Supporting Virtual Professional Learning

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As many Oregon districts begin the year under Comprehensive Distance Learning (CDL) they are learning to not only to navigate the delivery of online instruction to students, but the delivery of virtual professional learning to educators. While this is still a developing practice across the country and the world, a review of lessons learned from the spring school closure offers some considerations for supporting virtual professional learning.

1. **Tap your human capital.**
   - It has been said more than once that when schools shifted to remote learning, "all teachers became first year teachers". However, many novice teachers have skills and expertise with technology that veteran teachers do not. Consider how novice teachers might serve as resources to their colleagues.

   - Examine the use of technology coaches. A recent [nationwide survey by Digital Promise](#) found that "*By using their expertise in meaningful use of technology in teaching and learning, instructional technology coaches significantly facilitated the transition of their school and/or district community to online instruction. They supported administrators in designing useful learning continuity plans, teachers in minimizing teaching disruption, and families in fostering a home environment that supports remote learning.*"

2. **Prioritize learning – not just technology.** Focus on good teaching practices and consider how technology can strengthen those practices.

   - While teachers need to be able to use the tools of distance learning in order to connect with students, professional learning should not focus solely on development of technology skills. Regardless of whether teaching is in-person or remote, schools need consistent and clear instructional practices that can be supported to ensure highly effective teaching and learning.

   - When focusing on technology skills, prioritize. In his article *[5 Tips to Remote PD Success,](#)* David Saleh Rauf highlights several key strategies including getting to know your Learning Management System (LMS) and learning how to engage in remote assessment.

3. **Acknowledge the trauma that educators are experiencing.** Students are not the only ones facing collective trauma. Consider professional learning that focuses on trauma informed care and the health and well-being of educators as a way to foster staff resilience.
   - [Educator Resilience and Trauma Informed Self-Assessment and Planning Tool](#) (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders)
   - [Tips for Taking Care of Yourself](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network)
   - [Coping With the COVID-19 Crisis](#) (National Association of School Psychologists)

4. **Apply effective professional learning practices.** Research shows that effective professional learning is ongoing, job-embedded, collaborative and classroom-based. These principles should continue to guide districts as they engage in virtual professional learning.

   - In their brief *"How to Create Virtual Professional Development Sessions"* The New Teacher Project (TNTP) applies "virtual tips" to a traditional five step cycle for creating effective professional learning sessions.

   - The authors of the article *"Strategies for Virtual Professional Development"* suggest assigning "co-presenter" roles including:
     - **Moderator**: Watches the virtual room for hand raising and reads the chat thread for questions. The moderator can inform the presenter there is a question and ask for him/her to pause.
     - **Note taker:** Records main takeaways and emails it to everyone after training.
     - **Technical support:** Troubleshoots problems for participants who cannot connect. Tech support can send private messages or place calls to participants without slowing down PD for everyone else.
     - **Small group facilitator**: Leads small group virtual breakout sessions after the PD training.
     - **Timekeeper**: Keeps things moving and the session to the time allotted.

5. **Align professional learning with existing systems and practices.** Supporting educators as they develop and improve their practice in delivering online instruction is a high priority in many districts right now. When developing these supports, consider ways to connect standards for technology with existing district standards for educator practice.

     - Technology Practices "Look-Fors" Within Danielson's Four Domains
     - Alignment of International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) to Danielson
     - National Standards for Quality Online Learning (NSQOL)

6. **Keep educators connected.** Due to the pandemic, meetings and digital communication will be the norm for providing learning opportunities to educators this year. Despite the challenges this presents, districts are finding value in virtual spaces for collaboration and learning.

   - Prioritize relationship building in professional learning. We know the critical role connection plays in the social and emotional health of students. The same is true for teachers.

   - Taking a longer-term view in developing systems virtual professional learning will pay dividends past the current health crisis. Help educators collaborate on their learning journey through strategies such as Virtual PLCs and educator helpdesks.