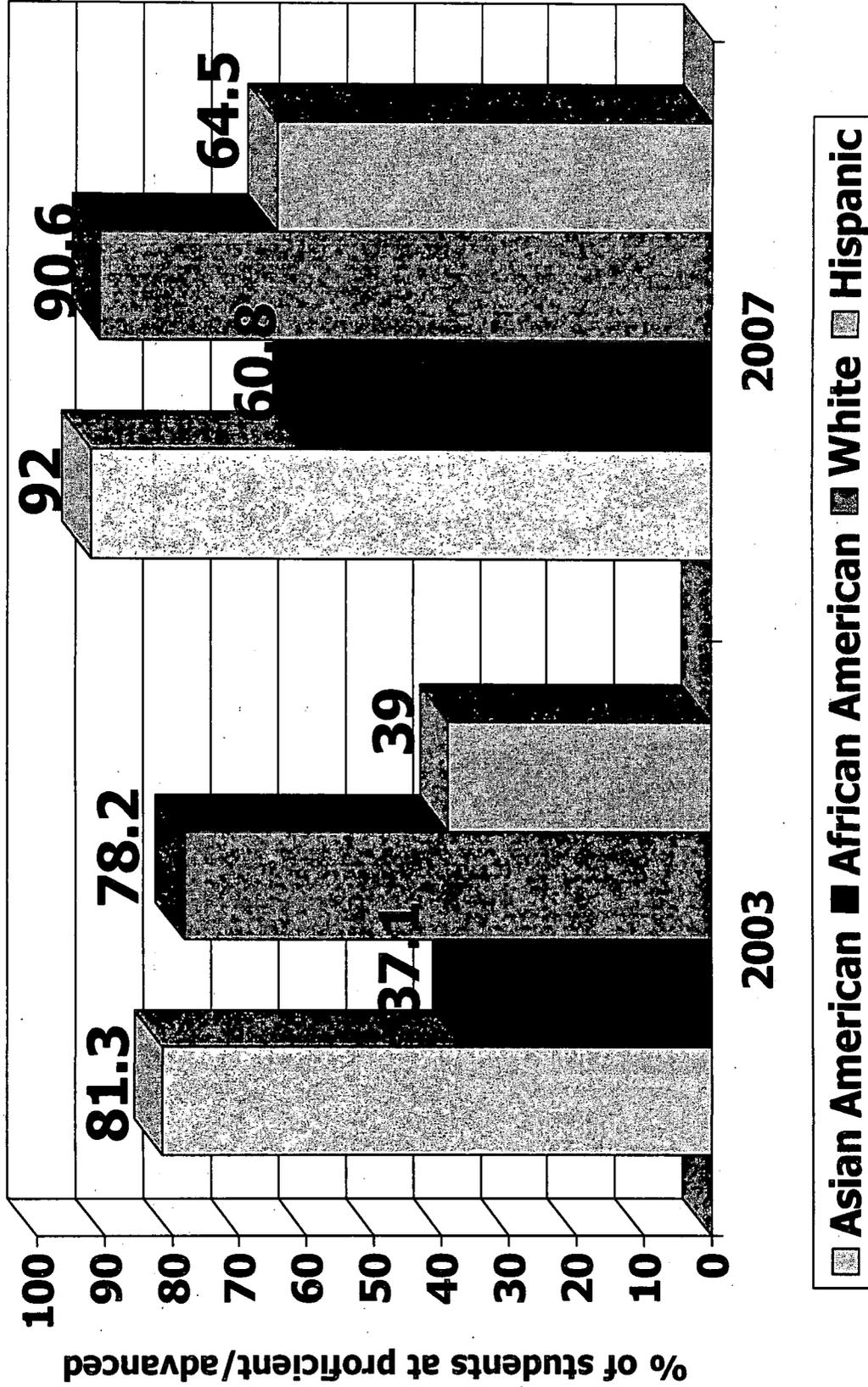
# Students At or Above Reading Benchmark in Kindergarten, 2002 and 2006



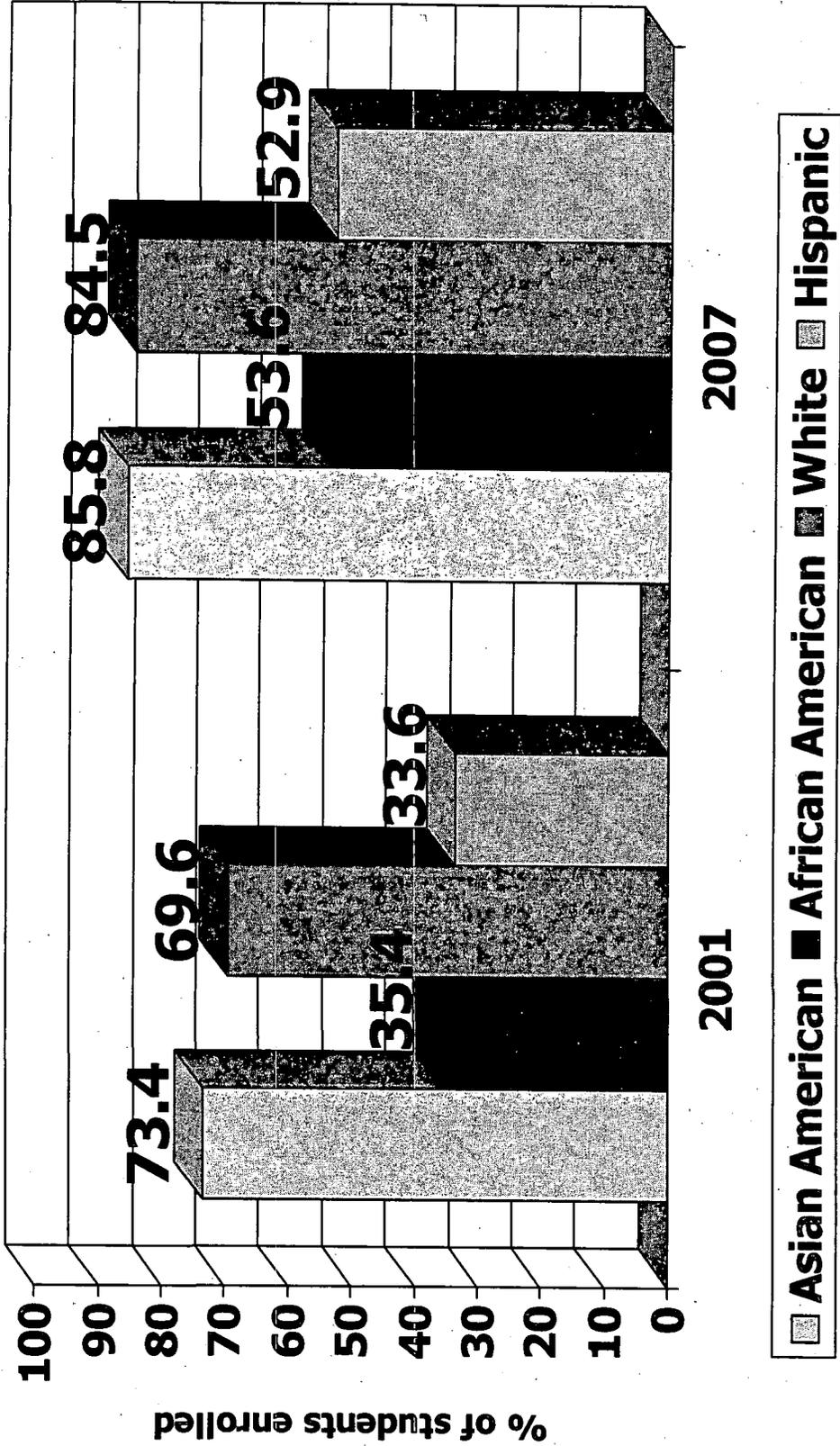
# MSA Reading, Grade 3, 2003-2007



# MSA Mathematics, Grade 6, 2003-2007



# Percent of Students Enrolled in At Least One Honors or AP Course, 2001 and 2007



**MCPS – Total AP tests passed by African American students – second only to New York City**

Jurisdiction	Enrollment (05-06)	AP tests taken, May 06	AP Tests Passed (3 or better)	Passed tests per 100 students
All public schools	2.4 million	110,000	28,700	1.2
MCPS	10,326	1,713	851	8.2
New York	115,000	4,247	987	0.9
Chicago	56,379	3,899	581	1.0
Baltimore	22,200	632	90	.04
Fairfax	5,771	1,072	494	8.6

A week in the life of a Staff Development Teacher typically includes:

- Working directly with multiple instructional teams as they review student work, analyze data, study curriculum, and plan instruction.
- Working directly with new teachers and teachers who are struggling.
- Working with veteran staff on their continuing professional development
- Collaborating with the principal to focus and implement school improvement plans
- Facilitating job-embedded staff development

A week in the life of a Staff Development Specialist typically includes:

- Working one-on-one with staff development teachers (SDT) in up to 20 schools.
- Providing training sessions for groups of SDTs (ie., new to the position, middle school SDTs, etc.) on topics such as culturally competent schools, data analysis, effective instructional strategies, coaching techniques.
- Supporting school leadership teams through teaching School Leadership Team Institute (SLTI) modules

**A week in the life of a  
Staff Development Specialist also includes:**

- Supporting school leadership teams through direct work in the schools with teams in meetings and developing school improvement plans
- Participating in Achievement Steering Committee meetings held in schools in need of improvement
- Following up on ASC recommendations
- Supporting principals in clusters through planning and facilitation of cluster meetings

## A week in the life of a Consulting Teacher typically includes:

- Working directly with 15-17 client teachers (novice teachers or teachers identified as under-performing) in 10-12 different school locations
- Conducting informal and formal observations
- Meeting with clients to provide feedback
- Writing formal observation and evaluation reports
- Collecting resources and materials for clients
- Meeting with principals to discuss client support
- Meeting with PAR panel to review client progress
- Meeting with other CTs to discuss ways to support clients

## A week in the life of a Consulting Principal typically includes:

- Working directly with 10-11 client principals (novice principals, principals new to their level, principals identified as under-performing) in 10-11 school locations
- Conducting informal and formal observations
- Meeting with clients to provide feedback
- Writing formal observation and evaluation reports
- Collecting resources and materials for clients
- Meeting the A&S Review Panel to review client progress
- Meeting with other CPs to discuss ways to support clients

A week in the Life of a  
Professional Growth Consultant typically includes:

- Working directly with clients (support professionals who have been identified as under-performing) in their work locations.
- Working with clients and supervisors to explain and guide them through the Performance Improvement Process (PIP)
- Supporting the rollout of the Support Services Professional Growth System by providing training to supervisors and evaluators
- Visiting schools and offices to make presentations on the SSPGS.
- Conducting informal and formal observations
- Writing observation and evaluation reports
- Meeting with the SSPGS Par Panel to review client progress

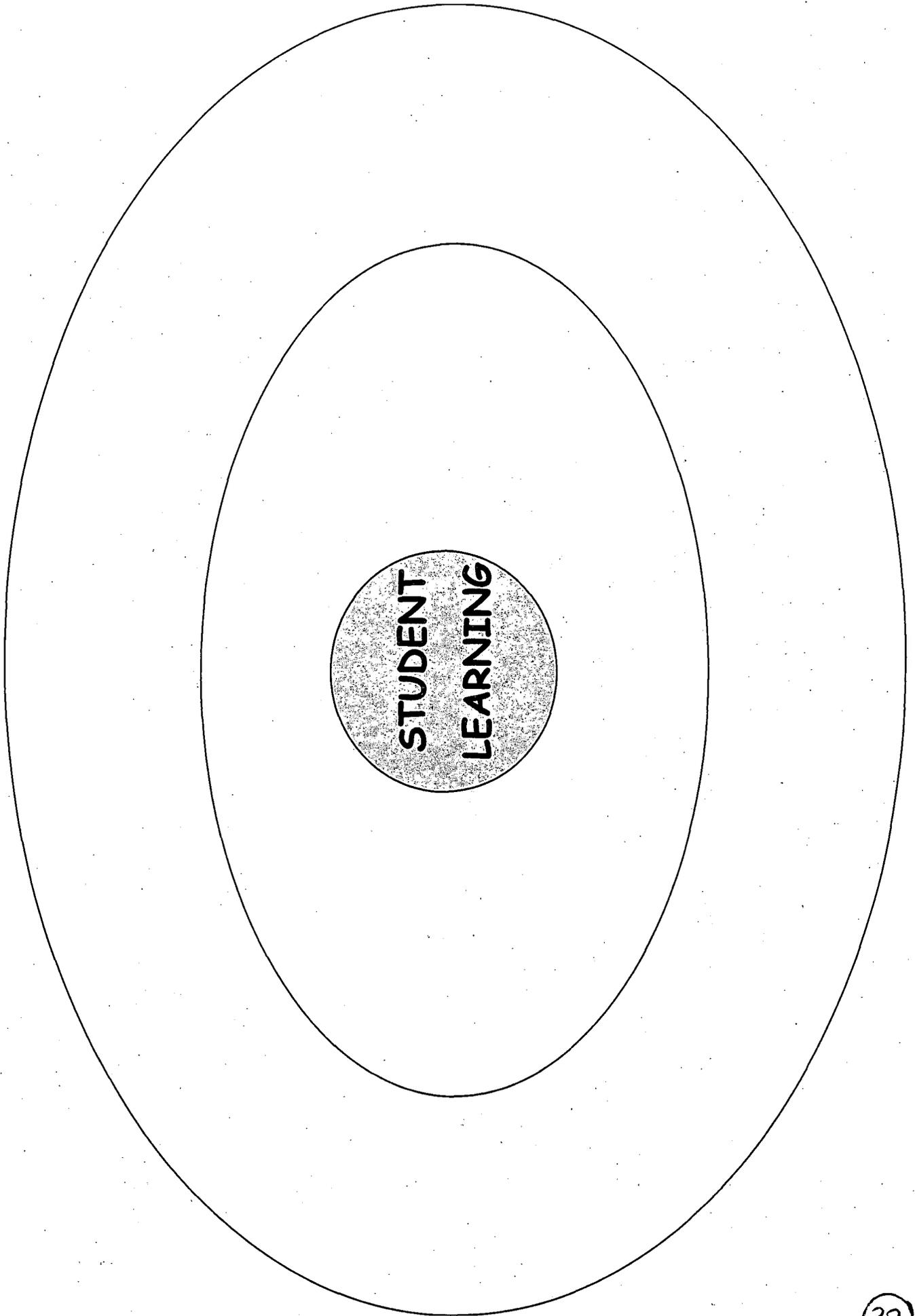
A week in the life of a

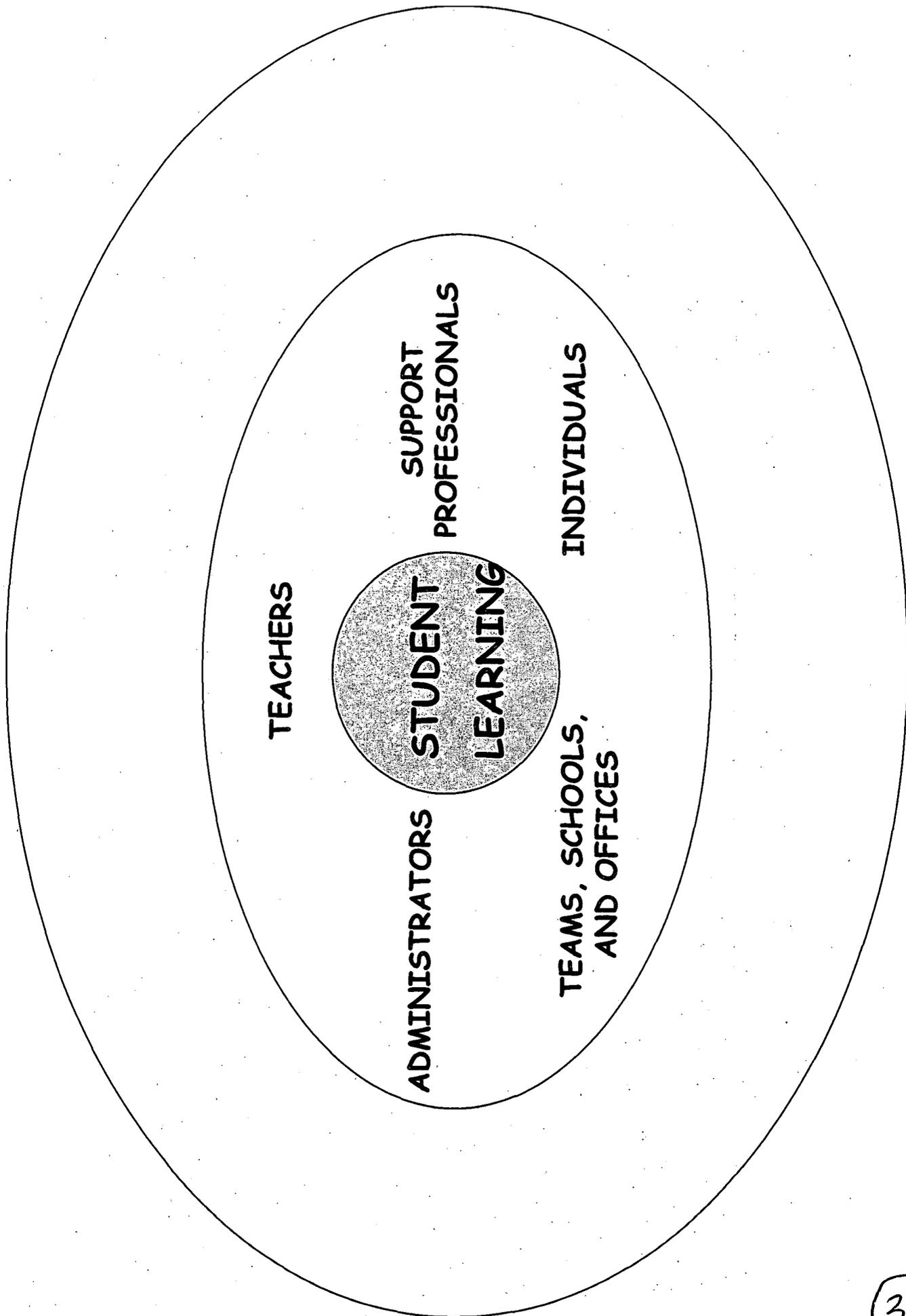
Curriculum Content Specialist typically includes:

- Leading professional development sessions for teachers and teams of teachers.
- Working directly with teachers and teams in school to provide follow-up support to curriculum training.
- Working with project and design teams to establish outcomes and develop training plans for new curriculum
- Working with staff from other offices (Curriculum, Special Education) to plan and implement curriculum
- Responding to requests from schools for school-specific training

## A week in the life of an SST/OAT trainer typically includes:

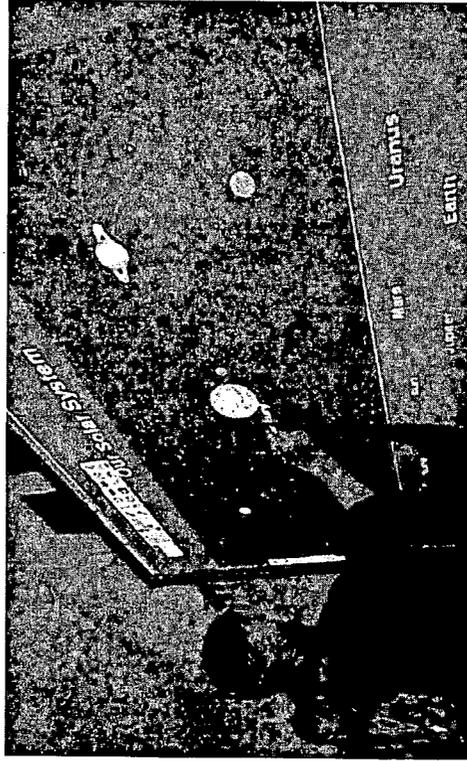
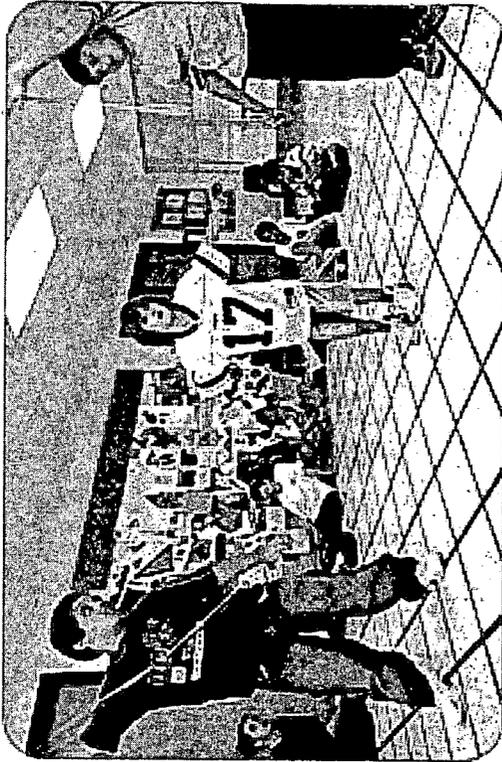
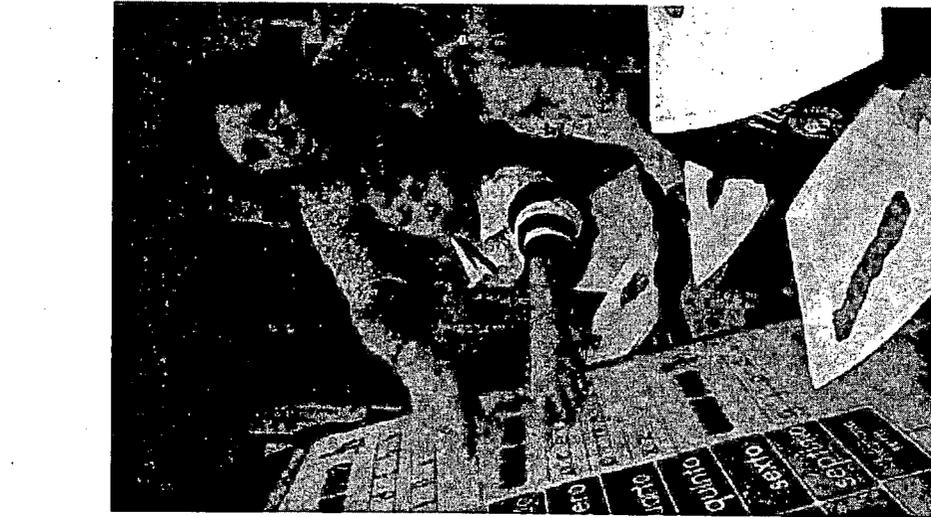
- Teaching multiple sections of Studying Skillful Teaching (SST) and/or Observing and Analyzing Teaching (OAT) to clients including principals, resource teachers, staff development teachers, and paraeducators
- Visiting schools to reinforce training and support implementation of content learned in SST and OAT
- Reviewing assignments completed by SST and OAT students
- Visiting schools to conduct teacher observations with OAT students
- Responding to requests for support from administrators to provide guidance in writing formal reports
- Making presentations at schools and in clusters to support implementation of the professional growth systems







# The Office of Organizational Development



*“Student Learning Drives Our Work”*

**Selected Positions in the Office of Organizational Development  
Program Budget FY 2008**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Sampling of Roles and Responsibilities</b>
<p>Staff Development Teachers (SDT)</p> <p>200 positions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-based position (1 per school). Depending on the size of the staff, SDTs work directly with 40 – 100 teachers.</li> <li>• Oversee and support job-embedded professional development and school improvement efforts.</li> <li>• Work with teams of teachers to review student work and plan instruction. Promote the use of equitable practices with students.</li> <li>• Work with principal to coordinate school improvement plan, action plans, monitoring systems, and intervention efforts</li> <li>• Support new teachers, teachers who are struggling, and teams that need assistance</li> <li>• Facilitate peer observations, conduct demonstration lessons, provide one-on-one coaching to help teachers succeed</li> </ul>
<p>Staff Development Specialist (SDS)</p> <p>14 positions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working one-on-one with staff development teachers (SDT) in up to 20 schools.</li> <li>• Communicate key system messages and content to SDTs so it is then carried into all schools.</li> <li>• Provide differentiated staff development to all SDTs</li> <li>• Providing training sessions for groups of SDTs (ie., new to the position, middle school SDTs, etc.) on topics such as culturally competent schools, data analysis, effective instructional strategies, coaching techniques.</li> <li>• Support school improvement teams/school leadership teams through teaching School Leadership Team Institute (SLTI) modules to full teams from schools. Provide follow-up support in schools to help teams implement SLTI content and strategies.</li> <li>• Supporting school leadership teams through direct work in the schools with teams in meetings and developing school improvement plans</li> <li>• Participating in monthly Achievement Steering Committee (ASC) meetings held in schools that are in need of improvement</li> <li>• Following up ASC recommendations by providing training</li> <li>• Supporting principals in clusters through planning and facilitation of cluster meetings</li> </ul>
<p>Consulting Teacher (CT)</p> <p>36 positions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working directly with 15-17 client teachers (novice teachers or teachers identified as under-performing) in 10-12 school locations</li> <li>• Conducting informal and formal observations of clients</li> <li>• Meeting with clients to provide feedback</li> <li>• Writing formal observation and evaluation reports</li> <li>• Collecting resources and materials for clients</li> <li>• Meeting with principals to discuss client support</li> <li>• Meeting with PAR panel to review client progress</li> <li>• Meeting with other CTs to discuss ways to support clients</li> </ul>

<p>Consulting Principal (CP)</p> <p>3 positions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working directly with 10-11 client principals (novice principals, principals new to their level; principals identified as under-performing) in 10-11 school locations</li> <li>• Conducting informal and formal observations</li> <li>• Meeting with clients to provide feedback</li> <li>• Writing formal observation and evaluation reports</li> <li>• Collecting resources and materials for clients</li> <li>• Meeting with the A&amp;S Review Panel to review client progress</li> <li>• Meeting with other CPs to discuss ways to support clients</li> </ul>
<p>Professional Growth Consultant (PGC)</p> <p>8 positions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working directly with clients (support professionals who have been identified as under-performing) in their work locations.</li> <li>• Working with clients and supervisors to support participation in the Professional Improvement Process (PIP)</li> <li>• Supporting the rollout of the Support Services Professional Growth System (SSPGS) by providing training to supervisors and evaluators</li> <li>• Visiting schools and offices to make presentations on the SSPGS.</li> <li>• Conducting informal and formal observations</li> <li>• Writing observation and evaluation reports</li> <li>• Meeting with the SSPGS PAR Panel to review client progress</li> </ul>
<p>Curriculum Content Specialist</p> <p>21 positions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading professional development sessions for teachers and teams of teachers. OOD has curriculum specialists with experience and certification in multiple subjects and school levels. This helps ensure a high level of content expertise in all training.</li> <li>• Working directly with teachers and teams in school to provide follow-up support to curriculum training.</li> <li>• Working with project and design teams to establish outcomes and develop training plans for new curriculum</li> <li>• Working with staff from other offices (Curriculum, Special Education) to plan and implement curriculum training</li> <li>• Responding to requests from schools for school-specific training</li> </ul>
<p>Skillful Teaching and Leading Specialist</p> <p>13 positions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching multiple sections of Studying Skillful Teaching (SST) and/or Observing and Analyzing Teaching (OAT) to clients including principals, resource teachers, staff development teachers, and paraeducators</li> <li>• Follow-up visits in schools to support implementation of content learned in SST and OAT</li> <li>• Reviewing assignments completed by SST and OAT students</li> <li>• Site visits to conduct observations with OAT students</li> <li>• Responding to requests for support from administrators to provide guidance in writing formal reports</li> <li>• Make presentations at schools and in clusters to support implementation of the professional growth systems</li> </ul>

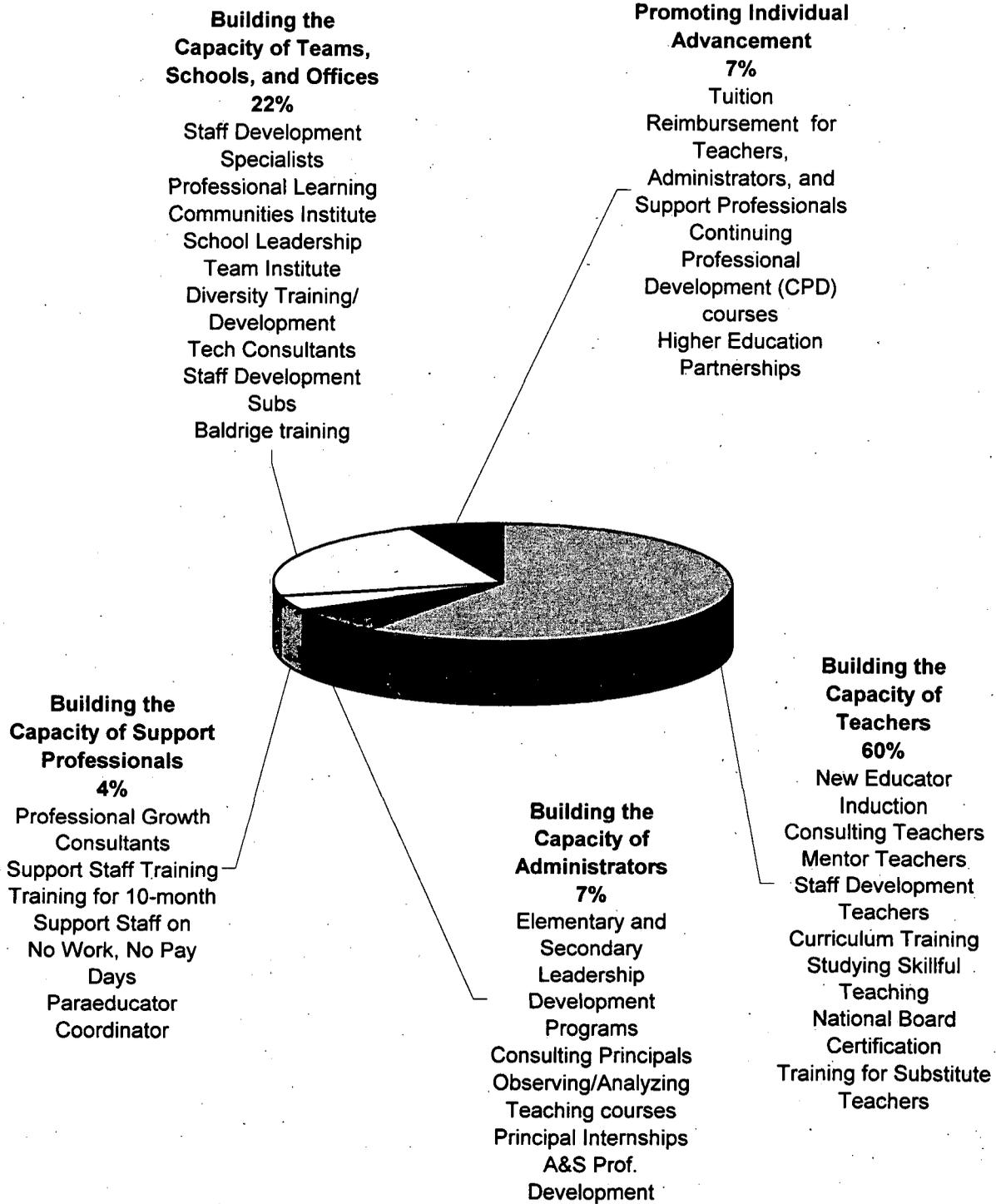
**FISCAL 2008**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Total funding</b>	<b>Number of positions</b>	<b>Funding for positions</b>	<b>Non-position</b>
<b>Building the Capacity of Teachers</b>	<b>28,196,818</b>	<b>259.0</b>	<b>24,739,387</b>	<b>3,457,431</b>
New Educator Induction	716,354	2.5	226,581	489,773
Consulting Teachers	4,312,971	37.0	4,208,756	104,215
Mentor Teachers	384,000	0.0	0	384,000
Staff Development Teachers	16,355,237	179.0	16,355,237	0
Curriculum Training	4,475,242	27.0	2,600,144	1,875,098
Studying Skillful Teaching classes	1,669,007	12.0	1,196,458	472,549
*** National Board Certification Support	182,211	1.5	152,211	30,000
Training for Substitute Teachers	101,796	0.0	0	101,796
<b>Building the Capacity of Administrators</b>	<b>3,542,190</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>2,142,235</b>	<b>1,399,955</b>
Elementary and Secondary Leadership	1,605,797	6.0	661,305	944,492
Consulting Principals	461,174	3.0	461,174	0
*** Principal Interns	816,808	8.0	816,808	0
A & S Monthly Meetings	119,336	0.0	0	119,336
Observing and Analyzing Teaching courses	539,075	2.0	202,948	336,127
<b>Building the Capacity of Support Professionals</b>	<b>2,157,771</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>1,027,978</b>	<b>1,129,793</b>
Professional Growth Consultants	589,359	8.0	589,359	0
Support Staff Training	1,200,607	5.0	372,718	827,889
Support Professional Training -10 (No Work No Pay days)	301,904	0.0	0	301,904
Paraeducator Coordinator	65,901	1.0	65,901	0
<b>Building the Capacity of Schools, Offices, and Teams</b>	<b>11,058,854</b>	<b>58.5</b>	<b>5,682,306</b>	<b>5,376,548</b>
Staff Development Specialists	1,842,592	15.0	1,455,236	387,356
School Leadership Team Institute	127,796	0.0	0	127,796
Professional Learning Communities Institute	435,818	2.0	209,389	226,429
Diversity Training and Development	848,788	3.0	304,422	544,366
Technology Consultant Team	3,449,892	26.0	2,618,078	831,814
Staff Development Substitute Program	2,515,084	0.0	0	2,515,084
Baldrige training	106,392	0.0	0	106,392
Office of Organizational Development	1,425,509	12.5	1,095,181	330,328
OSESS, OSA & SSL Training	124,983	0.0	0	124,983
On-Line Learning Project	182,000	0.0	0	182,000
<b>Support for Individual Advancement</b>	<b>3,465,493</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>290,430</b>	<b>3,175,063</b>
Tuition reimbursement	2,635,173	1.0	46,329	2,588,844
Continuing Professional Development courses	541,040	2.0	91,890	449,150
Higher Education Partnership programs	289,280	1.5	152,211	137,069
<b>TOTAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>48,421,126</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>33,882,336</b>	<b>14,538,790</b>

Building the Capacity of Teachers	29,981,770
Building the Capacity of Administrators	3,427,302
Building the Capacity of Support professionals	2,124,567
Building the Capacity of Teams, Schools, and Office	10,963,655

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**Office of Organizational Development, FY 2008 Budget  
"Student Learning Drives Our Work"**



## **New Thinking on Staff Development**

Back in the early 1990s, when Amy C. Orr started her teaching career in the Rockwood, Mo., school district, her colleagues dreaded the professional development workshops they had to attend.

"It was a lot of what we would call 'sit and git' workshops," said Orr, now a reading specialist in the district's Wild Horse Elementary School. "It was very fragmented, and there was no understanding that staff development could lead to student achievement." More than a decade later, the take on professional development has changed—and not just among Orr's co-workers. Now many national policymakers and experts believe that professional development, if done purposefully and given greater allotments of time, can be an important tool for improving student learning.

As often happens in education, the research on such programs is still catching up with the rhetoric, but scholars are beginning to agree in broad terms on the kinds of professional development efforts that might translate into improved student learning.

### **Common Visions**

Some of the current attention to professional development grows out of several studies in recent years that have highlighted the central role that teachers play in student learning.

A study of Texas districts in the early 1990s by Harvard economist Ronald Ferguson suggests, for example, that teacher expertise accounts for 40 percent of the difference in students' scores on math and reading tests.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act reflects that recognition. Besides calling upon schools to staff classrooms with "highly qualified" teachers, the law says schools should annually increase the percentages of teachers in their buildings who receive "high quality" professional development.

The federal law defines high-quality professional development broadly, calling for programs that are "sustained, intensive, classroom-focused ... and are not one-day or short-term workshops or conferences." While that definition lacks specifics, it tracks closely with what researchers are discovering.

Experts know, for instance, that programs focused on the academic content that teachers must cover and on how students learn that content are more effective than those that impart generic teaching techniques.

### **The Write Stuff**

Researchers have cited the National Writing Project, a federally supported network based at the University of California, Berkeley, as one effective model of professional development. Here are the group's core principals:

- Teachers are the agents of reform; universities and schools are partners for investing in that reform through professional development.
- Professional development programs provide opportunities for teachers to work together to understand the full spectrum of writing development across grades and across subject areas.
- Effective professional development programs provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically.
- Teachers who are well informed and effective in their practice can be successful teachers of other teachers as well as partners in educational research, development, and implementation.

•A reflective and informed community of practice is in the best position to design and develop comprehensive writing programs.

SOURCE: The National Writing Project ([www.nwp.org](http://www.nwp.org))

They know that longer-lasting professional development tends to produce better results. They also know that such programs work best when they link to teachers' daily classroom work—the tasks their students will have to do, for example, or the texts they will use.

To a lesser degree, researchers also have a hunch that it's important for teachers to engage in learning sessions collectively—maybe with other teachers from the same department or grade—so that they can meet later to reflect on what they learned.

Agreement on many of these components is widespread enough that the Washington-based American Educational Research Association published them in a 2005 research guide for education leaders and policymakers.

### **Research Questions**

Researchers can also point to particular models—such as the National Writing Project, a federally supported network based at the University of California, Berkeley, or Cognitively Guided Instruction, a program for teaching mathematics developed by researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison—that have shown some success in changing classroom practices. But they know less about particular aspects of staff development that might have more general applications. For instance, does it help for schools to have full-time “learning coaches” to work with teachers? Research on that fast-growing innovation is inconclusive, according to experts. The same goes for lesson-study teams, online professional development, and a myriad of other approaches.

Studies have been difficult to do because real classroom change is slow, expensive, and complicated to measure. And with multiple school-improvement strategies often taking place at once, experts say, the direct link between professional development and student achievement is not always clear.

Still, a number of reputable studies have identified links between certain types of professional development practices and positive changes in both teachers' instruction and students' achievement. While differing in scope and methodology, such studies tend to have some common themes—to the point that they seem to build on one another.

### **Time and Effort**

In one prominent study, David K. Cohen, a researcher at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and his research partner Heather C. Hill studied 559 California teachers learning to use a new state-approved math framework and new math curricula in the early 1990s that departed from practices then in use in the state. The teachers had participated in various kinds of professional development, from one-day workshops on cooperative learning to longer institutes where teachers worked with new curriculum units that state officials had developed.

Cohen and Hill found that teachers who had attended lengthier sessions that focused more on academic content tended to embrace curricular change more completely than those who hadn't. More importantly, their students scored higher on state math exams than those of other teachers in the study. While the study could not prove cause and effect, the researchers ruled out some other explanations for the improvements, such as differences in classroom demographics or in teachers' attitudes toward the new curricula.

### **Revamping Staff Development**

Some research suggests that devoting adequate time to professional development may be the key.

In 1998, for example, a team of researchers led by Michael S. Garet of the American Institutes for Research in Washington surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,027 teachers on their staff development in math and science over the previous year. When teachers spent about the same amount of time in such activities, the study found, they made about the same progress in improving their knowledge and in making changes in their own classrooms. The improvements occurred regardless of whether the teachers had taken part in a workshop or in more innovative approaches, such as mentoring or study groups. The newer approaches, however, tended to be more sustained.

Indeed, a 2001 study by the Consortium of Chicago School Research found that professional development programs in Chicago public schools that were characterized by "sustained, coherent study; collaborative learning; time for classroom experimentation; and follow-up" had a significant effect on teachers' instructional practices. The study also identified a reciprocal relationship between these types of professional development offerings and a school's overall "orientation toward innovation," suggesting the two feed off each other.

A 2000 study by the National Staff Development Council, meanwhile, examined the award-winning professional development programs at eight public schools that had made measurable gains in student achievement. The study found that in each of the schools, "the very nature of staff development [had] shifted from isolated learning and the occasional workshop to focused, ongoing organizational learning built on collaborative reflection and joint action." Specifically, the study found that the schools' professional development programs were characterized by collaborative structures, diverse and extensive learning opportunities, and an emphasis on accountability and student results.

### **Points for Policy**

In 2005, the American Education Research Association published a research guide on teacher professional development directed at policymakers. The guide offers the following recommendations:

- Make sure that professional development focuses on the subject matter that teachers will be teaching.
- Align teachers' professional development activities with their work experiences, using actual curriculum materials and assessments.
- Provide adequate time for professional development and include opportunities for observing and analyzing students' understanding of the subject matter.
- Make sure that districts have reliable systems for evaluating the impact of professional development on teaching and learning.

SOURCE: American Education Research Association

Amy Orr's district, the 22,000-student Rockwood school system outside St. Louis, adopted some of the newer approaches when it revamped its own staff-development practices several years ago.

Now, teachers at her school meet in teams regularly to analyze the school's test results. Through the analyses, they pinpoint students' knowledge gaps and what the teachers need, as a team, to fill the holes.

The teams might visit classrooms where students score better in a targeted area; recruit speakers; consult district specialists; study available research; and try new approaches and reflect on how they worked.

"If something interrupts our staff-development time now, we are not happy," Orr said. She believes this kind of training has had an impact both on student achievement and teacher satisfaction.

Some researchers warn, however, that new strategies are only as good as the content they incorporate.

The problem, says Thomas B. Corcoran, a co-director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, is that fads, ideology, or charismatic staff-development "gurus" often dictate content choices.

Instead, he said, educators should look for programs grounded in solid research and tempered by clinical knowledge. When the research base comes up short, he says, schools should systematically study and evaluate their own efforts.

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Vol. 01, Issue 01, Pages 15-17

<http://www.teachermagazine.org/tm/articles/2007/10/25/01research.h01.html?print=1>