**Terms Carry Meaning**

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Early in the process of developing the revised *Standards for Professional Learning*, the Standards Revision Task Force, which included 28 members representing 20 professional associations, made the decision to name the new document *Standards for Professional Development*. Within the last decade the term *professional development* has become more prevalent both in the research and popular literature as a replacement of the term *staff development*,or its ancestor *inservice education*. The term *professional development* seemed appropriate because research focused on the continuous development of teachers and principals, with teachers being the primary subjects of research.

Late in the revision process, the task force considered using the term *professional learning* rather than *professional development* in the name for this new set of standards. The task force overwhelmingly agreed.

Some of the rationale for this change is described here, yet it is important to remember that the name is less important than the practices of and results that occur from educator development. If the term applied can, however, alter perception, practice, and results, then it is important to be precise and consistent in the use of the terminology.

The term *professional development* tends to connote only the formal events in which people gather to learn. In addition, the meaning associated with the term conveys more about the design, logistics, and materials needed for learning than the outcomes of the learning for both educators and their students. The term *professional learning* emphasizes that learning is a process that continues over time, extends into practice, and expects results for students.

While this distinction may appear arbitrary for some, the concepts embedded in the meaning of *professional learning* are fundamental to shaping practice and perception. Changing the name from *development* to *learning* holds tremendous promise for engaging educators in a process that is a hallmark of a profession, continuous education and improvement of practice. Changing the name might contribute to changing both the public’s and educators’ perception of educator development from one that is a passive process, removed from the daily work in schools, disconnected from student and educator standards, designed by those outside of schools, and done at the expense of students’ opportunity to learn, especially when classes are suspended for professional development. The new name of *professional learning* strives to connote a new understanding of this core function within education. It communicates that *professional learning* is continuous improvement that occurs daily in schools; is facilitated and designed by educators themselves and supported by external assistance providers when necessary; focuses on educators’ everyday work, strengthening their capacity, and increasing student results; occurs as a part of the normal workday when students are in school; engages educators as active learners in a process that continues over time; weaves together acquisition of knowledge, development of skills, critique of, reflection on, and refinement of practice, and analysis of dispositions; and is vital to the success of students.

Whatever it is called, the practice of continuous learning is essential for any improvement effort. Without learning, little change is possible. Every major education initiative, past, present, or future, depends on the capacity of educators to implement it fully and with fidelity. Professional learning is the only viable, efficient, and logical process for building the capacity of educators working in schools today. *Standards for Professional Learning* describes the research-based attributes of professional learning essential to transforming schools for student success.