



# EMPOWERING TEACHERS TO EMPOWER STUDENTS

## What to look for in professional learning to equip teachers and benefit students

Professional learning is more critical than ever for educators. Following the rapid, massive shift to e-learning at the start of the pandemic, online meetings and digital communication became the norm for educators in their daily work life. This digital shift has remained in place, even as many educators have returned to in-person classrooms.

It makes sense then that providing the option of effective virtual professional learning to educators is necessary. Online training sessions are also flexible, accessible and budget-friendly.

For students to master challenging content, grasp self-direction, become better problem-solvers, and effectively communicate and collaborate, teachers need to be prepared with strategies to support them.

It's vital for teachers to learn and refine the pedagogies needed to teach their students these skills.

While the delivery model and experiences may differ between in-person and virtual professional learning — a classroom vs. Zoom — the same principles for effective professional learning remain the same. Here are some key features to look for when selecting a professional learning program for teachers, including those that take place virtually.

### MEETS EDUCATORS WHERE THEY ARE

Professional learning sessions, virtual or in person, often move too quickly because the person leading it assumes the role of “presenter” of content rather than the role of “facilitator” of learning. Like students, every



# HELPING TEACHERS OVERCOME THE OPPORTUNITY MYTH

**T**he term “opportunity myth” was developed by the nonprofit TNTP and it refers to what happens in classrooms when students of all backgrounds who are capable of doing grade-appropriate work are consistently given fewer of those opportunities.

Studies have shown that students from low-income backgrounds and students of color were less likely than their peers from higher-income families and those who are white to be in classrooms with grade-appropriate assignments and strong instruction.

“There is a gap between what students need to be prepared for college and what they are actually getting in their daily instruction,” said Erica Lott, high-school math and science teacher and Pre-AP National Faculty and Pre-AP Readiness Workshop leader at College Board.

Tara Czupryk is the executive director of Pre-AP Programs at College Board. Czupryk explains that the professional learning workshops they provide to educators offer solutions to help overcome the opportunity myth with:

- **Illustrations of grade-level assignments**
- **Strong, student centered, collaborative instruction**
- **An emphasis on strategies for students to engage in rigorous content**

“The beauty of the College Board workshops is that they give teachers the opportunity to allow students to engage with grade-level content,” Lott said. “This builds educator confidence to provide their students with more opportunities to rise to the occasion, transcending the opportunity myth one educator at a time.” ■

educator arrives at a learning session with diverse knowledge, skills and experiences. When preparing a professional learning session, a program must be mindful of the participants and ensure that they have time to process and discuss, make connections and formulate conclusions.

“Perhaps the most important component of a relevant professional learning program is personalization — the ability to meet an educator where they are — so that every educator is able to meet their students where they are,” said Erica Lott, high school math and science teacher and Pre-AP National Faculty and Readiness Workshop leader at College Board.

“College Board Pre-AP Readiness Workshops meet educators where they are by asking them to consider the concept of ‘readiness’ for their own students and to identify their students’ diverse needs,” added Tara Czupryk, executive director of Pre-AP Programs at College Board.

## FOCUSES ON CONTENT

Professional learning develops teacher expertise when modeling strong pedagogy in the context of high-quality instructional materials. This includes an intentional focus on discipline-specific approaches in areas such as mathematics, science or literacy. College Board’s Readiness Workshops are designed for teachers in grades 6-12. The workshops empower teachers to apply what they learn in the workshops to their own grade level and content area.

“Pre-AP Readiness Workshops are grounded in the belief that all students deserve engaging, relevant and challenging grade-level coursework. Participants are provided realistic and transferable ways to plan for instruction to make this happen in their own classrooms,” Czupryk said.

## INTEGRATES ACTIVE LEARNING

Active learning immerses teachers in the design of high-quality instructional materials and the practice of teaching strategies. This type of professional learning uses strategic activities to provide robust and effective experiences that mirror engaging, student-centered classrooms. It provides teachers the opportunity to experience the type of learning they are building for their own students.



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“During the workshop experience, educators are introduced to a set of consistent, interdisciplinary principles that can guide classroom practice: close observation and analysis, higher-order questioning, evidence-based writing and academic conversation. Regular practice with these routines in a classroom ultimately supports all students to be better prepared for high school, AP and college-level work,” Czupryk said.

### INCORPORATES MODELS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Modeled instruction provides teachers with a clear picture of what best practices should look like. Teachers are given the chance to view models that include observations of peer teachers, lesson plans and samples of student work.

According to the [Opportunity Myth](#) as researched and defined by the nonprofit TNTP, US classrooms with more students from low-income households had fewer high-quality academic experiences than others — even those classrooms in the same district. Supporting teachers as they work to improve educational opportunities for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, is key to setting students up for success in their next grade, in college and in whatever they aspire to do.

“What makes the Pre-AP Readiness workshops so effective is that they invite educators to look at differentiation through a different lens. Every student engages in the same grade-level content, but in a way that is meaningful for them,” Lott said.

### OFFERS FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION

Professional learning should provide teachers with time for reflection and the opportunity to get feedback. Providing input and valuing the opinions of teachers urges them to move toward the expert visions of practice and makes them feel valued. As a result, educator turnover rate and workplace morale may be improved.

Professional learning offers a space for teachers to share their ideas and come together to collaborate as they learn. Through their collaboration, teachers can build communities that change the instruction and culture of their grade level, department and school.

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Data from the College Board’s survey of participants, given upon completing the virtual Pre-AP Readiness Workshops in 2020-21, found that 94% of teachers “agree” or “strongly agree” that they feel more confident in applying the Pre-AP Shared Principles in their own classrooms.

“Teachers who feel supported are more likely to be open to new ways of teaching and learning,” Lott noted.

Well-designed professional learning is vital to support teachers as they develop skills and knowledge across the professional continuum. Professional learning should encourage active learning, tap domain-specific approaches and engage in shared practices that can

positively affect the classroom. When educators can share their experience with one another, the professional learning experience is elevated even more.

These features are true whether the professional learning is in person or online, while virtual professional learning is growing quickly and will continue to expand over the coming years. There are plenty of ways to make professional learning effective, useful and empowering — even remotely — which can help educators do a better job of meeting their students’ needs.

Visit our website to [learn more about supporting teachers with Pre-AP Readiness Workshops](#). ■



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## ABOUT COLLEGE BOARD

Founded in 1900, the College Board is a mission-driven not-for-profit created to expand access to higher education and connect students to college success and opportunity. Each year, the College Board helps more than seven million students prepare for a successful transition to college through programs and services in college readiness and college success. The organization also serves the education community through research and advocacy on behalf of students, educators and schools.

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