Encouraging Systemic Changes in Professional Development:

A Short Summary of Florida's Evaluation Protocol System

by

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ENCOURAGING SYSTEMIC CHANGES IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A SHORT SUMMARY OF FLORIDA'S EVALUATION PROTOCOL SYSTEM

The 2000 Florida Legislature enacted new legislation to improve the quality of the professional development system for public education. The law and subsequent revisions required the Department of Education to design and disseminate methods by which the state and district school boards may evaluate and improve the professional development system. In accordance with the law, the Department has generated and implemented the Florida Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol and completed the first cycle of reviews for all 67 Florida school districts. This short summary describes the evaluation system, the processes employed, and outcomes from the first full cycle of reviews for all Florida school districts.

HOW FLORIDA'S PROTOCOL SYSTEM WAS DEVELOPED

A careful process was used to develop the Florida Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol, commonly referred to as Florida's Protocol System. In the spring of 2001, the Florida Department of Education contracted with Evaluation Systems Design, Inc. (ESDI) to conduct a comprehensive study of professional development in relation to the new requirements. The system was generated using results from the study and extensive input from the professional development community around the state, including directors of professional development, educational consortia, principals, teachers, and university faculty involved in preservice and inservice education. A pilot study was conducted in 2001 in which teams of consultants applied the draft standards in six school districts selected to represent the state in geographic region and size (large, medium, and small). Final implementation was begun in the 2002-2003 school year.

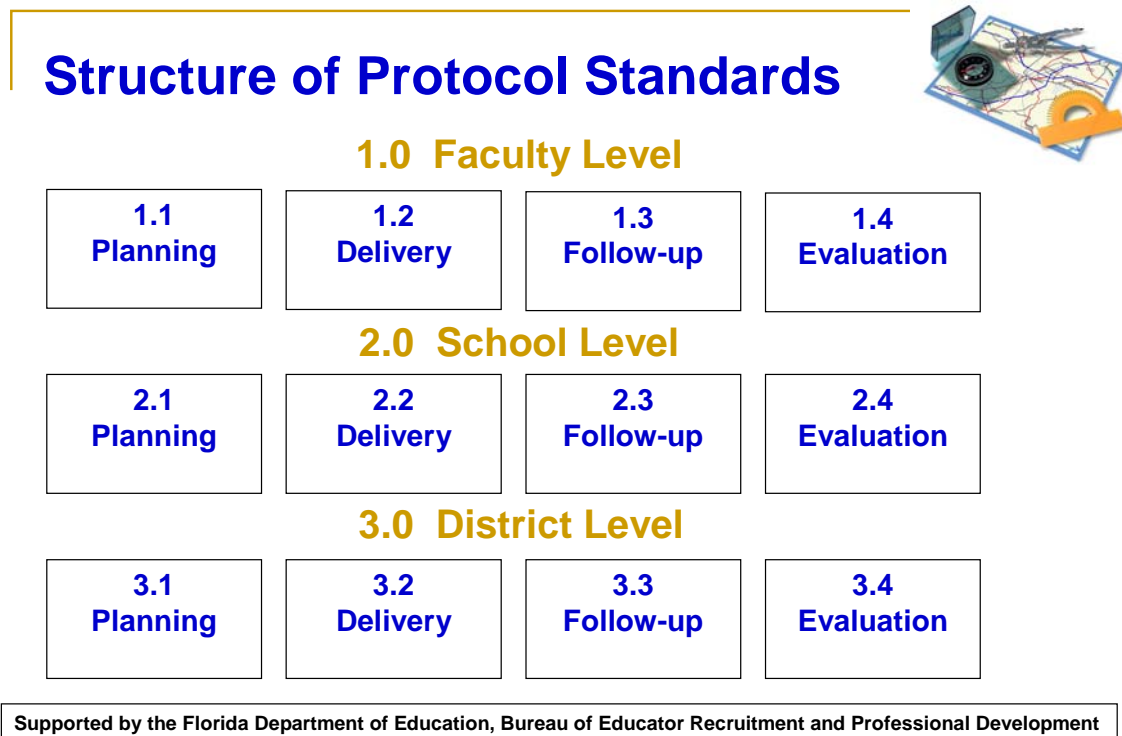## HOW THE PROTOCOL SYSTEM WORKS

The purposes of the Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol are to:

1. Ensure the highest quality district, school, and faculty Professional Development Systems in Florida to support instructional programs throughout the state and increase student achievement.

2. Provide the Commissioner of Education, State Board of Education, and Legislature with information each year on the quality of the district Professional Development Systems.
3. Provide Florida school districts with the methods and protocols needed to conduct ongoing assessments of the quality of professional development in their schools.

Standards. The Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol is based on a set of 66 standards that describe the characteristics and components of a quality professional development system that meets the requirements of Florida's laws. These standards were generated from statements in Florida's laws as well as the ***National Staff Development Council (NSDC) Standards for Staff Development***. The standards reflect three levels of the Professional Development System and four strands incorporated into each level (Figure 1) Judgments on each standard are made using a 4-point rating scale that ranges from "1 = unacceptable" to "4 = excellent" with a midpoint of 2.5.

Figure 1

Structure of Protocol Standards

1.0 Faculty Level

| 1.1 Planning | 1.2 Delivery | 1.3 Follow-up | 1.4 Evaluation |

2.0 School Level

| 2.1 Planning | 2.2 Delivery | 2.3 Follow-up | 2.4 Evaluation |

3.0 District Level

| 3.1 Planning | 3.2 Delivery | 3.3 Follow-up | 3.4 Evaluation |

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Using a Systems Approach. Components of the Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol include:

♦ Requirements directly linking professional development with achievement levels of the students of participating teachers.
♦ Site visits to school districts using teams of trained experts in professional development.
♦ Methods for the Department of Education to use to identify best practices and investigate the causes of lack of progress as needed.
♦ Technical assistance for districts to use in improving their professional development systems.

The model employs a basic systems approach to professional development addressing these general questions:

♦ **Planning:** What planning occurs to organize and support the professional development for teachers?
♦ **Delivery:** How and how well is the professional development delivered to teachers?
♦ **Follow-up:** What follow-up is provided to ensure that teachers apply the skills and knowledge gained through the delivered professional development?
♦ **Evaluation:** What evaluation occurs to ensure that the professional development resulted in teacher application in the classroom and improvements in student learning as a direct outcome?

Site Visits. The Department conducts onsite visits to school districts to apply the Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol. Site visits include:

A. Interviews with district-level staff including the directors of staff development, curriculum and instruction, and testing/assessment as appropriate.
B. Reviews of documents depicting and supporting the district's Professional Development System including the ways in which these items are incorporated into the process: disaggregated student data, school improvement plans, surveys of teachers' professional development needs, annual performance appraisal data for teachers/administrators, annual school reports, evaluation reports, budget and expenditure records, and student achievement data.
C. Reviews of memos and directives to school principals and teachers concerning policies and procedures for the Professional Development System.
D. Site visits to selected schools (elementary, middle, and high) where reviewers interview the principal and other administrators, conduct interviews with selected teachers, and review documentation including

School Improvement Plans, training manuals, training agendas, budget records, individual professional development plans for instructional personnel, and evaluation reports and documents.

Review Teams. District site visits are conducted by teams of trained reviewers for 3-5 days. Reviewers include staff from the Department of Education, professional development staff from other school districts, staff from regional consortia, and qualified university and community college faculty who do not have a working relationship with the district under review. Site visits do not require districts or schools to collect additional data or administer surveys of participants in their professional development system. Information is gathered by the site review teams through interviews and reviews of existing documents at all three levels of the professional development system.

The system is designed to deploy teams of two reviewers to each of the selected schools and the district office for a whole day. Teams typically arrive in the district in the afternoon of the first day for an introduction to the district, and stay a day at the end of the review to draft the report. Larger districts require larger teams of reviewers and larger numbers of schools visited.

Review Cycle. The Department initially launched the system using a 5-year cycle, resulting in 16 districts reviewed in the first two years. To increase the availability of recent information concerning districts, the district moved to a 3-year cycle, completing the remaining 41 districts in the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years.

REPORTING AND ACTION PLANNING

The Department generates a report for the district that documents the results of the site visit, areas of strength, and any areas in need of improvement. Numerical results are presented as a district rating for each standard at each level of the system.

Districts are provided an opportunity to review the report for errors in fact prior to public release. These reports are then summarized across districts each year for a report to the Commissioner and Legislature documenting the quality of the professional development systems across the state.

Two cut scores are used to help interpret the results. Any standard receiving a rating of 3.5 or higher is identified as exemplary and is commended. For standards receiving a rating below 2.0, the district must generate an action plan describing to the state the ways in which implementation of the standard will be improved. The Department may send a team to review progress on the action plans as needed, depending on the degree of concern raised during the review and the responses of the district.

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL USE

The Department encourages districts and schools to use the *Florida Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol* as one method for conducting a self-review of the quality of their professional development systems. Districts may choose to use a stratified purposeful sampling plan to select elementary, middle, and high schools representative of the district for limited site visits to review the status of professional development in their school systems. These reviews can be conducted informally by following procedures similar to those specified for the reviews conducted by the Department, or through other methods devised by the district. The document *District Self-Review System* is available online from the Department to assist districts in planning and conducting self-reviews using the standards.

WEB-BASED ASSISTANCE

The Department maintains a web-based statewide performance support system at http://www.firn.edu/doe/profdev/. The site contains the documents for the Protocol System, the checklists used in a review, a database of exemplary professional development activities, a listing of available professional development resources and Protocol System training programs, and available assistance. The findings from exemplary practices noted in district reviews are summarized into a technical assistance document that helps other districts learn more about the ways they can improve implementation of that standard and is a searchable web-based data system available on the Department's website.

SUMMARY OF FIRST CYCLE FINDINGS

Reviews of all 67 school districts were completed in the spring of 2006, constituting the First Cycle for the Florida Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the results from the First Cycle were presented in a First Cycle Technical Report. Key findings were:

1. **Most school districts are currently implementing most standards related to planning and delivery of professional development at the "good" or "excellent" level.** The average of ratings across all districts and standards was 2.97 on a 4-point scale with 4 equal to "Excellent" and 1 equal to "Unacceptable." A total of 63 of the 67 districts received average ratings of over 2.5 across all standards reviewed.
2. **Districts that receive good or excellent ratings on the district professional development standards also tend to have demonstrated greater increases in student achievement.** A correlational analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between high ratings on the standards and the last district standard, 3.4.7 on Student Gains. The analysis demonstrated a moderate positive relationship (.31)

between the state's ratings of districts on student achievement increases and ratings on the quality of professional development in the district, significant at the .01 level. **These results support the effectiveness of high quality professional development programs in contributing to increased student achievement in school districts.**

3. **Upward trends were noted on the ratings of districts over time, with small but consistent increases in the average ratings in almost all of the professional development strands and levels.** Statistically, 91% of the successive years of site visits displayed increases in the strands and levels of the standards. (See Figures 2-5.)

4. **Districts are more adept at planning and delivering professional development than providing follow-up to training or evaluating the effectiveness of professional development.** Consistently, the ratings in the strands for Planning and Delivery were higher than those for follow-up and evaluation, regardless of district size or region. (See Figure 6)

5. **Greater differences were noted among districts in the area of evaluation of professional development than in the other strands.** Larger standard deviations in the ratings on evaluation standards indicate that across the state there are greater differences in districts' efforts to evaluate professional development than for planning and delivery.

6. **Virtually all of the content of professional development being planning and delivered in districts and schools addresses the required areas in s. 1012.98.** Ratings for the standards related to Content were very high at all three levels. Virtually all districts or schools are supporting with federal, general revenue, or local dollars professional development that is directly related to the teaching assignments. Reviewers noted almost no professional development that didn't meet this criterion.

7. **Teachers consistently described and demonstrated that the professional development in which they have been involved recently was relevant to their needs and teaching assignment.** Most school districts received ratings of 3 or 4 on all three levels examining the relevance of the professional development teachers receive to their needs as classroom teachers. Virtually no professional development was listed in Individual Professional Development Plans, in School Improvement Plans, or in district plans that did not directly relate to the skills and knowledge that teachers need to deliver quality instruction in a well-managed classroom.

8. **Although structures are in place in some schools to implement Learning Communities, few teachers or schools have consistently implemented them.** Ratings for Learning Communities were among the lowest in the system. Some schools have the structures in place to conduct learning communities such as joint planning time for grade level or subject area meetings, but most of the discussions currently center on the logistics of operating the schools and classrooms rather than increasing the knowledge and skill levels of the teachers.

9. **Few teachers have conducted Action Research, and most teachers are not aware of the term or how to do it.** This faculty level standard received the lowest rating among the 66 standards and is an area for growth for the entire state.

10. **Districts are incorporating standards into their organization/structure.** Districts are using the 66 standards and the rationales for the standards in their planning. Some districts have used the standards to generate checklists for training developers.

11. **The Protocol system provided a common language.** Conceptually, many discussions and planning sessions center now on the four strands of planning, delivery, follow-up, and evaluation. Common language is more apparent now for concepts and practices such as learning strategies, learning communities, and action research.

12. **The set of standards is raising expectations.** The Department's wide dissemination and public availability of the standards has encouraged all districts to meet the standards and improve their professional development systems.

13. **Reviewers learn from other districts.** District professional development staff who participate in reviews of other districts increase their awareness of better methods for planning and implementing professional development, as well as becoming more focused on the need to improve professional development systems in their own districts.

14. **Some districts conduct self-studies.** Some districts have used the Department's self-study methods to review their professional development systems and encourage principals and trainers to adhere to the standards.

15. **Continued efforts need to be concentrated on the quality of follow-up and evaluations of professional development in many districts.** These standards received lower ratings at all three levels than planning and delivery standards.

Overall, districts have benefited from the review system through increased awareness and understanding of quality professional development programs, learning about practices throughout the state, and self-reviews of the quality of their own professional development systems. Statistical evidence demonstrates a correlation between high performance on the ratings of the quality of professional development in a district and increases in student achievement, as represented by the district's grade.
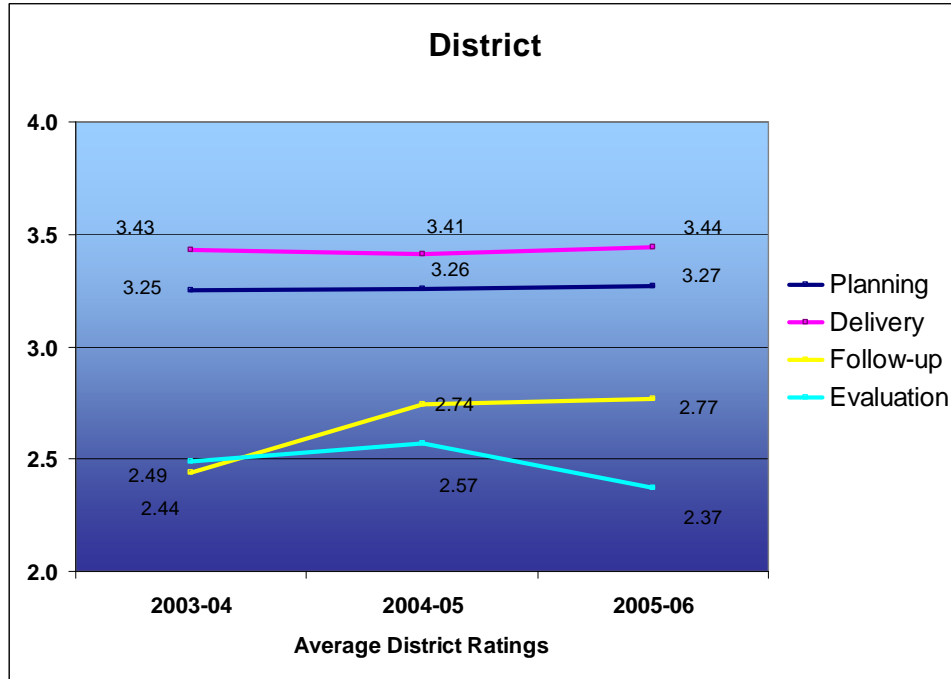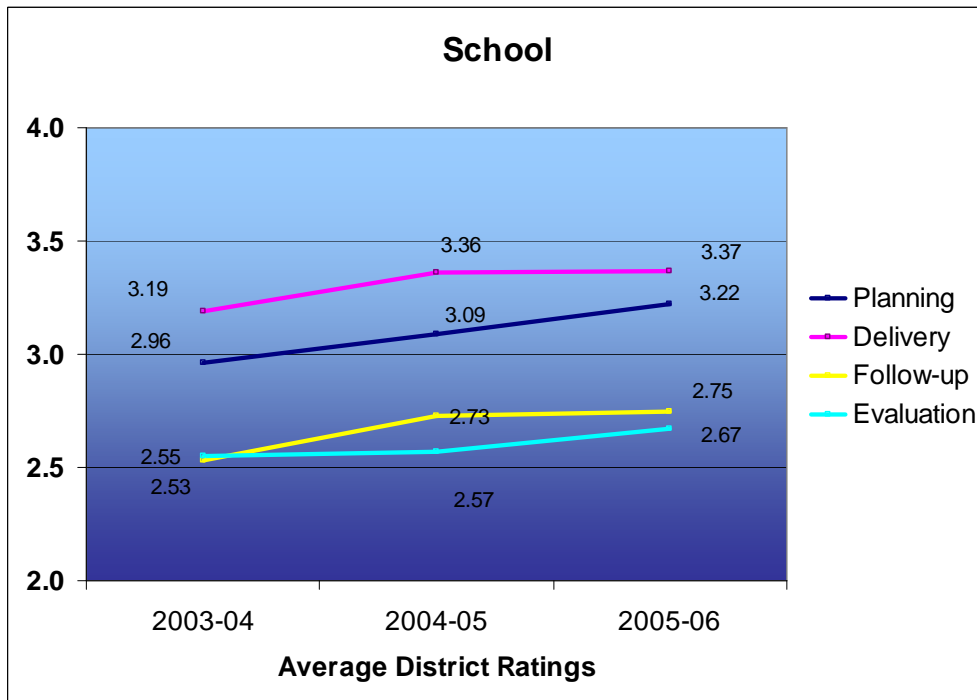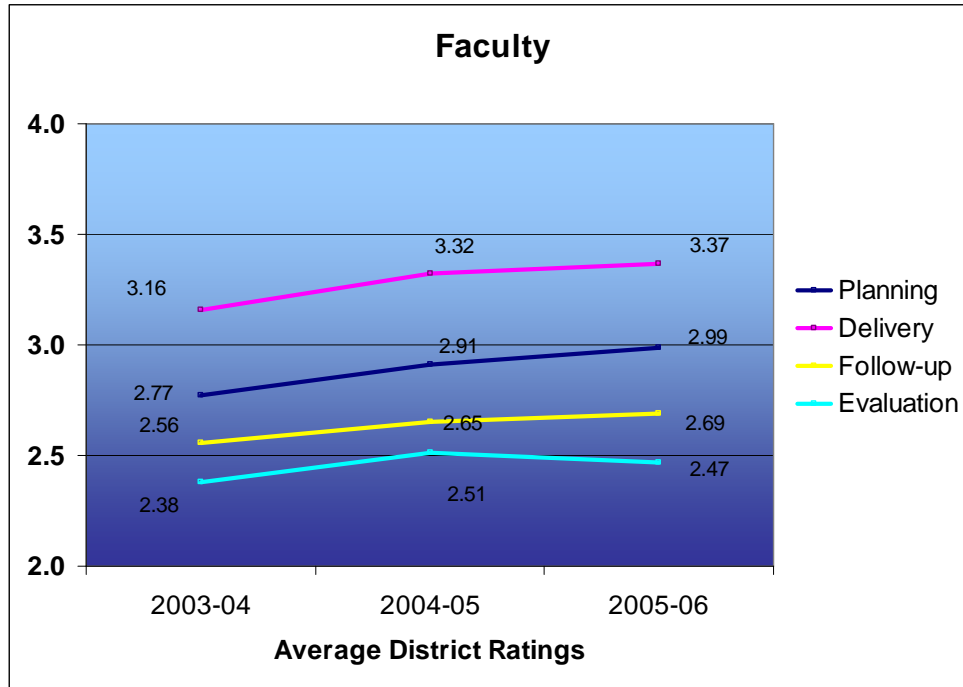
Figure 2

District

Figure 3

School

Figure 4

Faculty

Figure 5

All Levels

Figure 6

Average Ratings by Size and Strand