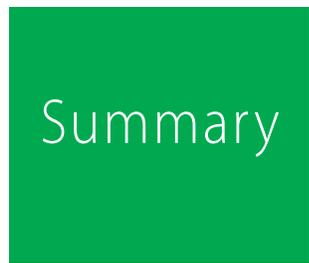




Examining context and challenges in measuring investment in professional development: A case study of six school districts in the Southwest region



Institute of Education Sciences  
U.S. Department of Education



# Examining context and challenges in measuring investment in professional development: a case study of six school districts in the Southwest Region

Summary

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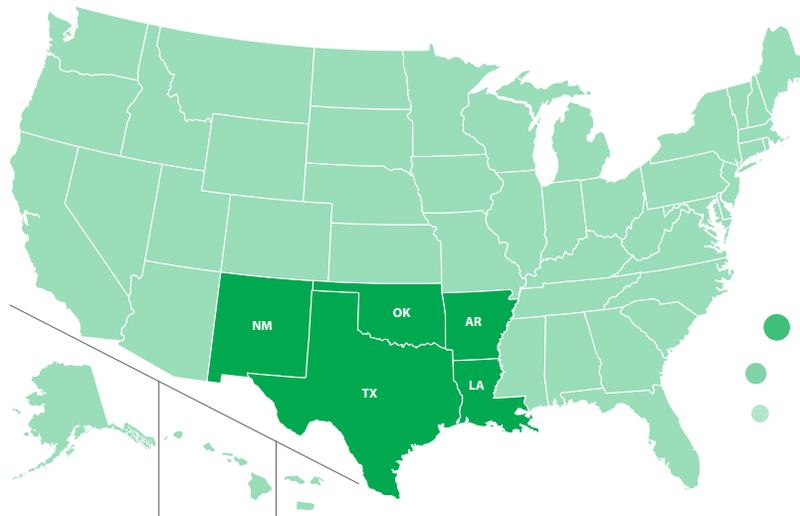
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This report is available on the Regional Educational Laboratory web site at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

# Examining context and challenges in measuring investment in professional development: a case study of six school districts in the Southwest Region

**This study is an exploratory inquiry into the context and challenges of measuring investment in professional development in six Southwest Region school districts. The study estimated annual spending of approximately \$150–\$600 per pupil—or 2–9 percent of total spending. These figures likely underestimate the full investment in professional development in these districts because of the inability to track more integrated professional development activity that is a natural part of a teacher’s work day or week.**

This descriptive analysis illustrates some of the challenges in measuring investment in professional development and concludes by highlighting a promising strategy—using online data systems—that might improve the accuracy of spending estimates and the tracking of expenditures.

Previous literature defines two categories of professional development: traditional professional development, such as workshops, conferences, and college courses for credit, and integrated professional development, such as teacher collaboration during common planning periods, teacher mentoring, academic coaches, observation of others, and individual

research projects. This study adapts the conceptual framework established by Odden et al. (2002) to derive cost estimates of professional development in the sample districts.

Data sources were identified for six districts in four states in the Southwest Region—two in Arkansas, two in New Mexico, one in Oklahoma, and one in Texas—to determine how much these districts were spending on professional development.

Before initial contact with the targeted districts, state and district policies and practices likely to influence investment in professional development were investigated. The four states covered by this study require districts to develop formal plans for implementing professional development. These planning documents were obtained from the six districts in advance of data collection and helped identify the potential financial implications of implementing professional development. For example, the documents delineated district plans for the number of in-service days for various staff, district support for other training and for advancing teacher licensure, and the use of academic coaches and mentoring to train and support teachers and other professional staff.

The framework from Odden et al. (2002) was used to identify data sources that could estimate the six districts' total investment in professional development and disaggregate the total by object of expenditure (for example, personnel and nonpersonnel resources), function (instruction, instructional support, and administration), and source of funding. Based on these six districts' data, an estimated 2–9 percent of district spending was allocated to

professional development activities. As with previous studies, this probably underestimates investment because of the difficulty of obtaining accurate data on professional development that is more integrated into the daily and weekly work of teachers. Future research could explore how feasible online systems would be for obtaining more accurate data on the time allocation of education professionals to better estimate the cost of professional development.

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