The Pursuit of Excellence
in Teacher Professional Development

Report of the Maryland Teacher
Professional Development Advisory Council

Submitted to:

Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick
Maryland State Superintendent of Schools

March 2008

April 4, 2008

Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick
State Superintendent of Schools
Maryland State Department of Education
200 W. Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD

Dear Dr. Grasmick:

On behalf of the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Advisory Council, we are pleased to submit the Council's third report, *The Pursuit of Excellence in Teacher Professional Development.*

As the title suggests, the Council based its work over the past eighteen months on your charge to examine state and local efforts to use the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards* to create a statewide system of high-quality professional development and to identify challenges associated with implementing the standards. We acknowledge the thoughtful work of our colleagues in schools, in district offices, in colleges and universities, and at the Maryland State Department of Education. At the same time, the Council identified a number of areas in which continuing improvements are warranted if we are to make good on our commitment to ensure all of Maryland's teachers have access to and participate in meaningful professional learning opportunities.

The *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards* offer a bold vision of professional development. The Council examined statewide efforts to ensure the standards are in use by reviewing use of the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide,* the state of the art of evaluating teacher professional development and the deployment of school-based professional development staff to increase the amount of job-embedded professional development.

As in previous reports, the Council's third report is a consensus document and reflects our continuing resolve to be inclusive and transparent in all of our work. The Council thanks you for your continued leadership and guidance in its work and for demanding that we do all that is possible to support teachers as they help their students. All of the members of the Council stand ready to assist you in the important work that lies ahead.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Haas,
Superintendent
Harford County Public
Schools

Hanne Mawhinney,
Coordinator of
Organizational Leadership
and Policy Studies

Colleen Seremet,
Assistant State
Superintendent of
Instruction

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to the Council's work over the past 18 months. The Council is especially pleased to acknowledge the help provided by the members of the Professional Development Coordinators Network. These hard working educators provided extensive information about local evaluation efforts and were quite candid in discussing their questions and concerns about how to improve the quality of evaluations of professional development. The coordinators also shared their experiences in using the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide and they provided detailed information about the deployment of school-based professional development staff across the state. The Council is also pleased to acknowledge the assistance of MSDE staff who gave generously of their time to explain the agency's role in promoting more extensive use of the planning guide and in conducting more rigorous evaluations of teacher professional development at the state and local levels.

Finally, the Council acknowledges the support provided by staff from Policy Studies Associates and LDRA Performance Consultants. A special thanks to Bruce Haslam who served as the facilitator at the Council's meetings. We appreciate his skill in framing complex issues, his ability to listen to multiple perspectives and find common ground, and his never ending patience and sense of humor.

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Executive Summary

Recognizing the importance of high-quality professional learning for all teachers, Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, convened the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Advisory Council in January 2003. She called on the Council to:

■   Examine current teacher professional development policies and programs at the state and local levels

■   Set standards as a means of articulating a Maryland-specific, policy-relevant definition of high-quality professional development

■   Offer recommendations for improving professional development so that it meets the new standards

In December 2006, Dr. Grasmick affirmed the Council's ongoing work and renewed her original charge by calling on the group to:

■   Continue to examine state and local efforts to use the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards* to create a statewide system of high-quality professional development

■   Identify challenges associated with implementing the standards

From the outset, the members of the Council have consistently adhered to five basic principles. Together, they:

■   ***Ground their work in a broad definition of what constitutes teacher professional development.*** Professional development includes activities such as teacher study groups, coaching and mentoring, teacher networks, engagement on school improvement teams and committees that develop curricula and assessments, workshops and other training, conferences and professional meetings, and college and university courses that focus on improving teachers' professional practice.

■   ***Recognize and acknowledge that this broad definition requires that responsibility and accountability for professional development quality be shared by many stakeholders***. This principle means that teachers, principals, central office staff, college and university faculty and staff, and staff at MSDE, as well as other stakeholders, must work together.

■ **_Have applied a systems perspective in their thinking about professional development._** This means that the members look for evidence of coherence in professional development programs and practices and for the links between professional development and other components of school and district organization and operations.

■ **_Are transparent and inclusive in all of their work._** Council members routinely communicate with colleagues and solicit their feedback on the work of the Council. They also share and solicit feedback on draft reports and other products.

■ **_Reach solid consensus out of lively discussions and after considering differing viewpoints._** The Council members work hard to reach consensus on all of their public reports. One important advantage of the Council's diverse membership is that many different viewpoints and perspectives are reflected in the Council's deliberations.

The Council has adopted an intensely practical perspective. Among other things, this means that the Council works hard to find a reasonable balance between recommendations that are consistent with current capacity and resources and those that stretch current capacity and that may require a reallocation of resources or perhaps even an increase in resources for professional development. Indeed, the Council believes that state and local investments in capacity-building are critical to carrying out recommendations related to improving professional development programs and practice.

Using the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide and Planning Framework

One of the important messages from the spring 2003 focus groups on the new teacher professional development standards was that state and local capacity to implement the standards was uneven. Focus group participants also expressed a need for some sort of assistance to help educators understand the standards and plan professional development that reflected the dimensions of quality called for in the standards. To address this need and to encourage increased attention to the standards, MSDE commissioned the development of the _Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide_ and a companion document, _Tips and Talking Points for Introducing the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide._[1] Dr. Grasmick and the Council encouraged professional

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[1] Development included preparation and field testing of several versions of the guide. Overall, more than 100 Maryland educators reviewed these early versions, applied them to professional development planning efforts, and provided feedback and suggestions to the developers.

development planners to review the planning guide and to consider using it in carrying out their planning tasks.

The planning guide presents a six-element framework for planning high-quality professional development that meets the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards* and it provides concrete suggestions for applying the framework. Therefore, the Council was interested in looking at use of the guide as one indicator of progress in applying the standards. Specifically, the Council's review was guided by two questions:

- How and to what extent is the guide being used at the state and local levels?

- What challenges are associated with applying the planning framework to professional development planning?

The Council concludes that use of the guide in planning professional development that meets the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards is a work in progress. Users and potential users at the state and local levels generally recognize the potential payoffs of using the guide. They also point to examples of how it has been and is being used. In some cases, they offer concrete examples of planning processes and the plans that have been generated. In other cases, they point to the ways that the guide has influenced conversations and led people to think differently about professional development.

The Council also concludes that some—although by no means all—of the challenges of using the planning guide are associated with broader challenges in applying the professional development standards. The Council's recommendations focus on building capacity to use the guide, especially the planning framework. Because the Council believes that the planning guide is most useful in addressing specific needs and priorities, the Council does not recommend a statewide policy requiring its use. Finally, the Council cautions that the timing of the introduction of the planning guide is crucial. The guide should be introduced in the early stages of planning activities to allow adequate time for users to work through the planning process.

Recommendations for More Strategic Use of the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide in Implementing the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards

Recommendation 1	
State and local professional development planners and providers should apply the planning framework to planning both high-priority, comprehensive, long-term initiatives at the state and local levels and more narrowly focused school-based, job-embedded professional development	
Action Step 1.1	In consultation with the Master Plan Work Group, MSDE should modify requirements and expectations for district master plans and annual updates to require application of the planning framework to district professional development initiatives, including school-based, job-embedded professional development
Action Step 1.2	MSDE program offices should require the application of the planning framework in all requests for proposals or solicitations for support for teacher professional development programs and initiatives
Action Step 1.3	Districts should incorporate the planning framework and suggestions and directions for using it into all guidance related to teacher professional development, including school improvement planning
Action Step 1.4	MSDE and the districts should collaborate to provide adequate orientation and training to new and inexperienced users of the guide to familiarize them with the planning framework and expectations for the completed plans
Action Step 1.5	Districts should extend the orientation and training recommended under Action Step 1.4 to prepare school-based professional development staff to make extensive use of the planning framework

Recommendation 2	
MSDE and the districts should establish procedures for providing detailed feedback on plans based on the planning framework, with the overall goal of designing professional development that addresses the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards	
Action Step 2.1	MSDE and the districts should collaborate on creating and using rubrics to review plans for completeness as reflected in their attention to six elements of the planning framework and their overall coherence
Action Step 2.2	MSDE and the districts should routinely provide clear, concise, and timely feedback to guide revisions of the plans to ensure that they address the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards*
Action Step 2.3	MSDE and the districts should review the substance of formal feedback on professional development plans to diagnose problems in preparing adequate plans and gaps in capacity to apply the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards*

The State of the Art of Evaluating Teacher Professional Development in Maryland

Standard VIII of the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards calls for "rigorous evaluations (that) assess the impact of professional development on teaching and student learning." In addition, indicators under this standard call

for professional development planners to (1) identify the kinds of evidence about teaching and student learning that will be collected and used as indicators of the success of professional development, and (2) consistent with progress benchmarks and goals, determine how and when the data will be collected and reported. The indicators also call for evaluations that "assess the impact of professional development on school culture and organization…." Finally, the indicators emphasize the need to communicate the results of evaluations to key stakeholders and to ensure that there are adequate resources for the evaluations.

Because of the potential benefits of rigorous evaluations in improving teacher professional development, the Council concluded that it is important to address the following questions about evaluating professional development professional development in Maryland:

- How and to what extent are districts, MSDE, and other entities evaluating professional development in Maryland?

- What are some examples of promising practices?

- What are the challenges associated with evaluating teacher professional development?

The Council concludes that the increase in the quantity of state and local evaluations teacher professional development, combined with increased awareness of the need for more rigorous evaluations, sets the stage for significant progress. The Council recognizes that ongoing review of teachers' perceptions of their professional learning experiences, both in terms of how these experiences are organized and the perceived likelihood that they will result in changed in teaching and learning, are important. At the same time, the Council concludes that the districts, MSDE, and other stakeholders need to work together to improve both the scope and quality of their evaluation efforts. In particular, future evaluation efforts should focus on careful examination of the effect of professional development on observable and measurable changes in teacher knowledge and skills and classroom practice. These evaluations should also focus on linking specific changes in practice to changes in student learning.

In urging improvements in evaluating teacher professional development, the Council is acutely aware that there are few good models elsewhere in the country to guide improvements in Maryland. At the same time, heightened demands for accountability and solid evidence of reasonable returns on investments make it imperative to improve evaluations of teacher professional development.

Recommendations for Improving Evaluations of Teacher Professional Development

Recommendation 1	
MSDE, the districts, and college and university faculty and staff should collaborate to develop tools and other resources that will enhance state and local capacity to evaluate professional development	
Action Step 1.1	MSDE, districts, and providers should collaborate to assemble a compendium of data-collection instruments for districts and MSDE program offices to use in designing evaluations of teacher professional development
Action Step 1.2	MSDE, the districts, and state professional associations, such as the Maryland Council of Staff Developers, should collaborate to convene a series of capacity-building seminars and training activities focused on evaluation design, data collection and analysis, and reporting

Recommendation 2
MSDE and the districts should include individuals who are knowledgeable about evaluation on planning teams and draw on their expertise in designing, conducting, and reporting on evaluations

Recommendation 3	
Ongoing evaluations focused on teacher perceptions of and satisfaction with professional learning opportunities, which are important for state and local professional development planning, should employ more sophisticated instruments and analyses	
Action Step 3.1	Evaluations should employ data-collection instruments and strategies that are explicitly tailored to the professional development activities being evaluated
Action Step 3.2	Evaluations should rely on instruments that invite comparisons with other activities, and that include questions and prompts focused on teachers' (a) understanding of the purposes and objectives of the professional development; (b) basic mastery of content; (c) likely application and use of new knowledge and skills in the classroom; (d) perceptions of the likely availability of time to experiment with new instructional approaches, collaborate with other teachers, and reflect on their effectiveness; and (e) perceptions of the roles of principals, other school leaders, and school-based professional development staff in supporting and facilitating participation and experimentation and application of new practices

Recommendation 4	
MSDE and the districts should focus more explicitly on evaluating the outcomes of teacher professional development, as indicated by: (a) changes in teacher knowledge and skills, (b) changes in school organization, (c) changes in classroom practice, and (d) changes in student outcomes	
Action Step 4.1	Evaluations should rely on well-designed, validated instruments to measure participant mastery of new knowledge and/or skills
Action Step 4.2	Evaluations should rely on well-designed teacher logs and similar self-report instruments to assess the effect of professional development on classroom instruction
Action Step 4.3	Evaluations should rely on data from walk-throughs and other carefully structured observations of teacher performance linked to clearly defined indicators of intended professional development outcomes
Action Step 4.4	Evaluations should rely on multiple indicators of student learning

Recommendation 5	
MSDE and district investments (including people, time, and money) in evaluations of professional development should be consistent with overall improvement priorities and priorities in professional development program and practices	
Action Step 5.1	MSDE and the districts should allocate sufficient resources for evaluation to ensure that the evaluations will yield useful information about the results of key professional development activities and activities that are central to the success of major reform initiatives

The Deployment of School-Based Professional Development Staff in Maryland Schools

The Council's interest in the role of school-based professional development staff has been shaped in large part by an interest in school-based, job-embedded professional development, which is viewed by many as the most valuable kind of professional learning. By working with individual teachers and small groups of teachers in their schools and classrooms, school-based professional development staff can, among other things, tailor professional development to address individual professional learning needs, facilitate more rapid application of new knowledge and skills, and provide early feedback and guidance.

Although the Council has been aware of the presence of school-based professional development staff in Maryland, the members wanted to know more about the particulars of these assignments. In particular, they were interested in the following questions:

- What are the statewide patterns in the deployment of school-based professional development staff?

- What responsibilities do they have?

- What challenges do they encounter in their work?

- What kinds of infrastructures have been developed to support these positions?

Based on its review of the deployment of school-based professional development staff in Maryland, the Council applauds the considerable progress in this area and notes that districts have made a substantial investment in this strategy. Indeed, districts identified 86 categories of school-based professional development staff and reported approximately 1,800 staff assigned to these positions. The estimated annual cost of these positions is more than $135,000,000. The Council also concludes that this effort holds significant promise as a strategy for enhancing job-embedded professional development and views it as an important

indicator of progress in providing professional development that meets the
Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards.

The Council's recommendations focus on enhancing state and local
infrastructures to support these positions. The recommendations also focus on
providing support for principals and they call for more extensive documentation of
the work done by school-based professional development staff and for more
systematic evaluations of their contributions to teacher performance and student
learning.

Recommendations to Support and Enhance the Deployment of School-Based Professional Development Staff

Recommendation 1	
MSDE should expand the statewide learning communities on coaching and mentoring	
Action Step 1.1	MSDE and the districts should continue to rely on these learning communities to collect and share examples of (a) job descriptions, (b) recruitment strategies, (c) training strategies and materials, (d) promising and successful practices, and, (e) evaluations

Recommendation 2	
Districts should expand their support for the work of school-based professional staff through more extensive preparation of principals and other school leaders to work effectively with these staff	
Action Step 2.1	Districts should train principals and other school leaders to understand the responsibilities and facilitate the work of school-based professional development staff

Recommendation 3	
Districts should document the work of school-based professional development staff and assess its effect on teachers, schools, and student learning	
Action Step 3.1	Districts should use individual logs and similar instruments to document the work of school-based professional development staff
Action Step 3.2	Districts should survey school-based professional development staff, teachers, and principals to gauge overall satisfaction with the work of these staff, perceptions of their contributions to improving instruction, and gaps in assistance and other challenges associated with the work
Action Step 3.3	Districts should conduct rigorous evaluations of the effect of school-based professional development staff on classroom instruction and student outcomes

Concluding Comments

In reviewing (a) state and local efforts to use the *Maryland Teacher
Professional Development Planning Guide,* (b) the state of the art in evaluating

teacher professional development, and (c) the deployment of school–based professional development staff, the Council found clear evidence of progress in implementing the standards. Both MSDE staff and district staff say that using the planning guide has helped them to focus on the standards. The increase in the amount of evaluations and heightened sensitivity to the need for evaluations indicate recognition of the need for quality and accountability in teacher professional development. The widespread deployment of school-based professional development staff reflects a positive trend toward more professional development that explicitly addresses teacher needs and school improvement priorities.

The Council's recommendations for next steps in each of these areas reflect four themes. First, MSDE plays a critical leadership role by modeling good practice. Second, active collaboration among key stakeholders is an essential ingredient in all efforts to improve professional development. Third, implementation of many of the recommendations, especially those related to applying the planning framework included in the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide* and to increasing the scope and quality of evaluations of teacher professional development, require considerable capacity-building at the state and local levels. Finally, implementation of the recommendations can be accomplished by improving and expanding existing programs, policies, and practices and not by creating new programs and policy initiatives.

The Council urges MSDE and the districts to review their options and opportunities for implementing the recommendations and following the action steps in the larger context of comprehensive planning to address state and local needs and priorities. The Council recognizes that considering the recommendations as part of comprehensive planning necessarily means that implementation will look different in different places and that the pace of the changes will also vary. Finally, the Council recognizes that decisions about following the recommendations and taking the action steps will depend on the availability of resources.

Introduction

Recognizing the importance of high-quality professional learning for all teachers, Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, convened the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Advisory Council in January 2003. She called on the Council to:

■ Examine current teacher professional development policies and programs at the state and local levels

■ Set standards as a means of articulating a Maryland-specific, policy-relevant definition of high-quality professional development

■ Offer recommendations for improving professional development so that it meets the new standards

In December 2006, Dr. Grasmick affirmed the Council's ongoing work and renewed her original charge by calling on the group to:

■ Continue to examine state and local efforts to use the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards* to create a statewide system of high-quality professional development

■ Identify challenges associated with implementing the standards

This report is the third report prepared by the Council. (The previous reports are discussed below in the summary of the Council's progress to date.) The report begins with an overview of the Council's work since 2003. The next three sections present the Council's observations about three issues related to statewide efforts to ensure that all teachers have access to a system of high-quality professional development: (1) continued implementation of the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards* as reflected by the use of the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide*, (2) the state of the art of evaluating teacher professional development, and (3) the deployment of school-based professional development staff as part of a trend toward job-embedded professional development. Each of these sections begins with a brief review of the issue and how it is related to ongoing efforts to provide high-quality professional development as envisioned in the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards*. Next, there is a discussion of what the Council has learned about the issue. Each section ends with recommendations and specific action steps. The recommendations and action steps provide a road map of policy and program options for the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), districts, and other professional development stakeholders to follow as they continue their efforts to improve teacher professional development. Together, the recommendations and action steps underscore the importance of (a) MSDE exerting leadership by modeling good

practice, especially in professional development planning and evaluation; (b) collaboration among key stakeholders; (c) building state and local capacity; and (d) improving and expanding existing programs, policies, and practices rather than creating new ones. The last section of the report presents a concluding comment and previews the next steps in the Council's work.

I. Guiding Principles and Progress

The 26-member Council includes teachers, principals, school-based professional development staff, district central office staff and leaders, MSDE leaders and staff, and faculty and administrators from institutions of higher education (IHEs). The Council is led by three co-chairpersons, including Dr. Jacqueline Haas, Superintendent of the Harford County Public Schools, Dr. Hanne Mawhinney, Coordinator of Organizational Leadership and Policy Studies in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland– College Park, and Dr. Colleen Seremet, Assistant State Superintendent for Instruction at MSDE. Together, the Council members and co-chairpersons possess a wealth of experience, widely diverse perspectives, and a deep commitment to high-quality professional development for all teachers.

Five Guiding Principles

The members of the Council have consistently adhered to five basic principles. Together, they:

- ■ *Ground their work in a broad definition of what constitutes teacher professional development.* Professional development includes activities such as teacher study groups, coaching and mentoring, teacher networks, engagement on school improvement teams and committees that develop curricula and assessments, workshops and other training, conferences and professional meetings, and college and university courses that focus on improving teachers' professional practice.

- ■ *Recognize and acknowledge that this broad definition requires that responsibility and accountability for professional development quality be shared by many stakeholders.* This principle means that teachers, principals, central office staff, college and university faculty and staff, and staff at MSDE, as well as other stakeholders, must work together. They must, among other things, ensure that professional development effectively addresses teachers' learning needs, receives adequate allocations of time and money, and becomes a routine part of teachers' work.

- ■ *Have applied a systems perspective in their thinking about professional development.* This means that the members look for evidence of coherence in professional development programs and practices and for the links between professional development and other components of school and district organization and operations. Moreover, the Council's reliance on a systems perspective focuses on

coherence and alignment among existing policies, programs, and practices at the local and state levels rather than on establishing new ones.

■ ***Are transparent and inclusive in all of their work.*** Council members routinely communicate with colleagues and solicit their feedback on the work of the Council. They also share and solicit feedback on draft reports and other products. Finally, the members review and discuss a wide range of current research and other reports on teacher professional development.

■ ***Reach solid consensus out of lively discussions and after considering differing viewpoints.*** The Council members work hard to reach consensus on all of their public reports. One important advantage of the Council's diverse membership is that many different viewpoints and perspectives are reflected in the Council's deliberations.

The Council has adopted an intensely practical perspective. Among other things, this means that the Council works hard to find a reasonable balance between recommendations that are consistent with current capacity and resources and those that stretch current capacity and that may require a reallocation of resources or perhaps even an increase in resources for professional development. Indeed, the Council believes that state and local investments in capacity-building are critical to carrying out recommendations related to improving professional development programs and practice. Absent these investments, progress will be sporadic. As noted above, the Council also concentrates on opportunities and options for improving existing programs, policies, and practices rather than on creating new ones. Finally, in recognition of the importance of autonomy in local decisionmaking, the Council does not seek to alter the state regulatory structure.

Progress and Key Accomplishments

Since January 2003, the Council has:

■ Met 38 times to review issues critical to ensuring that all of Maryland's teachers have access to a wide array of high-quality professional development. During the course of these meetings and in other public forums, the Council has heard from more than 1,500 Maryland educators.

■ Provided extensive advice on the development of the 2004 *Maryland Survey of Teacher Participation in High-Quality Professional Development* and reviewed survey results from 39,000 teachers

- Reviewed numerous reports and studies of professional development programs and policies at the national, state, and local levels

- Articulated the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards*, a process that included, among other things, conducting a comprehensive, statewide public engagement campaign to solicit feedback on the standards and to build understanding and consensus around them. The process included 72 focus groups, which generated comments and suggestions from almost 1,000 educators.

- Contributed to the final development of the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide,* including assisting in disseminating the guide and monitoring its use across the state (See Section III of this report.)

The Council has also produced two reports.[2] *Helping All Teachers Help Their Students: The Imperative for High-Quality Professional Development,* issued in December 2004, reviewed state and local professional development policies and programs, introduced the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards,* and offered recommendations for using the standards to create a statewide system of professional development. In a follow-up to the first report, *Helping All Teachers Help Their Students: Responding to the Imperative for High-Quality Professional Development* (January 2006), the Council reported on state and local progress in implementing the professional development standards.

The Council meets about every six weeks and will continue to do so through fall 2008. At that time, the Council will submit another report to the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education.

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[2] The Council's reports, the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards,* the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide,* and other documents are available at MDSE's website, www.marylandpublicschools.org. Click on the Teacher Professional Development button on the right-hand side of the homepage.

II. Using the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide*

The Issue

One of the important messages from the spring 2003 focus groups on the new teacher professional development standards was that state and local capacity to implement the standards was uneven. Focus group participants also expressed a need for some sort of assistance to help educators understand the standards and plan professional development that reflected the dimensions of quality called for in the standards. To address this need and to encourage increased attention to the standards, MSDE commissioned the development of the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide* and a companion document, *Tips and Talking Points for Introducing the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide.*[3] Dr. Grasmick and the Council encouraged professional development planners to review the planning guide and to consider using it in carrying out their planning tasks.

The guide presents a framework for planning high-quality professional development that meets the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards* and it provides concrete suggestions for applying the framework. The planning framework calls for plans that:

- ■ Build on a clear, data-based statement of the student and teacher learning needs to be addressed by the activity

- ■ Specify which teachers are most likely to benefit from participating in the professional development

- ■ Specify the intended professional learning outcomes and related indicators that (1) explicitly address the need for the activity and (2) are observable and measurable

- ■ Specify the professional learning activities and follow-up and explain clearly how they will help participants achieve the intended outcomes

- ■ Specify how the professional development will be evaluated to determine whether (1) the activity took place as planned and (2) it achieved the intended outcomes

- ■ Specify the resources necessary to support the professional learning activities, follow-up, and evaluation included in the plan

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[3] Development included preparation and field testing of several versions of the guide. Overall, more than 100 Maryland educators reviewed these early versions, applied them to professional development planning efforts, and provided feedback and suggestions to the developers.

The planning framework also underscores the need for coherence and internal consistency among the six components of plans.

The guide explains each of the elements of the planning framework in detail and provides "Planning Tips" to help planning teams think about each of the elements. A planning checklist and budget template accompany the guide. The companion document offers suggestions for orienting new users, and it recommends modifying the guide to make it more explicitly relevant to state and local priorities and needs.

In short, the planning guide is a tool for applying the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards* to the design of high-quality professional development. Therefore, the Council is interested in looking at use of the guide as one indicator of progress in applying the standards. Specifically, the Council's review was guided by two questions:

- How and to what extent is the guide being used at the state and local levels?

- What challenges are associated with applying the planning framework to professional development planning?

The Council's review drew on the experience and perceptions of individual Council members who have used the guide and who are familiar with other efforts around the state. In addition, interviews and the survey conducted to examine the state of the art of evaluating professional development included questions about the use of the planning guide. (Key findings from this survey are discussed in Section III.)

Observations about the Use of Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide

Use of the guide is increasing at both the state and local levels and, as with most tools, the guide is used in different ways by different users. At the state level, MSDE has played a significant role in encouraging the use of the planning guide. Consider the following examples:

- MSDE's guidance for the preparation of annual updates to district master plans required under the *Bridge to Excellence Act* suggests (but does not require) that districts use the planning guide framework for preparing sections of the annual updates that describe four key professional development initiatives that support district improvement initiatives. The specific prompts included in the guidance also call on

districts to describe components of the professional development initiatives that correspond to parts of the planning framework. Despite the requirement that annual updates address the key components of the planning framework, an internal MSDE review of the 2007 master plan updates suggests that the districts did not fully address the components of the planning framework. Here it is important to note that the initial planning for most, if not all, of the initiatives reported in the 2007 master plan updates took place prior to the completion and dissemination of the final version of the planning guide in early 2007. Therefore, it is quite possible that staff who prepared the annual updates were not familiar with it and had had little or no direct experience in applying the planning framework or following the guide's suggestions for applying the framework.

- MSDE's recently updated guidance for requesting approval for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses has incorporated the planning guide into the requirements for seeking approval for new courses

- Staff in MSDE's Division of Special Education and Early Intervention report frequent use of the planning guide in working with grantees and professional development providers

- Staff who manage federal Title II Part B (math and science partnerships) and II Part D (instructional technology) programs have incorporated the planning guide into local project planning requirements and have developed solid systems for reviewing and providing feedback on district plans for professional development supported with these funds. In addition, program staff have provided and continue to provide extensive orientation and technical assistance in using the planning guide to ensure that users understand and are able to meet the guide's expectations.

- In a statewide solicitation for proposals for professional development initiatives to be supported under Title II, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) encouraged university-school district partnerships seeking support to use the planning guide in preparing their proposals. MHEC also provided an orientation in using the guide to potential grantees.

In interviews conducted in spring 2007, district professional development coordinators and others familiar with district professional development activities reported examples of use of the guide in 22 of the 24 districts. In some districts, the guide has been used to orient those responsible for professional development to the planning process and expectations for a quality plan. Staff in these districts

anticipated that use of the guide in formal planning activities will increase as staff become more familiar with it. In other districts, professional development coordinators reported that use of the guide has, in fact, become a central part of the planning process. One coordinator described the use of the guide in her district this way:

> *We use the guide in our district. We use it when planning and developing large-scale professional development. It forces us to consider how one day is part of a bigger plan in order to move people forward. It changes our thinking. At the planning level, different people are at different places and the guide helps us to focus. The planning tips are really good.*
>
> *The guide has been shared with supervisors. We are focusing on evaluation and observing as a team. I am confident that we will continue to integrate this guide into our planning as we move forward in the evaluation of professional development activities and formalize our process.*
>
> — Professional Development Coordinator

In one example of how a district has used the planning guide, the professional development coordinator in one of the states larger districts reports extensive use of the guide as a tool in planning large-scale professional development coordinated by his office. According to the coordinator, planners were expected to use the guide and to submit completed plans for review and feedback. For him, the completed plans become a valuable record of the district's professional development portfolio and also set the stage for monitoring the activities and gauging the extent to which they take place as planned and achieve the intended outcomes.

In another example, a professional development coordinator who had been involved in the early development of the guide made a concerted effort to introduce the Maryland *Teacher Professional Development Standards* and the planning guide simultaneously. This approach, which was intended primarily to encourage school-level use of the guide, began with carefully planned pilot projects to use the planning guide in an elementary school and a high school. In the pilot projects, a teacher specialist for professional development teamed with designated teacher leaders to introduce and use the guide with a group of selected teachers. Lessons and experience from the pilot projects informed the design of extensive orientations for pre-K through high school principals and assistant principals and pre-K-12 curriculum specialists and elementary teacher specialists. Subsequently, staff at the high school involved in the pilot program used the planning guide to design four HSA professional learning communities (PLC's) and, more recently, to create 11 Advanced Placement professional learning communities. Next steps include seeking approval of these activities as CPD courses.

Despite increased use of the guide, challenges remain. Perhaps the most persistent concern about the planning guide is that the six-step process simply takes too much time. Here, it is important to note that this complaint often—although by no means always—comes from first-time or inexperienced users. In some cases, early positive experiences with the guide led users to observe that using the guide requires less time as they become more familiar with the process and expectations.

The timing of the initial use of the guide can also pose problems and contribute to resistance to further use. As an MSDE staff member explained:

Retrofitting the guide onto existing plans or ongoing activities is burdensome and, more importantly, can convey the message that using the guide is more of a bureaucratic requirement than the strategic application of a useful tool.

> *We tried to use the guide in planning with school teams, but the principals and some of the teachers didn't want any part of it. Later, they told us that they had already planned the activities, and using the guide just seemed to be doing the same things a second time.*
> —MSDE Staff Member

A third concern, shared by a few professional development coordinators, is that the guide is simply another version of procedures that are already in place in their districts and is, therefore, redundant.

> *We have a great data system and we have our own budget forms, so this guide doesn't provide anything that we don't already have at our fingertips.*
> — Professional Development Coordinator

Some of the responses to interview questions about using the guide as well as the observations of Council members from their own experiences with the guide and working with others who are using it point to a fourth concern: a lack of capacity to effectively use the guide.

Several other respondents agreed with this notion and suggested that when they sat down to really use the guide they realized that perhaps they didn't understand how to address some of the issues. For example, they noted the difficulty of linking a

> *We have been talking about each of the parts of the guide for years. What the guide does is make us bring all of the pieces together, and many of us really haven't had to do that before.*
> — Professional Development Coordinator

statement about teacher and student learning needs to defining specific outcomes and indicators for the professional development that they were planning. Others noted that they lacked the experience necessary to plan rigorous evaluations that would effectively assess whether or not the outcomes had been achieved.

The observations about progress in using the guide and about the challenges associated with its use lead the Council to conclude that use of the guide in planning professional development that meets the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards is a work in progress. Users and potential users at the state and local levels generally recognize the potential payoffs of using the guide. They also point to examples of how it has been and is being used. In some cases, they offer concrete examples of planning processes and the plans that have been generated. In other cases, they point to the ways that the guide has influenced conversations and led people to think differently about professional development.

The Council also concludes that some—although by no means all—of the challenges of using the planning guide are associated with broader challenges in applying the professional development standards. Consistent with its January 2007 recommendation that professional development planners consider using the planning guide in ways that help them address specific needs and priorities, the Council's current recommendations focus on building capacity to use the guide, especially the planning framework. Because the Council believes that the planning guide is most useful in addressing specific needs and priorities, the Council does not recommend a statewide policy requiring its use. Finally, the Council cautions that the timing of the introduction of the planning guide is crucial. The guide should be introduced in the early stages of planning activities to allow adequate time for users to work through the planning process. Introducing the planning guide late in the process or somehow applying the planning framework to activities that have already been planned is counterproductive and inevitably results in the guide being viewed as a burden that is, at best, tangential to concerns about quality.

Recommendations for More Strategic Use of the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide* in Implementing the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards*

Recommendation 1	
State and local professional development planners and providers should apply the planning framework to planning both high-priority, comprehensive, long-term initiatives at the state and local levels and more narrowly focused school-based, job-embedded professional development	
Action Step 1.1	In consultation with the Master Plan Work Group, MSDE should modify requirements and expectations for district master plans and annual updates to require application of the planning framework to district professional development initiatives, including school-based, job-embedded professional development
Action Step 1.2	MSDE program offices should require the application of the planning framework in all requests for proposals or solicitations for support for teacher professional development programs and initiatives
Action Step 1.3	Districts should incorporate the planning framework and suggestions and directions for using it into all guidance related to teacher professional development, including school improvement planning
Action Step 1.4	MSDE and the districts should collaborate to provide adequate orientation and training to new and inexperienced users of the guide to familiarize them with the planning framework and expectations for the completed plans
Action Step 1.5	Districts should extend the orientation and training recommended under Action Step 1.4 to prepare school-based professional development staff to make extensive use of the planning framework

Recommendation 2	
MSDE and the districts should establish procedures for providing detailed feedback on plans based on the planning framework, with the overall goal of designing professional development that addresses the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards	
Action Step 2.1	MSDE and the districts should collaborate on creating and using rubrics to review plans for completeness as reflected in their attention to six elements of the planning framework and their overall coherence
Action Step 2.2	MSDE and the districts should routinely provide clear, concise, and timely feedback to guide revisions of the plans to ensure that they address the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards*
Action Step 2.3	MSDE and the districts should review the substance of formal feedback on professional development plans to diagnose problems in preparing adequate plans and gaps in capacity to apply the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards.* These reviews can also help pinpoint the need for additional training and modifications to the guidance for applying the planning framework or to the framework itself.

III. The State of the Art of Evaluating Teacher Professional Development in Maryland

The Issue

Standard VIII of the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards* calls for "rigorous evaluations (that) assess the impact of professional development on teaching and student learning." In addition, indicators under this standard call for professional development planners to (1) identify the kinds of evidence about teaching and student learning that will be collected and used as indicators of the success of professional development, and (2) consistent with progress benchmarks and goals, determine how and when the data will be collected and reported. The indicators also call for evaluations that "assess the impact of professional development on school culture and organization…." Finally, the indicators emphasize the need to communicate the results of evaluations to key stakeholders and to ensure that there are adequate resources for the evaluations.[4] Here, the Council calls readers' attention to the parallels between Standard VIII and the planning framework and guidance included in the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide*.

Careful evaluations of teacher professional development can yield useful information about teachers' perceptions of their professional learning experiences. This information can help predict whether teachers will actually apply what they learn, and it can also help to pinpoint problems in the design of the activities. In addition, as Standard VIII indicates, more sophisticated evaluations can help determine the extent to which teachers actually master and apply new knowledge and skills and whether the mastery and application of new knowledge and skills contributes to improved student learning. Evaluations can also help gauge the effect of teacher professional development on school organization and culture. Finally, rigorous evaluations can help gauge the return on the investments in professional development at the school, district, and state levels.

Despite the benefits, there are significant challenges associated with conducting rigorous evaluations of professional development. Foremost among these challenges is the difficulty of establishing solid empirical links between

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[4] The *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards* build on an evaluation model developed by Thomas R. Guskey in his book, *Evaluating professional development* (2003) (available from Corwin Press). Guskey's model includes five levels of evaluation, with each serving a distinct purpose and generating its own kind of evidence of effectiveness. The five levels focus, in turn, on (1) participant reactions to professional development, (2) participant learning outcomes, (3) organizational impact including changes in culture and structure and support for new practices, (4) participant *application* of new knowledge and skills, and (5) impact on student learning. Guskey's framework extends an evaluation model originally developed for business by David Kirkpatrick. See, for example, Kirkpatrick, D. (1996) "Great ideas revisited: Techniques for evaluating training programs." *Training and Development Journal, 50(1), 54-59.*

teacher participation in professional development and changes in teacher performance and, subsequently, between participation in professional development and changes in student learning. In addition, evaluations that focus on changes in teacher knowledge and skills and the applications of new skills in the classroom can be time-consuming and may not generate meaningful results for months or even a year or two after participation. Third, because some professional development does not have clearly defined or measurable outcomes, it is difficult to measure its effectiveness. Finally, there may be significant resistance to collecting data on individual teacher performance and linking the changes in performance to changes in student outcomes.

Because of the potential benefits of rigorous evaluations in improving teacher professional development, the Council concluded that it is important to address the following questions about evaluating professional development professional development in Maryland:

- ■ How and to what extent are districts, MSDE, and other entities evaluating professional development in Maryland?

- ■ What are some examples of promising practices?

- ■ What are the challenges associated with evaluating teacher professional development?

To address these questions, the Council reviewed information provided by district professional development coordinators, MSDE staff, and others who are familiar with evaluation efforts at the state and local levels. Information was collected through interviews, a survey administered to professional development coordinators, and a review of documents, including the sections of the 2007 master plans that reported on key professional development initiatives.

Observations about the State of the Art of Evaluating Teacher Professional Development in Maryland

Since the publication of the Council's first report in 2004, both the districts and MSDE have made progress in evaluating teacher professional development. Overall, districts and MSDE program offices are conducting more evaluations than in the past and the evaluations are becoming more routine. For example, all 24 of the districts reported evaluating at least some evaluation of teacher professional during the past year. These evaluations are primarily descriptive and rely heavily on surveys administered upon completion of the professional development events. District evaluations typically generate data on teacher satisfaction with the activities and, to a lesser extent, on teacher learning. Districts reported using these data to evaluate and select presenters for future

professional development activities, to identify new topics for district-sponsored professional development, and to decide on the scope and format of follow-up activities. Indeed, several districts reported that the most valuable feedback they collect through teacher surveys is information about teachers' needs and suggestions regarding follow-up. Often this feedback comes in the form of responses to open-ended questions about next steps. One district professional development coordinator echoed the sentiments of several others across the state:

> *The most important and useful information has been about what teachers need. These [responses regarding] next steps have been really taken to heart and used in the planning process. We really value our teacher feedback and work very hard to make decisions and provide meaningful PD activities that … recognize and respond to their needs.*
>
> — Professional Development Coordinator

Several professional development coordinators observed that providing teachers with professional development that is appropriately differentiated—addressing the varying knowledge and skill levels among teachers—is a central challenge of their work. Teacher surveys can often provide professional development planners with valuable information about the extent to which professional development meets their particular individual needs. As one professional development coordinator put it:

> *The real challenge is in differentiation. When we obtain feedback and find out that some participants were bored out of their minds, while others thought the material was way over their heads, and the rest felt that the PD activity was appropriate, what do we do with that? Evaluations remind us that one size does not fit all and that we have to design our plans with that in mind.*
>
> — Professional Development Coordinator

As noted above, teacher surveys are usually administered at the conclusion of events, or immediately thereafter. An advantage of this approach is that districts receive timely feedback on major events or activities, as well as feedback that can guide the design of follow-up activities. Because teachers can complete surveys at the event itself, response rates are generally high. But one disadvantage is that the resulting evaluations do not capture information on any follow-up activities that may occur, nor do they provide any information on teacher reports on early efforts to apply new knowledge and skills in their classrooms.

In addition to teacher surveys, a few districts rely on focus groups, interviews, and teacher journals and other sources of teacher reflection to assess teachers' professional development experiences. For example, several districts have conducted evaluations of their new teacher support programs, including the orientation that new teachers receive at the beginning of the year; work with a mentor teacher; and additional training throughout the year. These evaluations draw on multiple data sources, including teacher surveys, teacher focus groups with district administrators, individual interviews conducted by mentor teachers, and teacher surveys. They also explore differences among types of teachers—by grade level, teaching assignment, or previous experience.

Despite the progress in evaluating teacher professional development, the Council has identified some critical gaps. These include:

■ *Most evaluation focuses on single events, like systemwide professional development days.* This focus on discrete activities is at odds with a vision of high-quality professional development that is long-term, cumulative, and ongoing. Several professional development coordinators argued that a new emphasis in evaluation is needed to assess the kinds of high-quality professional development experiences called for in the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards.* This shift will require a fundamental change in focus—from gathering immediate feedback on specific events to engaging in ongoing, longer-term evaluations. The following comment from a professional development coordinator echoed the thoughts of a number of professional development coordinators around the state:

> *One of the challenges is that our evaluation is always a summative activity. Because of the nature of [traditional] staff development, [our evaluation has] been event-driven, short-term at best. We are trying to move away from that, move to staff development that is long-term, and we need to learn to evaluate it in an ongoing fashion. We have to look at formative assessments of the effectiveness of our PD.*
>
> — Professional Development Coordinator

Low response rates to event-specific surveys can also be a problem. Several districts reported that they found it difficult to get teachers to respond to surveys at all, unless they made time for teachers to fill them out at the event being evaluated. One professional development coordinator argued that many teachers are rightly skeptical about the value of some evaluation efforts.

> *Do those who have to complete the evaluation believe that their time will have a return? Will the information be used, or does it get stuck in a file drawer? How does it get used? We've built a culture that doesn't value evaluation of professional development because we didn't do it, we didn't use the information. We've got our work cut out for ourselves, changing that paradigm. We need to do a better job making sure that the information we do glean is visible, used, and value added to the system.*
>
> — Professional Development Coordinator

■ *Job-embedded forms of professional development are rarely subject to evaluation.* The professional development activities most commonly evaluated by districts include system-wide professional development days, support for new teachers, and professional development associated with the implementation of reading/language arts or mathematics initiatives. The fact that there is almost no evaluation of job-embedded professional development is important because of the increasingly central role of this kind of professional development in district and

school improvement strategies. Typically, the evaluation of job-embedded professional learning opportunities—teacher collaboration, teacher mentoring, or school-based professional development—is left to schools. As a result, no evaluation of job-embedded professional development is conducted systematically across schools, and there is no review of the quality of these opportunities at the district level. In an exception to this pattern, several districts have evaluated the work of school-based professional development staff, who are key players in job-embedded professional development. These evaluations are discussed in more detail below in Section IV.

■ ***Evaluations rarely include rigorous assessments of the effect of professional development on teacher knowledge and skills, the application of new knowledge and skills in teaching, school organization, or student learning.*** To be sure, some local evaluations have relied on teacher self-reports to assess the contribution of professional development to improved teaching and, to a lesser extent, to increased student learning. In addition, districts and MSDE staff report increasing use of walk-throughs as a way of collecting information on changes in teacher performance. At the same time, this information is usually not captured or reported systematically.

Despite the increasingly widespread attention to using student data for school improvement planning and planning professional development activities, evaluations of professional development rarely provide solid evidence linking participation in professional development to changes in student learning. For example, in reports on 93 professional development initiatives in the 2007 master plan updates, none of the districts reported evaluation results to demonstrate the contributions of professional development to teacher performance and student learning. Similarly, there have been no rigorous evaluations of the effectiveness of two of MSDE's signature activities, the Governor's Academy and the district partnerships to support low-performing schools, although, in both cases, MSDE staff report that a variety of data has been collected.

Several recent evaluations of Title II, Part B Mathematics and Science Partnership initiatives are exceptions to these patterns. These evaluations looked carefully at changes in teacher knowledge and skills and subsequently examined changes in student learning that could be associated with the professional development activities. Both of these evaluations extended over several years and, from the earliest stages of the planning process, featured strong working relationships between district staff and the evaluation teams.

Overall, the Council concludes that the increase in state and local efforts to evaluate teacher professional development, combined with increased awareness of the need for more rigorous evaluations, sets the stage for significant progress in the future. The Council recognizes that ongoing review of teachers' perceptions of their professional learning experiences, both in terms of how these experiences are organized and the perceived likelihood that they will result in changed in teaching and learning, are important. At the same time, the Council concludes that the districts, MSDE, and other stakeholders need to work together to improve both the scope and quality of their evaluation efforts. In particular, future evaluation efforts should focus on careful examination of the effect of professional development on observable and measurable changes in teacher knowledge and skills and classroom practice. These evaluations should also focus on linking specific changes in practice to changes in student learning. The Council notes that the planning framework in the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide* is a useful tool for designing rigorous evaluations. The Council also notes that the forthcoming guide for evaluating teacher professional development, which will complement the planning guide, will also be a useful tool for designing rigorous evaluations. (See the discussion of next steps in the Council's work in Section V for more details about current plans for developing this guide.)

In urging improvements in evaluating teacher professional development, the Council is acutely aware that there are few good models elsewhere in the country to guide improvements in Maryland. At the same time, heightened demands for accountability and solid evidence of reasonable returns on investments make it imperative to improve evaluations of teacher professional development. The Council's recommendations first address the need to enhance state and local capacity for evaluation and then call for a shift to more rigorous evaluations and evaluations that assess impact on teacher knowledge, skills, and professional practices and changes in student learning.

Recommendations for Improving Evaluations of Teacher Professional Development

Recommendation 1	
MSDE, the districts, and college and university faculty and staff should collaborate to develop tools and other resources that will enhance state and local capacity to evaluate professional development	
Action Step 1.1	MSDE, districts, and providers should collaborate to assemble a compendium of data-collection instruments for districts and MSDE program offices to use in designing evaluations of teacher professional development
Action Step 1.2	MSDE, the districts, and state professional associations, such as the Maryland Council of Staff Developers, should collaborate to convene a series of capacity-building seminars and training activities focused on evaluation design, data collection and analysis, and reporting

Recommendation 2
MSDE and the districts should include individuals who are knowledgeable about evaluation on planning teams and draw on their expertise in designing, conducting, and reporting on evaluations

Recommendation 3	
Ongoing evaluations focused on teacher perceptions of and satisfaction with professional learning opportunities, which are important for state and local professional development planning, should employ more sophisticated instruments and analyses	
Action Step 3.1	Evaluations should employ data-collection instruments and strategies that are explicitly tailored to the professional development activities being evaluated
Action Step 3.2	Evaluations should rely on instruments that invite comparisons with other activities, and that include questions and prompts focused on teachers' (a) understanding of the purposes and objectives of the professional development; (b) basic mastery of content; (c) likely application and use of new knowledge and skills in the classroom; (d) perceptions of the likely availability of time to experiment with new instructional approaches, collaborate with other teachers, and reflect on their effectiveness; and (e) perceptions of the roles of principals, other school leaders, and school-based professional development staff in supporting and facilitating participation and experimentation and application of new practices

Recommendation 4	
MSDE and the districts should focus more explicitly on evaluating the outcomes of teacher professional development, as indicated by: (a) changes in teacher knowledge and skills, (b) changes in school organization, (c) changes in classroom practice, and (d) changes in student outcomes	
Action Step 4.1	Evaluations should rely on well-designed, validated instruments to measure participant mastery of new knowledge and/or skills
Action Step 4.2	Evaluations should rely on well-designed teacher logs and similar self-report instruments to assess the effect of professional development on classroom instruction
Action Step 4.3	Evaluations should rely on data from walk-throughs and other carefully structured observations of teacher performance linked to clearly defined indicators of intended professional development outcomes
Action Step 4.4	Evaluations should rely on multiple indicators of student learning

Recommendation 5

MSDE and district investments (including people, time, and money) in evaluations of professional development should be consistent with overall improvement priorities and priorities in professional development program and practices

Action Step 5.1	MSDE and the districts should allocate sufficient resources for evaluation to ensure that the evaluations will yield useful information about the results of key professional development activities and activities that are central to the success of major reform initiatives

IV. The Deployment of School-Based Professional Development Staff in Maryland Schools

The Issue

The Council's interest in the role of school-based professional development staff has been shaped in large part by an interest in school-based, job-embedded professional development, which is viewed by many as the most valuable kind of professional learning. By working with individual teachers and small groups of teachers in their schools and classrooms, school-based professional development staff can, among other things, tailor professional development to address individual professional learning needs, facilitate more rapid application of new knowledge and skills, and provide early feedback and guidance.[5]

Although the particulars of these assignments vary depending on local priorities, needs, and improvement strategies, districts rely on staff in these positions to:[6][7]

■ Guide and facilitate the introduction and use of new instructional strategies across the curriculum

■ Provide support to new teachers and teachers who may be struggling in the classroom

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[5] These positions carry a variety of titles (e.g., coaches; mentors; resource teachers; technology coaches; *e*coaches; staff development teachers; reading, literacy, or math resource teachers; instructional support teachers; student achievement specialists). In most cases, they are based in schools, although some are based in district offices. No matter where their "home offices" are, they spend all or almost all of their time in schools.

[6] For a more extensive discussion of the roles and potential contributions of school-based professional development staff, see: *Coaching: A strategy for developing instructional capacity* (2003) by Barbara Neufeld and Dana Roper. This report is available at www.aspeninstitute.org. See also *Taking the lead: New roles for teachers and school-based coaches* (2006) by Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison, which is available from the National Staff Development Council (Visit www.nsdc.org.) The authors review the various roles that school-based staff can play and the kinds of support necessary to ensure effectiveness. The authors also provide recommendations for evaluating the work of school-based professional development staff.

[7] Research on teacher efficacy and strategies to develop it lend empirical support for decisions to deploy school-based professional development staff, especially when there is an expectation that these staff will help teachers develop and apply new knowledge and skills as well as give them the confidence to do so. See, for example: Ross, J.A., & Bruce, C.D. (2007). Teacher self-assessment: A mechanism for facilitating professional growth. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*, pp. 146-159; Goddard, R.D., Hoy, W.K., & Hoy, A.W. (2000, Summer) Collective teacher efficacy: Its meaning, measure, and impact on student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal,37*(2), pp. 479-507; Ross, J., & Bruce, C. (2007, September/October). Professional development effects on teacher efficacy: Results of randomized field trial. *Journal of Educational Research, 1*(1), pp.50-60; Mawhinney, B.H., & Haas, J.C. (no date). *Design principles for learner-centered schools: Developing professional learning communities to improve student learning.* Monograph prepared for the Council of Educational, Administrative, and Supervisory Organizations of Maryland.

- Work with principals and other school leaders to increase school capacity for change and improvement

- Help teachers develop their leadership skills

- Identify resources that may be available to support improvement efforts

The *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards* do not specifically call for the deployment of school-based professional development staff. Nevertheless, the Council considers the increase in job-embedded professional learning associated with these assignments as a significant indicator of district efforts to provide professional development that reflects the core dimensions of quality included in the standards. The Council also notes that these potentially valuable professional learning activities can also reduce the amount of time that teachers are out of their classrooms and schools for attending traditional workshops and other centralized activities. Moreover, participation in these school-based activities can reduce or, in some cases, eliminate the need for substitutes.

Although the Council has been well aware of the presence of school-based professional development staff in Maryland, the members wanted to know more about the particulars of these assignments. In particular, they were interested in the following questions:

- What are the statewide patterns in the deployment of school-based professional development staff?

- What responsibilities do they have?

- What challenges do they encounter in their work?

- What kinds of infrastructures have been developed to support these positions?

To develop a snapshot of the statewide deployment of school-based professional development staff, the Council sought the assistance of district professional development coordinators, other district staff, and staff at MSDE. Professional development coordinators worked with their colleagues to provide profiles of school-based professional development positions in their districts. MSDE staff provided information about statewide efforts to support the work of school-based professional development staff.

Observations about School-Based Professional Development Staff in Maryland Schools

In 2007-2008, Maryland school districts have deployed approximately 1,800 staff in 86 categories of school-based professional development positions.[8] An estimated 85 percent of staff assigned to these positions are assigned to them full-time and just under 70 percent have 10-month contracts. Professional development staff who are not full-time often teach one or more periods during the school day, and some assume administrative responsibilities. School-based professional development staff are typically—but not always—recruited from the ranks of teachers and may be assigned to elementary schools, middle schools, or high schools. Many of the staff in these positions are assigned to a single school, with some working in two or three or even more schools in some cases. These variations as well as differences in the substantive focus of these positions make it difficult to provide a clear picture of the number of teachers served by individual school-based professional development staff or the actual amount of time spent with individual teachers. Indeed, as many of the position profiles provided by the district indicate, these patterns vary by individual staff members as they go about their work. In addition, these patterns are subject to change over time as teacher and school needs change.

Overall, districts spend an estimated $135 million annually on these positions.[9] This investment represents a very small portion of the total amount spent on education in Maryland, although it represents a rather large portion of the resources allocated to teacher professional development.

Criteria for selecting school-based professional development staff are fairly consistent across the districts.[10] For example, almost all positions (97 percent) formally require evidence of successful teaching experience, and a number of districts require a particular type of certification, typically an Advanced Professional Certificate, and a minimum number of years of teaching experience,

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[8] This estimate is based on information provided by the districts. A review of 2007 master plan updates, district budget materials, and other reports available from MSDE indicates that some districts did not provide profiles of all of the school-based professional development positions that they have created. Hence, the numbers of positions and staff assigned to them are somewhat larger than reported here.

[9] This estimate is also based on information provided by the districts and does not include expenditures for training and other support for these positions. Districts provided estimates of the average salaries and benefits for staff in these positions, and the overall estimate was calculated by multiplying these averages by the number of staff assigned to these positions. Because of the under-reporting of the number of positions and staff assigned to them as well as the fact that information on spending on training and other support was not available, the actual spending regarding these positions is probably somewhat higher than reported here.

[10] It was not within the scope of this review to examine how and to what extent the criteria for selecting school-based professional development staff and assigning them to school were actually applied.

typically five years, as indicators of qualification. School-based professional development staff are also expected (a) to possess solid oral and written communication skills (90 percent of positions), (b) to have demonstrated their ability to work with adults (77 percent of positions), and (c) to be familiar with the Voluntary State Curriculum (72 percent of positions). Other criteria are also cited for some of these positions and the application of these criteria no doubt reflects district-specific expectations for the work. For example, school-based professional development staff who are responsible for helping teachers integrate technology into instructional programs are expected to have expertise in using instructional technology. In a second example, one district requires that mathematics resource teachers demonstrate familiarity with a particular mathematics program as a qualification.

Criteria for assigning school-based professional development staff to individual schools vary, although three are mentioned more frequently than others. These include (1) a school's improvement needs, (2) the fit between the principal's needs and the school-based professional development staff skills, and (3) school-specific professional development needs. District staff cited these major criteria for assignments in just under half of the positions. Prior experience in the school and principal preferences were cited less often.

School-based professional development staff face a number of challenges in their work. Given the substantive scope of their responsibilities and the high volume of teachers they are expected to work with, it is not surprising that "juggling competing demands for their time" was cited as a major challenge for staff in 70 percent of these positions. Other factors identified as major challenges include (a) "remaining focused on their primary responsibilities," (b) "establishing a positive working relationship with teachers," and (c) and "establishing a role in the school."

Local and state infrastructures to effectively support and facilitate the work of school-based professional development staff are emerging. The complexity of the work of school-based professional development staff, including the scope of their responsibilities as well as the potentially large number of teachers with whom they work, points to the need for various kinds of support to ensure that they can succeed. The districts and MSDE are making considerable progress in addressing this need. Consider the following examples:

- **Districts have developed and published position descriptions to guide recruitment and selection of school-based professional development staff and to clarify responsibilities, expectations, and qualifications.** In some cases, the original position descriptions have been modified to reflect changing priorities and expectations as staff learn from experience and successful practice.

■ ***Districts provide a variety of training for staff in these positions***. Although there is considerable variation in the training portfolios, they typically include an initial orientation and on-the-job training and professional development during the school year. In some districts, these sessions may occur as often as every several weeks or once a month, with each session lasting several hours or longer. Over the course of the year, training can cover a broad range of topics and include presentations by external consultants, seminar-type discussions convened by district staff, and opportunities to identify and solve problems, to name some of the activities identified by district staff who work with school-based professional development staff.

Nine districts complement their training of school-based professional development staff by training school leaders to work with these staff. Three of these counties prepare principals to work with all of these staff, and six others report training principals to work with staff in some of the positions in the district. Training can include sessions for principals and for principals and school-based professional development staff together. In addition, principals may attend sessions designed for the professional development staff.

Training for principals is important because they need to understand the expectations for these positions, the knowledge and skills that these staff possess, and how best to support and facilitate their work.

■ ***Districts report that all or almost all school-based professional development staff go through some sort of a performance review.*** One district has developed an especially comprehensive performance review system for school-based professional development staff. The system, which is described in detail in a handbook prepared by the district, rests on seven domains that specify areas of responsibilities and expectations for working with teachers in a professional development capacity. The seven domains include professional responsibilities, professional development, curriculum, assessment and data-based decision making, interpersonal skills, instructional and student support, and technology. Each domain is further articulated by specific components that serve as indicators of quality performance by resource teachers. Each component is, in turn, defined by four proficiency levels. The performance review process includes a formative and summative evaluation, each of which comprises self-assessments, goal-setting, collecting artifacts, observation, and feedback.

This performance review process can serve three important functions in the district. First, the formative stage of the process can help identify strengths and weaknesses in individual performance and can pinpoint areas where improvement may be warranted. Second, the summative phase can provide a detailed assessment of the work of individual instructional resource teachers. Third, the system as a whole can help assess the districtwide impact of the deployment of instructional resource teachers.

Currently, the majority of performance appraisal systems are less comprehensive. A few districts have developed performance appraisal forms for the school-based professional development positions, but many rely on the same forms used in teacher performance appraisals or generic forms developed for non-teaching positions.

■ ***Several MSDE activities and program initiatives support and encourage increased use of school-based professional development staff.*** In one, MSDE staff have convened a network of 19 school-based professional development staff and central office staff. With support from a foundation grant, members of the network participate in the National Staff Development Council's National Coaching Academy. The academy provides ongoing training and technical assistance and is currently pilot testing an online reporting system that provides detailed information about the day-to-day work of school-based professional development staff. Data generated by this system make it possible to monitor their work, diagnose problems, and plan needed training and other support. In Maryland, this network is supported by Desire2Learn, which is an online learning community. MSDE has also used regular meetings of professional development coordinators for sharing information about school-based professional development staff and the activities of the National Coaching Academy.

In a second example of MSDE's role in this area, the Request for Applications for Math Science Partnership Grants encourages applicants to submit plans to "develop and implement programs that include job-embedded professional development, such as coaching or mentoring" to improve elementary school and middle school teachers' content knowledge in math and science.

In a third example, MSDE staff who provide professional development under the district partnership initiative frequently work with school-based professional development staff to plan these activities and to prepare them to provide follow-up to complement initial presentations. In some cases, school-based professional development staff

participate in the professional development to enhance their own knowledge and skills.

Finally, MSDE staff facilitate the Teacher Mentor Program (TMP) Network, which is a network of district staff responsible for the mentoring components of district programs to support new teachers. Members of this longstanding network meet quarterly to exchange information and ideas about promising practices. The network sponsors an annual conference that attracts several hundred participants. The conference includes numerous small-group sessions that feature mentoring and induction programs and activities in Maryland school districts. The TMP Network members also work together on informal data collection activities to keep track of the size and scope of local mentoring programs.

Consistent with the earlier observation about the overall paucity of rigorous evaluations of teacher professional development (in Section III), the Council found very few examples of formal evaluations of the work of school-based professional development staff. Anecdotal reports clearly indicate that district staff think that school-based professional development staff have a positive effect on instruction, but there has been little systematic effort to document and report on their influence.

Overall, seven districts reported having completed some sort of an evaluation of the impact of school-based professional development staff. Together these evaluations focused on a total of 13 (or less than a fifth) of these positions and the work of just over 600 (about a third) of these staff. Two of these evaluations do, however, stand out as examples of the ways that evaluations can inform practice. One of these evaluations focused on the early years of implementation of a comprehensive, districtwide professional development system and the other focused on the districtwide deployment of school-based professional development staff whose role was to help teachers use data to plan and implement new instructional programs. Although these evaluations were different in several ways, they shared a number of important features. For example, both were guided by carefully developed theories of change. In addition, both (a) included large samples of respondents, (b) addressed a core set of issues from the perspectives of key role groups (e.g., school-based professional development staff, teachers, principals), (c) included well-designed strategies for collecting candid feedback on progress and problems associated with the deployment of school-based professional development staff, and (d) featured well-developed working relationships between the evaluation teams and the districts that began at the design phase and continued throughout the evaluations.

Both evaluation reports provide extensive documentation of progress in implementing the two district-wide systems of school-based support. These reports also identify and document concerns expressed by various groups of respondents

and offered clear and concrete suggestions for how these concerns could be addressed. Staff who are familiar with these evaluations agree that they were very useful in focusing discussions about how to strengthen the work of school-based professional development staff and in providing clear starting points for making the necessary improvements. At the same time, by focusing on early implementation, neither of these evaluations yielded concrete information about the impact of these positions on teacher performance or student outcomes.

Based on this snapshot of the deployment of school-based professional development staff in Maryland, the Council applauds the considerable progress in this area. The Council also concludes that this effort holds significant promise as a strategy for enhancing job-embedded professional development and views it as an important indicator of progress in providing professional development that meets the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards*.

The Council's recommendations focus on enhancing state and local infrastructures to support these positions. Because these positions represent an important dimension of instructional leadership and because of the roles that principals play in facilitating the work of staff in these positions, the recommendations also focus on providing support for principals. Third, the recommendations call for more extensive documentation of the work done by school-based professional development staff and for more systematic evaluations of their contributions to teacher performance and student learning.

Recommendations to Support and Enhance the Deployment of School-Based Professional Development Staff

Recommendation 1	
MSDE should expand the statewide learning communities on coaching and mentoring	
Action Step 1.1	MSDE and the districts should continue to rely on these learning communities to collect and share examples of (a) job descriptions, (b) recruitment strategies, (c) training strategies and materials, (d) promising and successful practices, and, (e) evaluations

Recommendation 2	
Districts should expand their support for the work of school-based professional staff through more extensive preparation of principals and other school leaders to work effectively with these staff	
Action Step 2.1	Districts should train principals and other school leaders to understand the responsibilities and facilitate the work of school-based professional development staff, with special attention to (a) the district's expectations and related indicators of success for staff in these positions, (b) the parameters of their authority and responsibilities, and (c) principals' responsibilities for monitoring the performance of school-based professional development staff, and (d) coordinating the work of multiple staff assigned to these positions

Recommendation 3	
Districts should document the work of school-based professional development staff and assess its effect on teachers, schools, and student learning	
Action Step 3.1	Districts should use individual logs and similar instruments to document the work of school-based professional development staff
Action Step 3.2	Districts should survey school-based professional development staff, teachers, and principals to gauge overall satisfaction with the work of these staff, perceptions of their contributions to improving instruction, and gaps in assistance and other challenges associated with the work
Action Step 3.3	Districts should conduct rigorous evaluations of the effect of school-based professional development staff on classroom instruction and student outcomes, with these evaluations relying on direct observation of classroom instruction and analysis of student data, and focusing on clearly defined indicators of success that are specified in advance

V. Concluding Comments and Next Steps

Progress in Implementing the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards*

In reviewing (a) state and local efforts to use the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide,* (b) the state of the art in evaluating teacher professional development, and (c) the deployment of school–based professional development staff, the Council found clear evidence of progress in implementing the standards. Both MSDE staff and district staff say that using the planning guide has helped them to focus on the standards. The increase in the amount of evaluations and heightened sensitivity to the need for evaluations indicate recognition of the need for quality and accountability in teacher professional development. The widespread deployment of school-based professional development staff reflects a positive trend toward more professional development that explicitly addresses teacher needs and school improvement priorities.

As noted in the Introduction, the Council's recommendations for next steps in each of these areas reflect four themes. First, MSDE plays a critical leadership role by modeling good practice. Second, active collaboration among key stakeholders is an essential ingredient in all efforts to improve professional development. Third, implementation of many of the recommendations, especially those related to applying the planning framework included in the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide* and to increasing the scope and quality of evaluations of teacher professional development, require considerable capacity-building at the state and local levels. Finally, implementation of the recommendations can be accomplished by improving and expanding existing programs, policies, and practices and not by creating new programs and policy initiatives.

The recommendations related to evaluating professional development, as well as those related to applying the planning framework and assessing the impact of the work of school-based professional development staff, also address the need for accountability for ensuring that professional development is of high quality and that it is yielding acceptable returns on the very substantial investments made by MSDE, the districts, and teachers.

The Council urges MSDE and the districts to review their options and opportunities for implementing the recommendations and following the action steps in the larger context of comprehensive planning to address state and local needs and priorities. The Council recognizes that considering the recommendations as part of comprehensive planning necessarily means that implementation will look different in different places and that the pace of the changes will also vary. Finally, the Council recognizes that decisions about following the recommendations and taking the action steps will depend on the availability of resources.

In anticipation of expected changes in the federal *No Child Left Behind Act,* the Council notes that in addition to addressing increasing demands for accountability at the local and state levels, the recommendations anticipate the heightened attention to professional development that seems likely to be a part of the reauthorization. For example, Senate Bill 1979, which contains a proposal for the new statute, offers a more extensive definition of high-quality professional development than the one included in the original legislation, and it calls for rigorous evaluations that focus on the effect of professional development on teachers and their students.

Maryland is already positioned to address these provisions of the new law. Implementing the Council's recommendations will further enhance state and local capacity in these areas.

Looking Ahead

The Council will continue its work by examining the following three issues in the months ahead:

■ *Local programs to support new teachers.* A growing body of research suggests that well-designed teacher induction programs can facilitate new teachers' entry into the profession and greatly reduce the attrition of new and experienced teachers. The Council will examine district programs to support new teachers to learn about (a) the kinds of support that these programs provide, (b) the number of new teachers that they serve, and (c) indicators of their success in retaining new teachers and helping them become skilled practitioners.

■ *Strategies for finding sufficient time for professional development.* In Maryland and elsewhere, teachers, principals, and central office staff generally agree that one of the biggest impediments to teacher participation in high-quality professional development is the lack of time. The need to cover comprehensive curricula and to address the needs of diverse learners makes it difficult for teachers and others to find time in regular school schedules for comprehensive, long-term professional development. As the Council noted above, the deployment of school-based professional development staff can help address this problem. In addition, some schools have found ways to include professional learning activities into the routine work of teachers. The Council intends to look at examples of these strategies and to learn more about how they have been implemented and sustained.

■ ***Enrollment in college and university courses as professional development.*** Every year thousands of teachers enroll in college and university courses to enhance their teaching skills and to accumulate credits toward certification or advanced degrees. The Council will examine ways that districts and institutions of higher education are working together to ensure that coursework meets standards for academic rigor and also addresses district improvement priorities. The Council will also examine how current accreditation standards and reporting requirements address district interests in understanding how coursework is addressing their priorities.

In addition to examining these three issues, the Council anticipates watching the development of two tools that will be available to districts and MSDE to support ongoing professional development. The tools, which are being developed by a small consortium of districts, include (a) a guide for evaluating teacher professional development to complement the *Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide,* and (b) a guide for districts to use in reviewing annual expenditures for teacher professional development. The Council will review drafts of these two tools as well as the results of local pilot tests. The Council's next report will discuss these tools and possible options for their use.