



# Shrewsbury Public Schools

Amy B. Clouter  
Assistant Superintendent  
for Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

September 20, 2018

To: School Committee

Re: Professional Development

The best systems evolve, changing over time to better meet the needs of stakeholders. This is particularly true of school systems, where our stakeholders are our students and their teachers, because the consequences of our educational decisions will impact learning for a lifetime. How do we impart institutional knowledge and keep current? The answer: by investing in high quality professional development.

## Massachusetts Standards for High Quality Professional Development (HQPD)

### Characteristics of High Quality PD:

- 1 Has SMART goals relevant to student outcomes
- 2 Aligned with goals and priorities
- 3 Designed based on the analysis of data
- 4 Assessed to ensure goals met
- 5 Promotes collaboration
- 6 Advances an educator's ability to apply learnings
- 7 Models good pedagogical practice
- 8 Makes use of relevant resources to meet goals
- 9 Facilitated by knowledgeable professionals
- 10 Is coherent and connected

Professional development is the vehicle that drives continuous improvement in vibrant learning communities like ours. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) defines professional development as "a set of coherent learning experiences that is systematic, purposeful, and structured over a sustained period of time with the goal of improving educator practice and student outcomes." As you know, in Shrewsbury we pride ourselves on the diversity of learning experiences available to both students and staff. Coherence and consistency result from thoughtful strategic planning. Accordingly, in the next five years our professional

development efforts will focus on three priorities:

- Learning Environments Where Everyone's Success Matters
- Enhanced Wellbeing of All, and
- Connected Learning for a Complex World

Specifically, in the next two years we aim structure professional development for staff so that we enhance our shared understanding and ability to engage in inclusive and culturally proficient practices; the skills, habits, and mindsets of social and emotional learning; project-based learning and activities that integrate Science, Technology Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics (STEAM); and new state Social Studies standards. Importantly, in all of this work we plan to leverage data to improve student achievement. Finally, we recognize the importance of collaborative professional learning communities in furthering the work.

What does this look like? Our efforts to structure effective professional development are depicted well in the investment we've made to make our schools more inclusive. To start, the school leadership team completed a year-long course on Inclusive Practices. Next district leaders were provided with the [DESE's Guidebook](#) and related resources. At each school at the Elementary and Middle level co-teaching teams were established and trained by outside consultant Mrs. Donna Simone, with the goal that these teams will develop the capacity to lead future training. In addition, last year a new pathway entitled Teaching Diverse Learners helped general education teachers and specialists across the district to collaborate. This work is also supported by [online courses](#) offered to all educators, conferences held during the year and offerings available at the [2018 Summer Institute](#). Rather than structure "one and done" information sessions led only by outside experts, we aim to embrace a model where professional learning is dynamic, job embedded and ongoing.

Good professional development goes beyond mere training. In order for our investments to have impact, educators must apply their learning. Translating research into practice is an ongoing effort, and sustained professional development necessarily involves supporting building-based teams in each school. For this reason, allotting planning and meeting times for our educators to learn from one another is an important consideration.



Finally, just as we aim to meet the needs of diverse students, we must also acknowledge the different needs of our teaching staff. As professionals, every educator is responsible for continuing their learning. Yet the needs of a new teacher vary considerably from those of a more experienced educator. Just as importantly, in years when curriculum content changes, some departments require specific supports. For that reason,

Shrewsbury purposefully structures professional development opportunities with educator autonomy in mind.

For the past few years, we've empowered our professional staff to align their educator evaluation goals, building-based team goals and professional development interests by devoting professional development days to both departmental PD days and "[Pathways](#)" time. This year, staff members will choose from 13 different pathways. Some teachers will continue exploring a concept that they have researched in previous years; this allows for deep learning. Other teachers prefer to connect in job-alike groups, and their choices are driven by shared focus. For example, many teachers at the secondary level see Pathway time as an opportunity for collaboration.

Our people are our most important resource, and our goal must always be to empower every learner. I look forward to discussing professional development in Shrewsbury at greater length with you in the near future.