

Deepen

Teacher's World | Strategies | General Education | Empowered Teachers

How can arts education professional development be deepened to serve the unique needs of novice, specialist and generalist teachers?

Students are expected to learn the arts as core subjects. Yet, in the traditional school structure, art, music, dance, and theatre are often considered “specials.” This designation can segregate credentialed arts teachers from the general learning community. General classroom teachers are often in charge of teaching music, dance, theatre and visual arts, but may have little experience or training in the arts. How can a classroom teacher without a strong arts education background teach these subjects? How can arts specialists collaborate with generalists? This is where deep and meaningful professional development can begin to help.

To deliver professional development that speaks to teachers’ needs as well as those of their students, it is valuable to first consider the context for teaching in and through the arts. Through that lens, strategies for professional development can be devised to best serve your teachers. Literature on general education professional development is a rich resource for useful structural suggestions for deepening the quality of teacher learning. It should also be remembered that teachers can be empowered to take the reins to create their own learning opportunities.

Understanding the Teachers’ World

When seeking to deepen professional development for arts specialists and generalists, it helps to understand the context in which they work.

Reasons for teaching. Learn why your teachers teach. The literature reminds us, for some, it’s the love of the art form, where teaching provides the opportunity to continue to engage and celebrate that love, sharing it with other people every day. For some, it’s the love of helping young people. The profound changes students sometimes experience through the arts can deeply affect their teachers.

What students need to know and do. Standards delineating what students should know and do in the arts provide detailed guidance on what arts education could look like; teachers no longer need to guess. The advent of national (National Standards for Arts Education) and state standards (Education Commission of the States), provide continuity and clarity across communities. Professional development can help teachers learn how to teach standards-based curriculum to students. Diane Watanabe formerly of Los Angeles County Office of Education and Mark Slavkin of the Music Center of Los Angeles County reminded the researchers that defining or selecting a written curriculum is on the minds of many districts across the country. What do teachers need to be able to teach students? See *New York City Department of Education*

Learning in and through the arts. For classroom teachers, there are many ways to bring the arts into the learning environment. Some educators find learning to use high quality arts integration helps them feel renewed in their work, makes teaching and learning across the curriculum easier, and enhances the classroom environment. Incorporating arts into teaching across the curriculum can bring new life to school reform efforts. Research continues to explore relationships between ways of thinking and working in various arts disciplines and their relevance to other disciplines. *See The California Consultancy for Arts Education, Renaissance in the Classroom, Southeast Center for Education in the Arts.*

Understanding quality arts integration. While arts specialists may have a strong grasp of arts content in a particular area, classroom teachers' backgrounds vary widely, from little to no arts content knowledge to vibrant participation in the arts community. Both arts specialists and generalists new to arts integration may benefit from understanding what quality arts integration looks like.

Scheduling roadblocks. Schedules may inhibit arts specialists' ability to plan with other teachers. Lack of joint planning time for arts specialists affects many of the professional development designers interviewed for this investigation.

Reaffirm belief. Teachers' belief systems may affect teaching and receptivity to professional development. Visual arts researcher Mary Erickson finds a frequent disconnect in research studies between what is taught and what is expected, guided perhaps by a belief system about what is important to teach. Similarly, classroom teachers new to teaching the arts benefit from developing their own content confidence as they gain the background skills to succeed. Cola MacDonald's study of educators involved in in-service dance programs describes a series of experiences that help educators reassess previously held beliefs. Stepping back and examining what they thought about their own ability to teach dance empowered the educators to identify changes to those belief systems over the course of the professional development program. *See Hubbard Street Dance MAP Program.*

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Strategies for Novice, Specialist and Generalist Teachers:

Novice Arts Specialists | Arts Specialists | Generalist Teachers

Helping teachers move to the next level in their teaching practice is situational. If your district has one arts-related in-service a year and a few arts specialists, most of whom are novice arts educators, you are starting in one place. If you have just completed the revision of the district arts curriculum in four arts disciplines and developed assessment tools, the needs of your learning community may be different.

Visual arts education researcher F. Robert Sabol summarizes important forces affecting the training of art educators in an overview of recruitment, certification and retention. He challenges professional development to stay abreast of the educational reform waves affecting the current expectations of educators, which today include the standards movement, calls for accountability and improved quality, and an intense focus on assessment. Issues in the field include retention negatively affected by lack of support for quality standards and other professional development programs and continued teacher complaints about scarce and irrelevant professional development opportunities.

Novice Arts Specialists

Should you find you have a cadre of teachers new to the classroom, consider the following structures from the literature and practice.

Ease the transition from college to teaching. In the first years of their careers, arts specialists' most pressing needs relate to learning how to teach. In recent years, with arts standards in place, pre-service teachers may already have an introductory awareness of the frameworks for what students know and can do in the arts. Making the transition from college programs and student teaching to working with hundreds of children every week can be overwhelming. A great deal of energy goes into classroom management, assessment and applying the concepts of educational learning theory and technique.

Accordingly, professional development for newer arts specialists should be sensitive to their needs. Music researcher Jerry Kupchynsky suggests novices need to:

- Learn "the lay of the land", including physical surroundings and key support staff.
- Establish good relations with supervisors: learn about educational philosophy, politics and how you will be evaluated.
- Set up expectations for students. Get to know them and establish discipline and the ways to work together.
- Meet the community and learn about its culture, priorities, demographics and religions.

Kristine Alexander, director of The California Arts Project (TCAP) suggests that during the early years of standards-based arts teaching, new teachers need to focus on the development of a course outline aligned to the standards. Developing the professional development sequence for teaching grade level content and benchmarks for measuring student success can help novice teachers align their practice to district and state frameworks.

Optimize mentor programs. New arts educators may have more students and logistics to juggle and fewer opportunities to interact with colleagues than general education counterparts. Using mentors may be a helpful strategy to lessen the challenges. Music education researcher Paul Haack offers recommendations from the Project 2000: Mentorship and Professional Development - The Minnesota Model study of music education mentors. When identifying mentors, consider availability and expertise as well as interest. Haack suggests mentors may offer struggling novice teachers guidance in artistic, educational, logistic and political areas while serving as advocates within the system. In this study, Haack finds that new teachers prefer someone close to their own age and experience with a similar grade level to teach; someone who can empathize with their situation. Findings suggest cross-district mentoring may be helpful, as it provides fresh perspectives and ensures the mentor will not be officially evaluating the teacher.

Arts Specialist

Combating isolation and addressing needs, professional development communities find ways to help renew, empower and improve the teaching of arts specialists in the field.

Mentoring mentors. Successful mentors can benefit from the often neglected support of mentor orientation and training. Even the best teachers may need to learn how to effectively mentor their counterparts. Clearly defined expectation and training for mentors helps. Involved mentors attend to their charges' needs in informal as well as formal ways. For instance, some trainings advise regular phone calls, lunch meetings and monthly dinner meetings to keep the pair well connected, as the Society for Music Teacher Education of Music Educators National Conference learned.

Structures for co-mentoring. Some individuals and learning communities turn to co-mentoring as a more formal way for colleagues to help each other grow and reduce the hierarchy. Peers can provide structured, helpful support to each other across location and perspective. For instance, music educators Frances Kochan and Susan Trimble advise that each co-mentor needs to be proactive and willing to take responsibility. Their four phases of growth in co-mentorship consist of moving through groundwork and self-assessment; warming up by selecting a co-mentor and establishing norms; working with that co-mentor with criticism shared openly; and moving to long-term status, where the co-mentorship transcends disruptive changes, such as a move.

Including arts specialists in school leadership capacity. By bringing arts perspectives to integrated general education committees, advancing arts specialists can broaden their systemic understanding and effect. School-wide leadership teams provide a particular opportunity for change, adding value to non-arts educators who learn about the perspectives and possibilities of the arts. *See New York City Department of Education, Alaska Arts Education Consortium.*

The goals of (the) Alaska Arts Education Collaborative Project center on the development and support of a cadre of arts educators as a statewide leadership team, in order to sustain the role of the arts in Alaskan schools. The Focus is on Title One Schools, increasing the capacity of K-12 teachers to provide high quality, research-based arts education, and increasing the performance and achievement of students in Language Arts through their active involvement in the arts.

- Annie Calkins, Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) and Alaska Arts Education Consortium (AAEC): Alaska Arts Education Collaborative Project Evaluator

Self-assessing teaching can empower the educator. Teacher isolation remains a challenge across all subject areas, particularly in the arts. Developing tools to self-assess pedagogy and cultivating peers and partners for low-stakes “critical friend” networks can provide insight into the effects of various teaching strategies. In an encouraging learning community environment, you can see what’s working or not working and become more empowered to adjust. The challenge for school districts and professional development designers is to encourage teachers to look critically at the development of teaching skills that challenge students when the current overall educational environment around teacher quality is high stakes.

Supporting individual goals. The different pathways to professional growth need to be remembered when envisioning long-term learning opportunities for arts specialists. Remember to look for different benchmarks in different people. One educator may become a master teacher involved in assessment development while another may become an arts supportive superintendent.

Developing authentic arts assessment communities. Since very few large scale standardized assessments measure arts learning, many communities looking deeply at student learning in the arts develop tools for themselves. Learn and borrow from what’s out there already to avoid starting from scratch. As you adapt the approach or tool to your specific situation, the results can be stimulating, rewarding and empowering. *See Arts in Basic Curriculum Project, Center for Arts Education (CAE).*

Nurturing and challenging the artist. Helping specialists refine skills in their disciplines and develop strategies for teaching across arts disciplines offers renewal and reconnection to the artist within each educator.

Supportive structures from the field

- Peer networks across arts-based education reform schools
- Intensive summer institutes for selected arts specialists (different offerings for emerging or seasoned)
- Master teachers involved in helping peers learn
- Whole school networks to share promising practices and troubleshoot with other education colleagues and administrators
- Site-based institutes including specialists and other educators to adapt professional development to school needs

See Arts as Basic Curriculum Project (ABC), Arts Education Collaborative, Arts Impact & Puget Sound Education Service District, A+ Schools, Pennsylvania Governor's Institute for Arts Educators.

Generalist Teachers

To introduce classroom teachers to quality arts education, professional development designers take a variety of approaches including:

Modeling with teacher as learner. Often used in summer institutes or workshops, the master teacher or teaching artist walks teachers through the same steps a student would take in a strong, content-based arts class.

Pros: Teachers get to experience everything, from the risk taking to the art making that their students might also undergo; experienced teacher demonstrates content mastery, familiarity.

Cons: The skill gap between the arts experienced master teacher and participating teacher may be perceived to be too wide. If so, teachers stop processing and assume they can't teach in the same way.

Observation of mentor modeling with teachers' students. Often used as a follow up to summer institutes, frequently through artist-in-residence structures.

Pros: Teacher can stand back and witness new possibilities in own students.

Cons: Disparity in arts backgrounds may encourage teacher to give over the reins, doing less rather than more teaching of the arts.

Co-teaching. Sometimes done in teacher's home classroom, sometimes in neutral location, such as during summer school or after school program.

Pros: Levels hierarchy, respects existing teacher's experiences, can adapt to on-the-spot needs of students and co-teachers, provides a graduated level of support for new forms of teaching.

Cons: Shifting from a solo teacher to team teaching mindset is difficult for some educators; it takes more time to work out how two people will teach together than to do it alone.

See Music Center: Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County

Seeing standards as opportunities. Continue to spread deep awareness of the arts standards frameworks, which provide very specific guidance on what students at various grade levels should know and be able to do in the arts. These guides are a deep and broad piece of work that can inspire and inform educators, especially in districts without strong arts programs or personnel.

Assessing and differentiating instruction. Plan for different teacher backgrounds. Allow teachers to self-assess their prior experiences, belief and confidence in the arts before participating in a structured learning opportunity. Professional development providers can use that data to offer different levels or entry points into the learning opportunity. A dance in-service program studied by Cola MacDonald encourages participating teachers to self-select their level of participation; observing is an option, as the program develops a safe space. [The Center for Arts Education \(CAE\)](#) continues to develop new structures for classroom teachers, school leaders, parents and cultural personnel to learn from each other. Innovations include a principal leadership network with grant resources open only for experienced leaders, according to Russell Granet, former Director of Professional Development/Peer Exchange. *See Music Center: Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County, Arizona Artist Teacher Institute.*

Strategies from General Education

Literature on professional development provides useful structural suggestions for deepening the quality of teacher learning, particularly as it relates to improved student learning. In addition to research-based approaches, the analyses recommend offering professional development opportunities which:

Connect to the specific professional development needs of the education community by:

- Deepening educators' content knowledge
- Helping teachers develop instructional strategies
- Aligning with school and district goals or plans
- Helping educators create safe, supportive learning environments

Provide significant time to:

- Allow teachers to practice and apply the learning
- Encourage continued growth through on-going professional development

Practice principles of adult learning, such as:

- Integrating professional development with teacher goals and needs
- Creating collaborative professional development settings, which help teachers' work with colleagues in and out of school
- Tapping social needs of learners, such as reading, reflection, research and analysis, with colleagues can provide positive challenge for teachers
- Respecting teachers' own capabilities to direct their own learning by encouraging active involvement
- Expanding the definition of professional development to include a continuing learning mindset
- Varying professional development formats. Small groups can help teachers analyze individual student progress while large groups may align a staff to an education reform. Individual study can help teachers go deeper into specific learning areas, such as voice study for music or theatre specialists

Provide a supportive context for learning, which may include:

- Cultivating supportive educational leaders, who shape the culture of continuous instructional improvement
- Securing resources, which provide time and money to support professional development. Too often, the resource incentives support in-service workshops which introduce new, unrelated ideas without connection to practice or continued learning opportunities
- Helping educators learn to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately

How Teachers Can Create Their Own Opportunities

Both the arts specialist and the classroom teacher have things they can do to take their professional development into their own hands.

Be proactive. When teachers take charge of their own evolving needs and progress, it can benefit both individuals and the arts education community. Draw from existing components even if they are not closely linked; don't wait for a fully-baked professional development program.

Develop personal networks. Have a list of people to consult for outside advice to provide a fresh perspective or help in professional advancement. It may include colleagues, students, parents, administrators, artists, professors or researchers. Expand the network over time.

Identify discipline colleagues elsewhere. Bring teachers in the same discipline together across schools, districts and grade levels through joint in-service opportunities or working with professional arts teachers' associations.

Cross-arts identification. Persist in trying to create larger communities across arts disciplines. There can be professional development growth and a decrease in isolation when teachers see themselves as "the arts" not just as "music, dance, theatre, and visual arts."

Interdisciplinary networks. Engage educators in other subject areas in a broader group looking at how teaching in and through the arts can help transform schools. Arts integration can be a meeting place in the middle of disciplines that helps every educator learn more about education. *See Stockton Unified School District (SUSD).*

Escape boundaries – the arts teaching workforce. People who teach the arts, whether in or out of the school, form a natural affinity network. Places like [Center for Arts Education \(CAE\)](#), [Chicago Arts Partnerships for Education \(CAPE\)](#) and [New York City Department of Education](#) help cultivate the school-based arts partnerships that include arts specialists and generalists as well as teaching artists.

Culture of giving back. Over time, as teachers grow and learn, passing the hurdles of the novice years, their needs change and they have more to give back. For instance, music teachers who are more involved in their arts education communities and take active leadership roles experience greater renewal.

Simple can be effective. Community can be built within a school district. Some of the simplest things - the meeting together, the looking deeply at and discussing student work - can offer professional development. And, they are more sustainable than the big grant.

Participate in authentic assessment groups. To figure out what student achievement in classrooms looks like when students learn in or through the arts, join an existing groups improving their capacity to assess the arts. Look at networks across the state or the country if none exist locally or start your own.

Practice teaching the arts in low stakes environments. Explore after school or summer opportunities to practice teaching an art form or unit before bringing it to the school day. *See Washington State's Classroom-Based Performance Assessments.*

Deepen knowledge and skill in an art form. Identify an artistic area in which to improve. Chart a multi-year course using individual resources, such as coursework, community arts school classes, individual study, collaboration, videos, books or film. Learn an instrument and join a community band. Learn how to draw, then start going to weekly model drawing sessions. Discover raku, or weaving, or tap. Learn how to improvise. Take a theatre class, then audition for plays in the summer. Link this with a larger arts education learning community so you can share and receive feedback and support. Create opportunities to try, reflect and develop questions and the experiment in the classroom with what is learned. Regardless of whether the art form is new or an expansion of knowledge within or between arts disciplines, a focused course of study can build a solid arts literacy foundation in a new area. *See Perpich Center for Performing Arts.*

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Promising Practices: *The California Arts Project (TCAP) | Arts Impact & Puget Sound Educational Service District | North Carolina A+ Schools | Looking to Other Communities*

Communities across the country are addressing ways to serve the distinct needs of the novice and experienced teacher and the arts specialist and generalist teacher. Some communities start by building experience and competency in the art for their teachers. Others are best served by artist mentor relationships. Others use summer institutes or a focus on a single art form. The diversity of approaches serve the unique needs of each community.

The California Arts Project (TCAP) ***Journey Toward an Arts Understanding***

With classroom teachers, the Project rests on the idea that there is deep and worthwhile content in the arts. While no replacement for a strong basic foundation in the arts, the professional development services work to nurture a growing awareness, interest, and capacity in teaching the arts. With the classroom teacher new to the arts, Director Kristine Alexander explains, "We help them first see that there is content, and get over the idea they have to be talented, or have special gifts, at the same time, we work to build their confidence that this can be taught."

Once TCAP helps teachers connect the familiar idea of the standards with the arts, they start building academic vocabulary, beginning artistic skills and processes in an arts discipline. Then, teachers have the words, basic skills and personal experiences to draw from to teach, explain and help others learn. From there, the next level deals with managing the content, as teachers ask, 'How do you get 30 kids to move around and not hurt themselves?' Programs become more tailored and specific as teachers move forward in expertise. Longer learning cycles move from standards to assessment and the use of criteria to clarify the process. Alexander adds, "We also believe that for the generalist... once they grasp the art (form) content and pedagogy, they are masters of the interdisciplinary."

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Arts Impact & Puget Sound Educational Service District ***Side-by-Side Mentoring***

Puget Sound Educational District and the arts education cultural coalition called Arts Impact worked together to help increase classroom teachers' capacity to teach the arts. An intensive summer institute bringing together teachers and artist-mentors starts the process. Teachers receive follow-up support through a 10-week side-by-side mentoring program, with one of the institute's artist mentors working closely with them, modeling arts instruction. As educators begin to teach their own arts lessons, the mentors analyze and help teachers improve their understanding of the content and pedagogy. Together, the teacher and artist-mentor assess teacher and class development using Arts Impact rubrics. Centralized professional development and coordination of

the artist-mentors helps maintain a high level of mentor quality. Through in-services and retreats, artist-mentors learn to improve their own teaching, as well as use and guide others in performance-based arts assessment techniques. Evaluation of this work found participating teachers improved their content and skill knowledge in the arts. Concurrent with the teacher change, students' arts achievement also improved. As the state readies for statewide performance-based assessment in the arts, this professional development collaboration helps Tacoma area students move forward.

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North Carolina A+ Schools

Differentiated Approach to Teacher Learning

Sample A+ School Communities	Approach	Result
Nearly all schools participating in A+	Intensive whole school participation in summer institute to begin; flexible onsite and centralized institutes in years to follow.	All staff on same page with shared vocabulary, language, helping them develop the school approach to A+, part of the bottom-up reform. Encouraged changes in school identity.
Teachers from across the network	A+ Fellows: network of A+ experienced teachers, including arts specialists and classroom teachers developed internal capacity to teach and facilitate less experienced educators	Empowered teachers; stabilized; kept more experienced teachers growing, involved, and connected.
Creekside Elementary	Experimented with arts specialists team teaching in 90-minute blocks with generalists, eventually rotating through classrooms for daily teaching over nine intensive weeks. Teams sometimes worked together or broke in half for 2x45 minute smaller classes, allowing arts teachers to include elaborate projects.	Team teachers develop smooth working relationship, reduced isolation, gave teachers student-focused dialogue partner, and educators developed instructional flexibility. Arts teachers learned more of grade-level curriculum and classroom teachers learned more about potential of arts instruction, reducing the marginality of the arts.
Albany Woods Elementary School	Teaching through two process: A guest or school educator teaches an integrated arts lesson many times in the morning; many teachers observe. Afternoons, students are dismissed while teachers discuss and analyze the lessons, considering how to personalize for their students.	Builds on A+ Summer Institute intensive exposure, giving teachers direct connection between ideas and practice.

Source: Creativity, book 3 of 7 in the A+ Series, A+ North Carolina Schools Program: Schools That Work for Everyone.

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Looking to Other Communities

Target participants of the professional development	Sample communities	Lessons for school districts on deepening
Arts specialists and artist-mentors	Vermont MIDI Project	Pick one area to strengthen and form a community of teachers and others that delves deeply into learning that one area (music creation and response here). Create a culture of inquiry to improve the work. Develop the capacity within the community to help those with questions explore new avenues.
Generalists learning to teach the arts	Arizona Artist Teacher Institutes	Travel to remotely located teachers; bring the opportunity to them. Have them structure an inquiry and reflect on their practice while learning initial concepts. Focus on most needed arts disciplines (dance and theatre in here).
Interdisciplinary networks of arts specialists, educators, artists, education administrators, researchers.	Perpich Center for Performing Arts: Arts Quality Teaching Networks	Create a larger inquiry-based community of people involved in teaching in or through the arts. People have their own questions to make the professional development specific. The group helps each other learn and troubleshoot, assess and understand.

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Lessons Learned

Mentor teachers. Look cross-district to identify arts mentors and provide formal and informal mentoring opportunities.

Support teachers' needs. Create a culture across the education faculty to promote awareness and support to meet teachers' needs and ease burdens rather than pile on more challenges.

Provide opportunities for peer exchange. Develop peer-exchange structures that use small groups of both novices and seasoned professionals to support educators while they move ideas to practice.

Encourage collaborative planning. Teachers working together to plan curriculum for the school offer important opportunities to integrate the arts into school environments. Participating arts specialists can shape not only the curriculum, but may also help their colleagues deepen their understanding and value of arts in education.

Attend summer intensive arts institutes. Use intensive institutes to kick off ongoing work in pairs and small groups, as teachers learn to deepen their learning and apply concepts to practice.

Useful Tools

Education Commission of the States

Offers state profiles, analysis, and comparisons on school leader professional development, parent involvement in professional development, state arts education policies, standards, teacher certification, licensure, and other areas.

Handbook of Research and Policy in Art Education

Day, Michael D. and Elliot W. Eisner. eds. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

Summarizes research in pertinent areas including teacher preparation, retention, assessment, and curricula.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

The NAEP arts assessment presents a broad view of how well America's students can respond to, create, and perform works of visual art, music, and theatre.

National Staff Development Council (NSDC)

Includes NSDC Standards for Staff Development and links to research library and resources on teacher professional development and learning.

No Subject Left Behind: A Guide to Arts Education Opportunities in the 2001 NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND Act

A resource created jointly by a consortium of national arts and arts education service organizations. Includes sections on grant programs such as professional development for arts educators grants, Title I opportunities, and answers on frequently asked questions about arts teachers and high quality teacher requirements.

State Arts Education Policy Database by Arts Education Partnership

Includes state arts standards, assessment measures, graduation and college entrance requirements, licensure/certification requirements for arts teachers; implementation of arts standards, licensure/certification requirements for general (elementary) classroom teachers, pre-service and professional development requirements for arts teachers, and relevant state-appointed task forces or commissions relevant to arts education.

Your Turn

- What's happening now? What are the strong and weak areas of your system?

Students: What should students be able to do? To what extent do your educators help them do that? Who provides the instruction? Which students are receiving arts instruction? What level of equity do you have across the arts education program?

Arts Specialists: Where are the arts specialists in your school system? Where and when do they teach the arts? What are their professional development needs and interests?

Classroom Teachers: What capacity do your classroom teachers have to teach the arts? To integrate the arts with other subjects across the curriculum?

- How can professional development address the needs of your arts specialists, general classroom teachers and novice teachers (as opposed to other interventions such as space, scheduling, personnel, budget, or curriculum)?
- How can your current professional development be enhanced to align with the teachers' needs you have identified?
- What structures (mentorships, institutes, co-teaching) can best support your teachers' needs?
- Who can you partner with to deliver professional development that meets your teachers' needs?
- How can you use your strongest teachers to help others?
- How can you support teachers in creating their own professional development opportunities?