
Personalizing Professional Development for K12 Educators: Five Strategies and a Checklist to Get Started



Why We're Losing Teachers and How to Keep Them

Half of teachers in the United States leave the profession within five years, causing districts up to \$2.2 billion each year. Lack of mentoring and professional support is cited as the main cause.*

With new testing standards and expectations for student outcomes, a growing focus on teacher performance and evaluation, and new technologies, K12 educators are under more pressure than ever before. It's vital that we shift the way we support teachers and empower them with information and inspiration for their own personal professional learning plan and the opportunity to connect with fellow educators who share their goals and interests.

It's clear that the one-size-fits-all, one-stop, traditional professional development model is failing, with many teachers who feel it is not adequately preparing them for the changing nature of their jobs. After all, the new educator learning how to effectively manage his or her classroom is facing significantly different challenges than the educator who's been teaching for thirty years and might be struggling with adoption of new technology, so why should these two receive the same Professional Development?

These very different educators with their unique set of strengths and challenges need very different resources and support systems to take their practice to the next level. That is, they need a personalized approach to professional development to achieve growth. Some administrators are skeptical of personalized PD. Because of the high degree of customization for each and every educator, it often requires resources to be accessed online in a self-guided manner to achieve efficiency at scale. They wonder how online PD can be effectively monitored, and whether the lessons will really resonate and impact teacher practice.

Here at BloomBoard, we're changing the way educators grow. We offer a comprehensive online library of professional development resources and suites of additional supports for teachers, personalized to their needs and learning goals. In this guide, we offer five easy and practical strategies for implementing a personalized learning system for educators at your school or district, along with a checklist of criteria administrators should look for in a professional development solution.

*Source: Alliance for Excellence in Education

1 Put the Teacher in the Driver's Seat

A recent study by the Gates Foundation found that teachers who are allowed to choose all or most of their professional development opportunities are more than twice as satisfied as those with fewer options. Teachers can take charge of their learning by setting goals, selecting their own professional development resources, courses, or mentorships that will lead to goal achievement, scheduling learning on their own time by seeking flexible opportunities that will fit into their busy schedules, and sharing ideas with colleagues.

The BloomBoard Marketplace gives educators the power to take their learning into their own hands. With thousands of high-quality videos, articles, eBooks, and courses categorized by topics like classroom management or differentiated learning, teachers can quickly find the relevant content to accelerate them on their own personalized learning path. Educators can also filter resources by grade, subject level, and type of resource, and they can save resources for later to create their own personal learning playlist. You can even provide educators with a “Personal Learning Account” for paid resources, making budget allocation easier and more transparent.

“The key to effective goal-setting is making goals personal. Any fitness expert will tell you that it’s not enough to want to ‘be healthier’; it’s much more effective to envision what that means to you individually, whether that’s fitting into your jeans or being fit enough to run a 5k.”

Jason Lange
CEO of Bloomboard

2 Link Personal Learning to School-or-District-Wide Initiatives

When talking to educators about their professional learning plans, find ways to connect their goals to larger school-or-district-wide initiatives. By reinforcing that an educator’s growth is not only important to them, but is one component of creating a richer and healthier school, you signal to the educator that she is not working in isolation.

Make growth part of the weekly staff meetings. Take ten minutes every two-three weeks to break staff into small groups and encourage them to discuss their personal and professional goals. By inviting teachers to share their progress towards goals, they’re forming relationships that will provide a support system and accountability. Also, be candid about your own growth. “When employees see firsthand that it’s okay to be imperfect,” says BloomBoard CEO Jason Lange, “they’ll be more likely to admit their own shortcomings and take advantage of opportunities to improve.”

In the BloomBoard Marketplace, you can share a resource relevant to a school-or-district-wide initiative and include a note explaining why you find it valuable. You may also choose to send resources to all educators within a specific grade or subject matter or recommend resources to an individual teacher. Finally, if your school or district has internal resources you’d like to make easily accessible to your staff, you can upload those to the BloomBoard Marketplace.

3

Make Professional Learning Positive, Not Punitive

First of all, start with the positive. In conversations with staff members about growth, be sure to point out their strengths and accomplishments before focusing on areas for improvement. Don't tie professional growth exclusively to performance evaluations, either. While you and the educator may jointly identify a few growth areas based on classroom observations and formal evaluations, engage the educator to think about focus areas for growth driven by their interests or curiosity about a new methodology, technique, or technology.

You may even choose to reward staff members who have taken steps to learn. In the BloomBoard Marketplace, you can easily view which of your educators have consumed a resource and even which resources your educators are consuming most. With this invaluable insight, you can learn what's working best to help you make informed decisions that impact teacher growth and instruction.

Consider a professional learning “game” during an upcoming staff meeting. A recent study* revealed that some of educators’ biggest qualms with professional development is that it’s repetitive and boring and that they get the impression school leaders just want to check it off their to-do list. These more inventive methods will add variety and fun to your professional learning support plan and demonstrate that you care about educators’ well-being and success.

Source: Effects of Teacher Professional Development on Gains in Student Achievement: How Meta Analysis Provides Scientific Evidence Useful to Education Leaders; Blank & de las Alas

Send Educators on a Scavenger Hunt

You can generate excitement and promote efficiency around using the BloomBoard Marketplace by sending teachers on a scavenger hunt. Prior to the meeting, create a quick list of supports that teachers might typically need to find. Some suggestions are opening routines or tips on peer editing. Open the meeting by reviewing the Marketplace filtering tools, then give your staff time to search. If time allows, open the floor for teachers to share some of the great resources they found at the end of the meeting.

4

Provide Your Staff with a Variety of High-Quality Sources

Ongoing research increasingly shows that professional development shouldn't be “sit and get. Professional development should come from multiple, trusted sources, occur on an ongoing basis, and empower teachers with tools to control their own learning.

Educators can find resources in many places--through an online search, their own school or district, or through local and national advocacy organizations. None of these are as comprehensive as the BloomBoard Marketplace, which offers thousands of resources from high-quality content providers, including the Buck Institute of Education, Edutopia, Whitewater Learning, and more. Resources are vetted by our content team, which is comprised of former educators, and include ratings and reviews from educators across the country. To optimally support your team, you can invest in a Marketplace subscription, granting educators free access to all resources under a certain price threshold depending on your budget.

5 Help Them Help Each Other

Finding ways for teachers to both support and motivate each other towards progress on goals is one of the most powerful ways to ensure success. Consider setting up small group learning communities with your staff based on common areas of focus. These groups can meet and work independently for a number of sessions and report back to the larger group on the resources and methods they used to improve their practice.

The Marketplace not only enables you as an administrator to recommend resources to staff, but allows staff to recommend resources directly to each other. This quote from an educator using our Marketplace reinforces the value educators find in having a direct link to send helpful resources to each other.

“Sharing is what teachers do. In all my years of teaching, exchanging ideas has been one of the most helpful. This feature of BloomBoard broadens our ability to share with each other.”

Fostering healthy relationships and networks is vital to instilling a successful personalized learning system at your school.

What Educators Are Saying About the BloomBoard Marketplace

“The Marketplace has become my go-to after a challenging day! It’s my therapist, my mentor, my stress relief and my professional development all rolled into one! If a lesson didn’t work quite right, I can find a better way on Marketplace. If I have a student who really tried me that day, I can find a way to work with him on Marketplace. If I’m just not communicating well with my colleagues or admin, Marketplace has the solutions to those issues before they become issues! If I just need affirmation that I’m doing a good job, I can even find that there, too.”

Sheri Shepherd
Glen Rose High School, AR

Innovative Idea

“We host brown bag lunches and encourage team members to share anything they think would be interesting or relevant to the team. Our “brown bags” are a way for our team to come together for an hour around a dedicated topic, which can be company-related or completely separate from work. We’ve had presentations about everything from professional poker careers to Nobel Prize-winning physicists.”

Jason Lange
CEO of BloomBoard

Administrator Checklist

What to Look For in a Professional Development Solution

We've outlined why a teacher-driven personalized support system is so important for educators and some tangible steps for making this shift happen in your school or district. A comprehensive professional development platform is the most efficient way to implement real change. Here is a checklist of features to look for from a professional development technology solution:

Self-Service Professional Growth Resources

- ✓ Offers educators easy access to a variety of professional learning resources from quality publishers; searchable by topic, grade, subject level, and more.
- ✓ Promotes peer to peer sharing of resources within your school, district, or other educators across the country.
- ✓ Allows for uploading custom/private content from your school or district.
- ✓ Provides flexible payment options to meet the needs of your school or district's professional development goals.
- ✓ Generates reports that allows you to see how educators are engaging with resources to help you understand your return on investment.

Competency-Based Certification

- ✓ Enables you to drive competencies around your school or district's professional development goals and motivate teachers to complete desired competencies.
- ✓ Offers the ability to provide teachers with recognition for skills mastery in alignment to their professional learning goals.
- ✓ Allows you to see which competencies educators have mastered and understand which ones they find valuable to help guide professional development.

Evaluation and Observations

- ✓ Allows you to schedule, manage, and track in-classroom observations, as well as peer video observations.
- ✓ Offers a centralized location to collect, store, and organize evidence from observations.
- ✓ Provides the ability for administrators and coaches to share ratings and feedback with educators.
- ✓ Enables educators to set personal learning goals aligned to their strengths and areas for improvement.
- ✓ Creates reports that enable you see observation completion rates and compare ratings, identify educator strengths and areas for improvement, and fulfill state mandates.

Training and Support

- ✓ Offers in-person training, web-based trainings, and online support materials.
- ✓ Provides coaching and mentorship for you and your district's observers and coaches.
- ✓ Supports your organization in creating customized professional development plans based on the needs and goals of your school or district.