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# Extracting Success in Pre-K Teaching

## Approaches to Effective Professional Learning Across Five States

High-quality teachers are an essential component of an effective pre-K program. After all, young children’s learning depends on the quality of interactions they have and the relationships they form with adults. When designed and implemented well, professional learning can help pre-K teachers develop the knowledge and competencies needed

to best serve their young students. But what constitutes high-quality professional learning?

New America’s report identifies the following components associated with effective professional learning based on the research:



**Ongoing**  
Intensive and sustained over time



**Reflective Practice**  
Teachers encouraged to analyze their classroom actions, values, and educational philosophy



**Classroom-Focused**  
Developmentally appropriate and relevant to the instructional process



**Job-Embedded**  
Seamlessly incorporated into professional life



**Teacher Buy-In**  
Teachers elect to participate and/or help design programs



**Leader Buy-In**  
Program/administrative leaders actively support the program



**Data-Driven**  
Analyzes and responds to teacher and/or student data



**Continuous Improvement**  
Improves outcomes through an iterative process, using research and evaluation



**In-Classroom Coaching**  
One-on-one coaching available



**Collaborative**  
Multiple educators work together on the same content or practice, such as through PLCs



**Scaled**  
Replicated and expanded to meet the needs of a larger group of educators

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Unfortunately, with varying requirements, limited capacity, and often insufficient funding, this caliber of professional learning can be difficult for pre-K teachers to come by.

This report profiles five promising in-service programs that are incorporating most, if not all, of these aspects of high-quality professional learning.

- We visited **Passaic, New Jersey**, where SciMath-DLL is strengthening pre-K teachers' STEM instruction, with a focus on serving the community's high dual language learner population.
- In **Illinois**, we saw how the Erikson Institute is empowering pre-K through third grade teachers in the Archdiocese of Chicago to incorporate technology into their classrooms.
- In **Nashville, Tennessee**, we met with researchers from Vanderbilt's Peabody Research Institute and Metro Nashville Public Schools pre-K coaches who are together using teacher and student data to tailor professional learning to individual teachers' needs.
- In **San Jose, California** we heard from leaders and teachers about how Franklin-McKinley School District is responding to teachers' requests for help managing challenging classroom behavior.
- And in **Texas**, we learned about a literacy program that has been scaled to reach pre-K teachers across the state working in various settings.

Each program covers different content, though all is specific to early educators. Some of the professional learning is offered in the evenings or on weekends, others during paid planning time, and some online. While all incorporate aspects of quality, their program designs are unique to fit the needs of their

community. Our profiles illustrate that high-quality professional learning is not one-size-fits-all.

These program profiles illustrate that offering high-quality professional learning requires planning and careful implementation. Programs need to create structures and content that align with the research about how both adults and children learn best. Below are five lessons for professional learning design and implementation that emerged from our research on these programs.

### Five Lessons for Growing Strong Pre-K Teachers

1. Embrace that high-quality professional learning is an investment of time and money.
2. Help teachers and administrators see the value early on.
3. Develop opportunities for teacher leadership and growth.
4. Coach the coaches.
5. Align the program model with the latest research on professional learning and use evaluation tools for continuous improvement.

More states and local school districts should invest in professional learning that is of the intensity and quality necessary to move the needle on how pre-K teachers interact with their students. But policymakers should keep in mind that teacher practice will not change overnight, and changes in student outcomes may take even longer to see.



Find out more about what high-quality professional learning looks like in these five innovative programs and what lessons they can offer other states and districts in our full report, available at [newamerica.org/extracting-success](http://newamerica.org/extracting-success)

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