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PROFESSIONAL LEARNING BENEFITS TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Teachers lack time and opportunities to view each other's classrooms, learn from mentors, and work collaboratively," observed former North Carolina Gov. James B. Hunt Jr., a recognized education expert. "It is time for our education workforce to engage in learning the way other professionals do—continually, collaboratively, and on the job—to address common problems and crucial challenges where they work."¹

Former Governor Hunt articulates what educators know: sustained, intensive, collaborative, and ongoing professional learning is crucial to ensure that all educators have the resources, mentoring, and support every educator needs to help students learn and grow. When associations and school districts address educator teaching and learning issues, whether through professional development/learning provisions² in a collective bargaining agreement or through collaborative policies where bargaining doesn't exist, students and educators benefit.

Teachers want to improve their professional practice, and collective bargaining is an effective way to provide educators a genuine voice in the design and implementation of their own professional learning. Through bargaining, educators can ensure that professional learning is relevant and useful to the challenges they face in the classroom. Collective bargaining between teachers and their employer—involving mutual exchanges of ideas, cooperative problem solving, and written agreements—can create, and support a culture of professional learning that produces real results for students.

Thoughtful contract language or state policy (in states without bargaining laws) can advance instructional practice that can reduce achievement gaps. It is also important to students that teachers have consistent access to high-quality professional development.

1 From the forward to Linda Darling-Hammond, and Frank Adamson, *Professional Development in the Learning Professional: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad* (National Staff Development Council, February 2009).

2 Professional learning is intended to result in system-wide changes in student outcomes. Professional development, which 'happens to' teachers, is often associated with one-time workshops, seminars, or lectures and is typically one-size-fits all approach. In contrast, professional learning, when designed well, is typically interactive, sustained, and customized to teachers' needs. It encourages teachers to take responsibility for their own learning and to practice what they are learning in their own teaching contexts." (Scherff, *Distinguish Professional Learning from Professional Development*, 2018, https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/pacific/blogs/blog2_DistinguishingProfLearning.asp).

IMPROVING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SUPPORTS STUDENT LEARNING

NEA describes comprehensive professional learning as:

- ✓ **Job-embedded.** Too often, what passes for professional development is a series of brief, unconnected workshops planned without teacher input. Job-embedded professional development is intensive, grounded in day-to-day teaching practice, built right into teachers' regular work, and continued throughout educators' careers.
- ✓ **Collaborative.** Educators should have input into their professional learning opportunities so that the programs meet their needs.
- ✓ **Data-driven and classroom-focused.** This improves and increases teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects they teach, how students learn, and the ability to analyze student work from multiple sources and adjust instructional strategies based on such analysis.

HOW COLLECTIVE BARGAINING MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Strong collective bargaining language (or state or local policies where bargaining doesn't exist), ensures that educators have a voice in planning, implementing, and assessing their own professional growth throughout their careers. Key elements include:

- ✓ **Real time for professional learning, not just for isolated workshops scheduled on designated days.** Educators need dedicated time to collaborate and reflect with colleagues.
- ✓ **Formal mentoring/induction programs.** A comprehensive mentoring or induction program is beneficial to provide new teachers feedback and support about curriculum development, classroom management, parent communications, and other responsibilities. Even veteran teachers can use extra support if they are teaching new subjects or curriculum. Associations can negotiate or collaborate on identifying the roles and responsibilities for mentors and coaches, the selection process, compensation, and other program elements. These supports not only help the teacher and benefit students, but they also make educators feel more connected to the Association.
- ✓ **Support for professional certifications and credentials.** Many contracts provide additional compensation for advanced credentials or certifications or tuition reimbursement for those who earn these credentials.