

MEMORANDUM

June 15, 2020

TO: Dr. Shannon L. Verrett, Ph.D.
Assistant Superintendent, Special Education

FROM: Allison E. Matney, Ed.D.
Officer, Research and Accountability

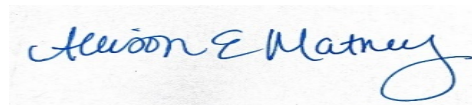
SUBJECT: **OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES (OSES) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SURVEY RESULTS, 2019–2020**

The Office of Special Education Services (OSES) at HISD wanted to explore various approaches to professional development (PD) that would allow more teachers to access training to improve their efficacy supporting students with disabilities. Currently, the department uses traditional in-person approaches to PD and wanted to evaluate the existing training, explore virtual PD opportunities, and identify gaps in training. Data was drawn from the Special Education (SPED) PD Survey that was administered during the 2019–2020 academic year.

Key findings include:

- Overall, 82.5 percent of survey participants strongly agreed or agreed that the professional development offered by the Office of Special Education Services was of a high quality.
- When asked which PD approach they preferred 46.0 percent of survey respondents selected both in-person and online, 38.7 preferred in-person, and 15.3 percent preferred online only.
- The delivery model most preferred by teachers was interactive workshops delivered in-person (40.6%) and webinars and video-based training delivered online (28.2%).
- Primary barriers faced by teachers when seeking to attend district-level OSES PD were class coverage (37.7%) and the times trainings were offered (36.8%).
- Most respondents (23.4%) selected Mondays from 4:30 pm to 7:30 and Saturday mornings (20.7%) pm as their preferred training time. In addition, 16.2 percent preferred training during school hours.
- Teacher's primary recommended trainings included targeted trainings that are population, content, and age specific (31.1%), using technology in the classroom (14.3%), improving classroom and campus supports (10.8%), and training on dealing with parents (8.0%).

Further distribution of this report is at your discretion. Should you have any further questions, please contact me at 713–556–6700.



_____ AEM

Attachment

cc: Grenita Lathan, Ph.D.
Silvia Trinh
Yolanda Rodriguez
Courtney N. Busby, Ed.D.



RESEARCH

Educational Program Report

OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES (OSES)
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SURVEY RESULTS,
2019-2020



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EVALUATION REPORT

BUREAU OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Office of Special Education Services (OSES) Professional Development Survey Results, 2019–2020

Prepared by Georgia Graham

In the United States there is a shortage of special education teachers in almost every disability category (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011). Therefore, finding trained and qualified teachers becomes a challenge. As a result, professional development (PD) emerges as a critical part of ensuring teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills to support students with disabilities. There are various approaches to professional development training to improve the efficacy of teachers supporting students with disabilities. The Office of Special Education Services (OSES) at HISD wanted to explore various approaches to professional development that would allow more teachers to access training, increase their knowledge, and improve their efficacy supporting students with disabilities.

Currently, the department uses in-person approaches to professional development and wanted to explore online models of professional development. There are various approaches to online professional development from real-time learning activities, hybrid online learning activities that take place as part of a broader in-person learning opportunity, to self-paced online workshops (Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013). The addition of various professional development models allows for the establishment of professional learning communities that create opportunities for sharing ideas, issue discussions, and establishment of connections with diverse colleagues and administrators (Vavasseur & MacGregor, 2008).

Method

The SPED PD Survey was an online assessment that was administered from April 3–April 30, 2020. The survey was disseminated to 9,659 teachers via an email message sent on April 9th. A follow-up email was sent out on April 13, 2020 to remind recipients to complete the survey. There were 2,170 responses to the survey. This was a 22.5 percent response rate. The survey collected information on teacher's perception of prior professional

development provided by the Office of Special Education Services, preferred professional development delivery modes, and gaps in knowledge for supporting students with disabilities. There was an open-ended question that allowed respondents to comment on additional training supports that were needed to improve their ability to work with students with disabilities. A thematic analysis was conducted of the 901 comments that were provided. The thematic analysis was done by coding each comment after exploring the phrase or sentence to describe or capture the meaning of an aspect of the data (Saldana, 2009).

Sample

The survey sample consisted of teachers (94.6%), administrators (2.3%), and campus support staff (3.2%). Of the sample of teachers, 52 percent taught at the elementary grade-level, 18 percent taught at the middle school grade-level, and 30 percent at the high school grade-level. Of the 2,052 teacher respondents, 74.7 percent had a general education designation, 15.6 percent had a special education designation, and 9.6 percent had combined designations, that is, special education and general education. The reported years of teaching was an average of 9.7 years (+/- 9.0 years), with 40.1% of teachers having taught at HISD for less than 5 years.

The number of professional development hours teachers received for supporting students with disabilities in the past two years varied. Most teachers reported having less than four hours (25.4%), between four and eight hours (24.6%), and more than 16 hours (21.8%). Some teachers reported not having any training to work with students with disabilities (11.4%). The minimum number of professional development hours confirmed through research as being required to improve student performance is 14 hours (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). When asked whether they participated in a professional development training offered by OSES, 51.8 percent responded no (n=1,047).

Results

The survey focused on three areas: quality of professional development received, preferred professional development delivery model, and recommended professional development training topics. The quality of professional development received only included the results of respondents who participated in professional development training delivered by OSES (n=1,047).

Data on recommended professional development compared respondents who participated in less than eight hours of training, eight to less than sixteen hours of training, and more than sixteen hours of training to gauge the level of professional development that would be required based on number of hours of prior training. The minimum number of professional development hours required to improve student performance is 14 hours. Respondents who had less than this may need foundational-level training while those who have had prior training may benefit from more advanced training. The final section is a thematic analysis of the aggregate of recommended professional development training based on teacher's survey comments.

Quality of PD Offered by OSES

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements related to the quality of professional development offered by the OSES department. Quality of professional development was measured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* (4) to *strongly disagree* (1). Indicators of professional development quality offered to enhance the

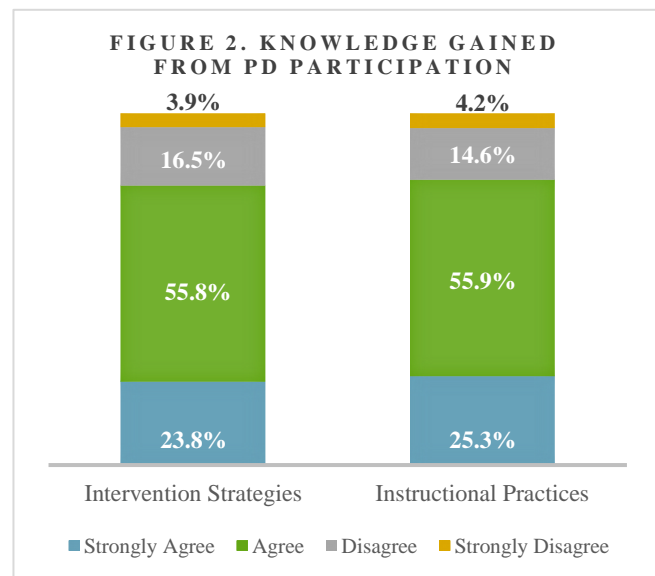
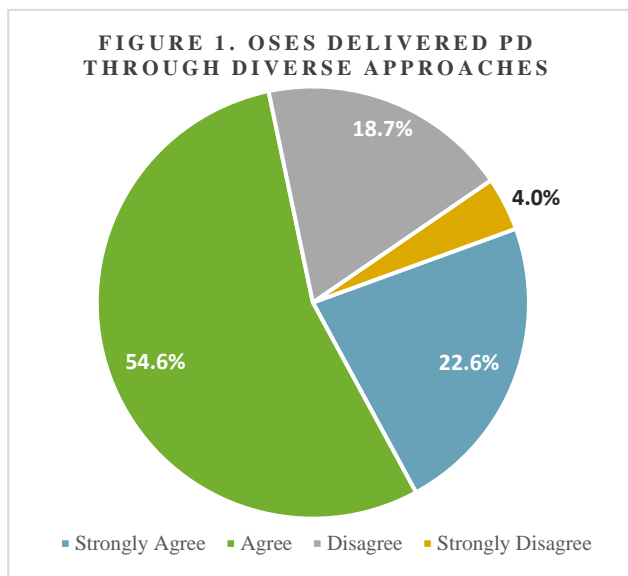
efficacy of teachers supporting students with disabilities were examined using four indicators. These indicators were (i) knowledge (information on various forms of instruction, knowledge of differentiated instruction); (ii) skills (improved efficacy, improved instruction, improved instructional strategies); (iii) mode (variety of delivery formats and approaches); and (iv) overall outcomes of participation in PD training (PD delivered on high quality topics, PD resulted in a change in practice, and the PD training addressed needs). Most respondents, 82.5 percent, *strongly agree* or *agree* across the four quality indicators.

Diverse Approach to PD

The OSES department provided professional development information and training session to the HISD community, specifically teachers, using various in-person approaches. When asked whether the professional development training was offered in a variety of formats and used different approaches, 54.6 percent of respondents reported *agree* and 18.7 percent responded *disagree* (Figure 1).

Knowledge Gained

OSES provided professional training on topics to increase teachers' ability to improve instruction to students with disabilities (Figure 2). When asked whether the professional development provided information and training on various forms of instructional strategies to improve academic outcomes of students with disabilities, 79.6 percent reported *strongly agree* or *agree*. Similarly, 81.2 percent of survey participants reported *strongly agree* or *agree* that the professional development offered increased teachers' knowledge of differentiated instruction for students with disabilities.



Skills

Research has shown that, to some degree, teachers will implement professional development strategies in their instruction (Park, Roberts, & Stodden, 2012). When asked whether the quality of the professional development opportunities helped to improve efficacy in supporting students with disabilities, 59.6 percent responded *agree* (Figure 3). In terms of instructional strategies, 81.2 percent responded *strongly agree* or *agree* that OSes offered professional development opportunities that improved instructional strategies to support students with disabilities.

Overall PD Quality

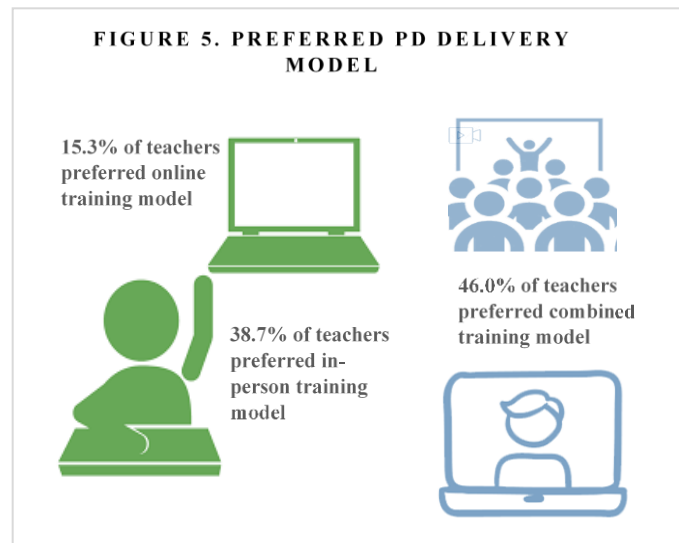
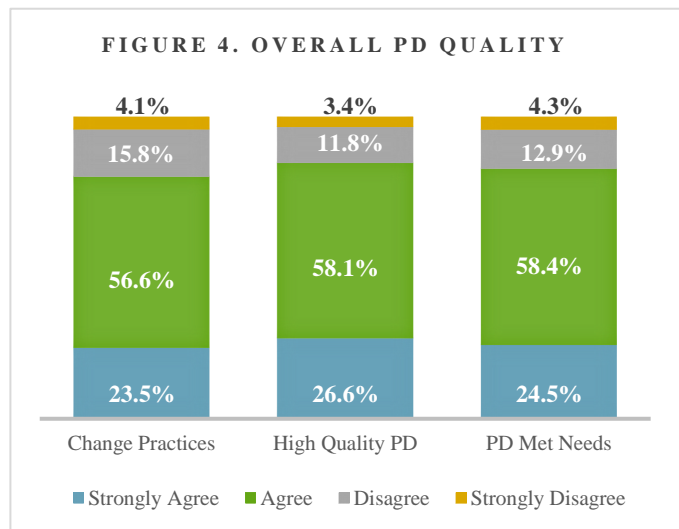
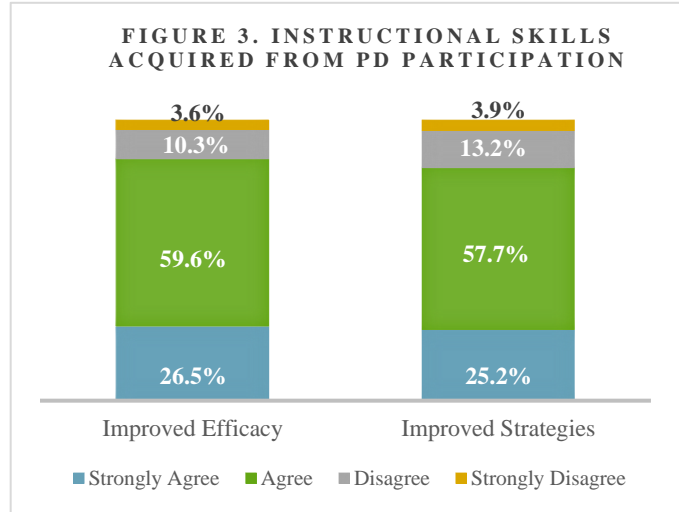
Professional development opportunities need to be high quality and effective. There is a need for educators to participate in professional development programs that increase their knowledge, improve their practice, and ultimately foster student learning and achievement gains (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010). With respect to the professional development training, teachers responded that professional development opportunities met their needs as an educator (58.4%) (Figure 4). Similarly, 58.1 percent responded *agree* when asked whether the professional development training was offered on topics related to students with disabilities that were of high quality. Finally, 56.6 percent responded that they *agree* that the professional development was effective and resulted in a change in practices that lead to improved student learning outcomes.

Preferred Delivery Mode for PD

Teachers who provide instruction to students with disabilities tend to be professionally isolated and in need of current knowledge and best practice in instruction. There is a growing need to shift from reliance solely on the workshop model of professional development to a more advanced and comprehensive model that offers educators alternative forms of professional development based on the desired outcomes of learning and the complexity of the needed instructional innovation (Lang & Fox, 2004).

Considering alternative delivery models and formats for professional development, the survey asked teachers to report on the barriers faced in attending professional development training, their preferred approach, and recommended training time. When asked which professional development delivery approach they preferred, 46.0 percent of survey respondents preferred both in-person and online, 38.7 preferred in-person, and 15.3 percent chose online only (Figure 5).

When asked which in-person professional development strategy would be most beneficial, 40.6



percent of teachers selected interactive workshops (Figure 6). With adults, learning should be approached with a clear goal in mind, using their life experiences to process new information. Adult learners are motivated by opportunities that allow them to address problems and create solutions that relate directly to their lives. They tend to prefer open-ended learning activities where they have a voice in the direction and pace of the learning. With these characteristics in place, teachers are more likely to consider professional development relevant and authentic, which makes teacher learning and improved teaching practice more likely (Hunzicker, 2011).

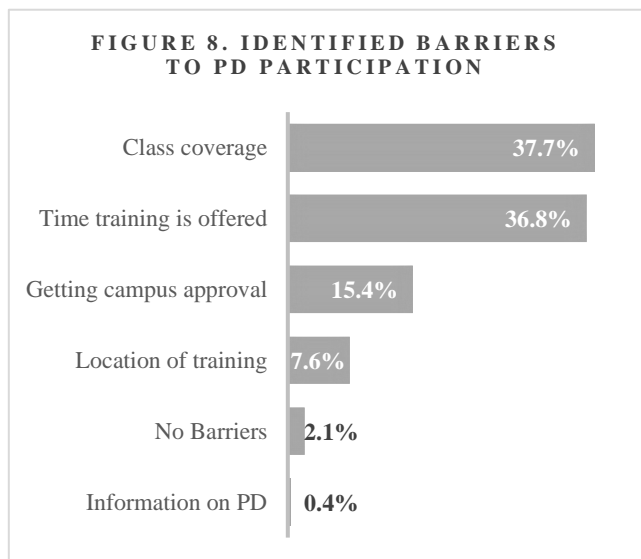
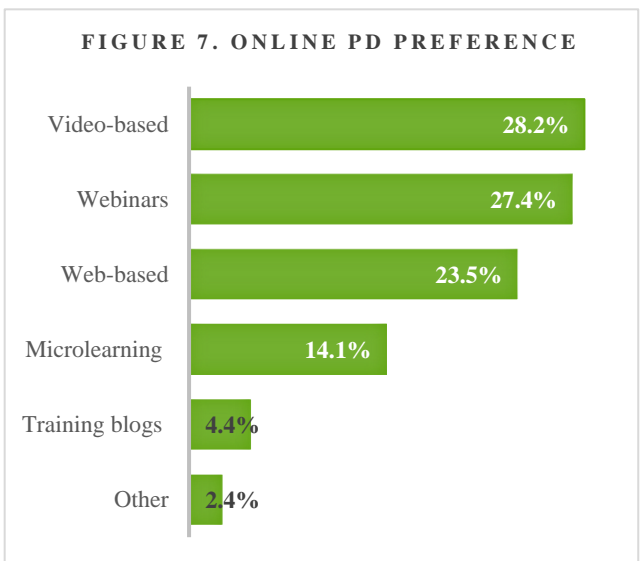
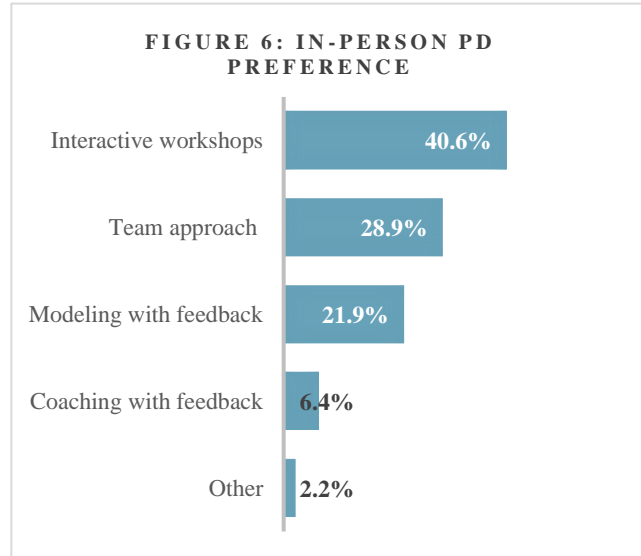
A team approach involving colleagues with diverse roles (i.e. leadership, general education teachers, etc.) had the second highest response rate (28.9%) (Figure 6). Participants highlighted the implementation of cross-team collaboration and training to be delivered to individuals across different roles and responsibilities (general education and SPED teachers, supports, administration, parents). Taking a more team-approach to professional development training would create a community of practice that would allow all stakeholders to have a shared understanding of the various roles and responsibilities and how they align to provide high quality support and instruction to students with disabilities.

For online professional development, respondents had the option of selecting from five approaches to delivery (Figure 7). The five approaches were: (i) microlearning (bite-size training that typically last no longer than a few minutes); (ii) training blogs (advice from experts, etc.); (iii) video-based training (animations, intervention modeling, interviews and testimonials); (iv) web-based learning (accessed via web browsers or the HUB); and (v) webinars and virtual classrooms. The preferred primary modes of delivery were almost comparable for video-based training (28.2%), webinars and virtual classroom (27.4%), and web-based learning (23.5%).

Barriers to PD Participation

The primary barrier reported by survey participants when trying to attend district-level professional development was class coverage (37.7%) (Figure 8). As noted by one teacher on attending professional development during school hours, “I tend to worry that my students will not do their assignments and get behind.” Another noted, “I don’t like having to be out of the classroom.” Another respondent commented, *I am a first-year teacher it is hard to leave the classroom.*”

Another frequent barrier reported by survey respondents was the time the training was offered (36.8%). When asked to select from a predetermined list of professional development delivery days and times, 23.4 percent indicated that Mondays from 4:30 pm to 7:30 pm was an ideal time, Saturday mornings (20.7%), followed by Tuesdays from 4:30 pm to 7:30 pm (17%) (Figure 9, p.5).



There were 16.2 percent who recommended that professional development occur during school hours. The primary reason for recommending that professional development occur during school hours was personal commitments after school. Several survey respondents believed that summer professional development would be preferable. As one respondent noted, “*I prefer summer training. There’s more time to absorb what was taught and consider how it’s applicable in my classroom.*” There is a division between teachers preferred delivery times based on personal commitments and professional concerns. To address this a professional development plan that incorporates in-person and online models of training would allow teachers flexibility and to be an active participant in their learning.

PD Training Topics Offered by OSes

For professional development to be effective, it needs to be offered at the knowledge level and experience of the learner. As one respondent noted, “*some of us have been doing this for many years and some have not. We don’t teach 1st graders and 12th graders in the same rooms. Please consider teaching educators the same way.*” The data in this section was disaggregated to allow for comparison of those who had less than eight hours of training, eight to less than sixteen hours of training, and more than sixteen hours of training.

To collect information on teacher’s perceived training needs the survey included a list of proposed areas of training related to managing student behavior (Figure 10) and instructional supports for students with disability (Figure 11). In terms of managing student behavior, *positive behavior support strategies* was the most popular topic selected across hours of training groups (Figure 10). This was followed by *deficits in social communication* being selected by 71.5 percent of those with less than eight hours of training, 71.2 percent of those with eight hours to less than sixteen hours, and 77.8 percent of those with more than sixteen hours.

Difference in training preferences based on number of hours of prior training for respondents was also evident when considering instructional supports (Figure 11). For those with less than 8-hours and those with less than 16-hours of training, *accommodation and modification* was the most frequent training selected for instructional support (82.7% and 78.0%, respectively). For those with more than sixteen hours of training, *technology supports* was the highest training selected (81.0%). The second highest training selected for this group was *specially designed instruction* (79.9%). This training topic was also the second highest selected for those respondents with less than eight hours of training (75.8%).

Recommended PD Training Topics

In addition to the list of training, survey participants were given the opportunity to recommend additional training that they felt would improve their ability to support students with

FIGURE 9. PREFERRED DAYS FOR PD DELIVERY

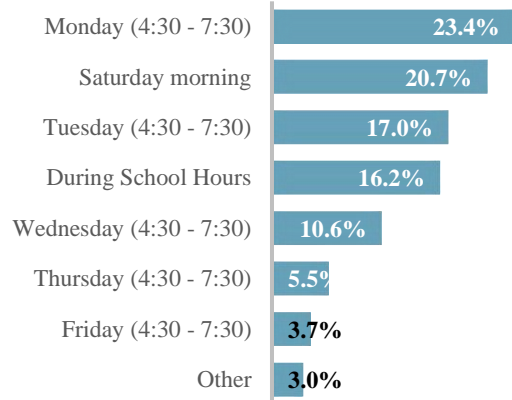


FIGURE 10. PERCENT WHO SELECTED BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT BY HOURS TRAINED

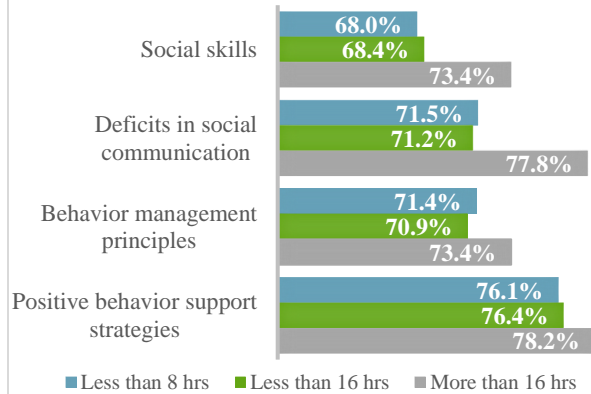


FIGURE 11. PERCENT WHO SELECTED INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS BY HOURS TRAINED

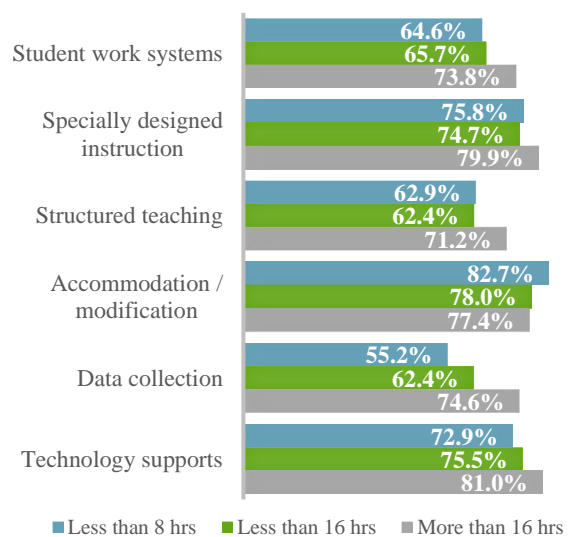
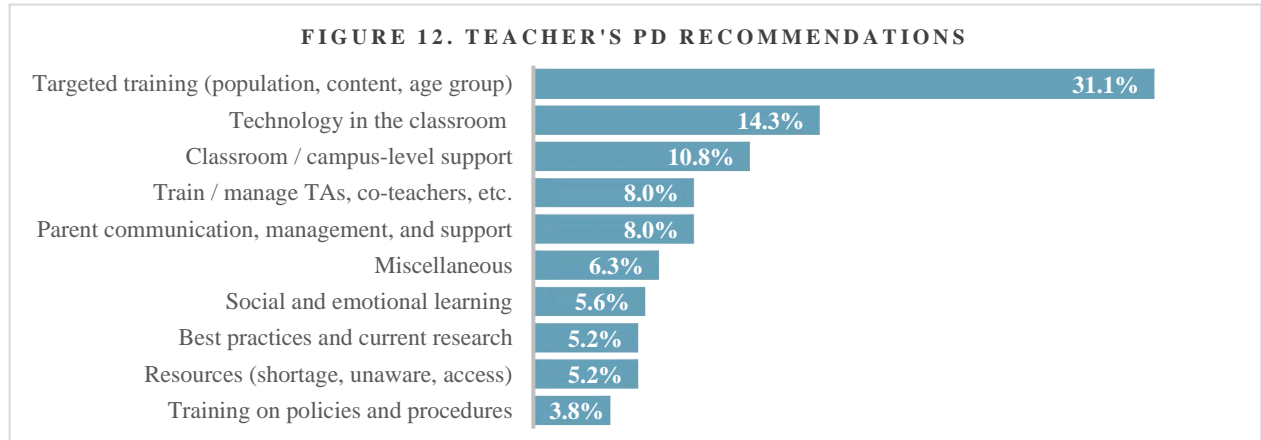


FIGURE 12. TEACHER'S PD RECOMMENDATIONS



disabilities. The recommendations were, for the most part, like the list of training provided in the survey. However, there were some emergent training themes that were not included in the survey. These themes included targeted training, parents, technology in the classroom, classroom / campus-level support, and training / managing instructional support (Figure 12).

In terms of targeted training, three secondary themes were identified in 31.1 percent of the comments: (i) targeted training on population of students with disabilities (i.e. autism, ADHD, PSI); (ii) subject matter training that focused on the application of classroom supports within specific content areas (i.e. physical education, arts); and (iii) age appropriate training that focused on issues faced by students with disabilities in high school, middle school, or preschool (Figure 12). One respondent noted, “training on how to deal with very aggressive behavior of student younger than 5 years old.” Another respondent stated, “applications in high school. Not just elementary and middle schools.” Another noted, “As a first-grade teacher, my primary academic responsibility is to teach my students to read. Receiving in-depth training on how to identify and accommodate learning disabilities would be beneficial; especially since there is often little or no paperwork when children enter first grade.”

Of the comments, 10.8 percent identified classroom and campus support as an area for training (Figure 12). Such a training would address gaps that were identified regarding “how to work with the person assigned to my students.” As another noted, the, “ways case managers and co-teachers can be more support for students and teachers,” Another respondent recommended “training on the overall inner workings of our districts roles and responsibilities at different departments and levels for students with disabilities.”

Another theme identified in the comments was related to how teachers can work with the various personnel that work with students with disabilities, with 8.0 percent of comments referring to this (Figure 12). As mentioned by a respondent, “there needs to be a lot more training for general education teachers and administrators.” The

principals do not respect special-education teachers and do not include them in planning.” Another noted that there needs to be training that provides information on, “the overall inner workings of our district’s roles and responsibilities at different departments and levels for students with disabilities.”

Another emergent theme was training on parent communication, management, and support that was mentioned in 8.0 percent of comments (Figure 12). For example, one respondent recommended how to “teach parents how to support their learner.” Another respondent mentioned, “how to communicate with frustrated parents and, training on how I can improve parent involvement; especially the parents who cannot attend daytime events during work hours.” A respondent commented, “it would be awesome to have (campus) trainings where parents could attend so that they can work with the teacher to address the needs of the child with special needs. If this could be scheduled regularly across the district like the Parent University, then it would certainly make parents more accustomed to putting into practice routines that enable their child to be successful.” Involving parents in a variety of activities, such as professional development training, throughout the school year will send the message that school personnel and the parents are members of a team working together to create a nurturing learning environment (Staples & Diliberto, 2010).

Finally, 14.3 percent of survey respondents identified a need for training that would improve their ability to incorporate technology in the classroom. Teachers wanted to diversify the learning tools available to students by creating online forums, apps, and other virtual activities that would make learning more engaging for students with disabilities. Teachers wanted to be able to access, “available apps related to the content taught in self-contained classrooms.” Or know where to “access online activities for low-level students.” For some teachers, training should focus on how to develop online content. As one teacher noted, “training on setting up virtual classes... to teach students with severe autism.”

Discussion

To improve the efficacy of teachers supporting students with disabilities, a culture of continuous learning is required. If schools are to offer more powerful learning opportunities for students, they must offer more powerful learning opportunities for teachers – opportunities that are grounded in the concept of learning to teach as a lifelong endeavor and designed around a continuum of teacher learning (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010). There is a recognition among HISD teachers of the benefits of continuous professional development training that takes into consideration variation in teachers’ learning styles, availability, and experience supporting students with disabilities.

The results of this report has highlighted a need for a community of practice built on more inclusive and diversified approach to professional development that would include not just teachers but instructional personnel (co-teachers, specialists, etc.) supporting students with disabilities and parents of students with disabilities. To ensure a community of practice, parents, administration, and instructional and behavioral support staff should be included, at some level, as part of professional development training to encourage a continuation of learning from school to home. Such an approach would address some of the concerns highlighted by HISD teachers relating to parent engagement, classroom and campus support, and improved relations with support personnel.

The inclusion of varied in-person and online professional development models would address many of the barriers highlighted by teachers relating to class coverage, training time, and getting campus approval. Teachers also highlighted a need for more population and content specific training on the application of best practices supporting students with disabilities, and the incorporation of technology in the classroom. A tiered and diversified professional development plan that takes into consideration teachers’ level of knowledge of processes and best practices supporting students with disabilities would allow teachers to access training based on gaps in knowledge relating to supporting students with disabilities and application of learning to content areas.

Teachers are motivated by opportunities that allow them to address problems and create solutions that relate directly to their lives. Effective professional development is anything that engages teachers in learning activities that are supportive, job-embedded, instructionally focused, collaborative, and ongoing (Hunzicker, 2011) A more inclusive and comprehensive plan that offers instructional personnel alternative forms of professional development across multiple groups allows for the creation of a learning community of practice that would help to ensure that best practices are being applied seamlessly and strategically to improve the learning outcomes of students with disabilities.

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