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Teacher training effort called expensive waste

Billions spent, but classroom gains are elusive

By **Lyndsey Layton** | WASHINGTON POST AUGUST 05, 2015

WASHINGTON — A study of 10,000 teachers found that professional development — the teacher workshops and training that cost taxpayers billions of dollars each year — is largely a waste.

The study released Tuesday by TNTP, a nonprofit organization, found no evidence that any particular approach or amount of professional development consistently helps teachers improve in the classroom.

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“We are bombarding teachers with a lot of help, but the truth is, it’s not helping all that much,” said Dan Weisberg, TNTP’s chief executive. “We’re basically throwing a lot of things against the wall and not even looking to see whether it works.”

Researchers examined three large school districts as well as a network of charter schools. They looked at professional development programs at all the schools, and teacher performance data over several years, and they surveyed 10,000 teachers and interviewed more than 100 administrators.

They identified teachers who got better at their jobs and tried to figure out which experiences they had that differed from teachers who were stagnant. To determine if a teacher had improved, researchers analyzed multiple measures — evaluation ratings, classroom observation, and student test scores.

And they didn't find many answers. "When it comes to teaching, real improvement is a lot harder to achieve, and we know much less about how to make it happen than most of us would like to admit," Weisberg said.

The school districts that participated in the study spent an average of \$18,000 per teacher annually on professional development.

Based on that, TNTP estimates that the 50 largest school districts spend \$8 billion on teacher development annually. That is far larger than previous estimates.

Teachers spend a good deal of time in training, the study found. The 10,000 teachers surveyed were in training an average of 19 school days a year, or almost 10 percent of a typical school year, according to TNTP.

The findings echo two recent federally funded studies, which concluded that current approaches to teacher training have no significant effect on performance.

"At the federal level, we spend \$2.5 billion a year on professional development," Education Secretary Arne Duncan said at a teacher town hall in 2012. "As I go out [and] talk to great teachers around the country, when I ask them how much is that money improving their job or development, they either laugh or they cry. They are not feeling it."

In the TNTP study, about one third of teachers — 3 out of 10 — improved over a two- to three-year period after participating in teacher training while 20 percent got worse, as measured by teacher evaluations.

The study also found that school districts are not helping teachers understand their weaknesses.

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