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**SENATE BILL 5054**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2023 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Wellman, Dhingra, Nobles, Saldaña, Valdez, and C. Wilson

AN ACT Relating to promoting and facilitating the use of professional learning communities; amending RCW 28A.150.205, 28A.415.430, and 28A.415.434; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that it has already recognized the positive impact that effective professional learning has on student learning and that a critical component of effective professional learning is collaboration between educators who are all committed to working together on an ongoing basis to improve student outcomes. However, collaboration does not magically happen on its own; school districts must prioritize creating a regular and dedicated time for educators to meet and work together during the school week in order to realize the benefits of effective professional learning and create an environment of continuous improvement for their students and themselves. Research shows that professional learning communities are an extremely effective mechanism for promoting collaboration. Professional learning communities not only encourage collaboration but also promote collective creativity and provide space for educators to reflect on their own instructional practices and their students' needs in a supportive environment. Research also shows that providing educators time for professional learning communities on a regular and ongoing basis leads to greater job satisfaction and higher morale and creates a more positive school climate while also positively impacting student learning. In professional learning communities, educators focus on the various facets of the students' public education experience including their academic, social and emotional, and mental and behavioral health needs and goals. They help educators increase their professional capacity to rethink their practice together, to challenge existing assumptions about instruction, and to dive deeply into analyzing student data and collaboratively plan instruction, interventions and supports that address the needs of the whole child. It is, therefore, the legislature's intent to encourage school districts to build time into their school calendars to accommodate weekly and even daily time for educational staff to engage in professional learning communities.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.150.205 and 2018 c 8 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, the definition in this section applies throughout RCW 28A.150.200 through 28A.150.295.

(1) "Instructional hours" means those hours students are provided the opportunity to engage in educational activity planned by and under the direction of school district staff, as directed by the administration and board of directors of the district, inclusive of intermissions for class changes, recess, and teacher/parent-guardian conferences that are planned and scheduled by the district for the purpose of discussing students' educational needs or progress, and exclusive of time actually spent for meals. "Instructional hours" include hours students are engaging in educational activities under the supervision of noncertificated school district staff while certificated staff participate in professional learning communities as defined in RCW 28A.415.434.

(2)(a) If students are provided the opportunity to engage in an educational activity that is part of the regular instructional program concurrently with the consumption of breakfast, the period of time designated for student participation in breakfast after the bell, as defined in RCW 28A.235.200, must be considered instructional hours.

(b) Breakfast after the bell programs, as defined in RCW 28A.235.200, including the provision of breakfast, are not considered part of the definition or funding of the program of basic education under Article IX of the state Constitution.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.415.430 and 2016 c 77 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The term "professional learning" means a comprehensive, sustained, job-embedded, and collaborative approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement. Professional learning fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance and must comprise learning that is aligned with student learning needs, educator development needs, and school district((~~,~~)) or state improvement goals. Professional learning shall have as its primary focus the improvement of teachers' and school leaders' effectiveness in assisting all students to meet the state learning standards. School districts are encouraged to promote and facilitate effective and collaborative professional learning by establishing a school calendar that provides at least four hours each week for certificated instructional staff to engage in professional learning communities during the school day.

(2) Professional learning is an ongoing process that is measurable by multiple indicators and includes learning experiences that support the acquisition and transfer of learning, knowledge, and skills into the classroom and daily practice.

(3) Professional learning shall incorporate differentiated, coherent, sustained, and evidence-based strategies that improve educator effectiveness and student achievement, including job-embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to support educators' transfer of new knowledge and skills into their practice.

(4) Professional learning should include the work of established collaborative teams of teachers, school leaders, and other administrative, instructional, and educational services staff members, who commit to working together on an ongoing basis to accomplish common goals and who are engaged in a continuous cycle of professional improvement that is focused on:

(a) Identifying student and educator learning needs using multiple sources of data;

(b) Defining a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of these multiple data sources and the collective and personalized learning needs of teachers and administrators;

(c) Continuously assessing the effectiveness of the professional learning in achieving identified learning goals, improving teaching, and assisting all students in meeting state academic learning standards through reflection, observation, and sustained support;

(d) Using formative and summative measures to assess the effectiveness of professional learning in achieving educator learning goals;

(e) Realizing the three primary purposes for professional learning: (i) Individual improvement aligned with individual goals; (ii) school and team improvement aligned with school and team improvement ((~~[goals]~~)) goals; and (iii) program implementation aligned with state, district, and school improvement goals and initiatives.

(5) Professional learning should be facilitated by well-prepared school and district leaders who incorporate knowledge, skills, and dispositions for leading professional learning of adults and meet the standards described in RCW ((~~28A.300.602~~)) 28A.415.432. These facilitators may include but are not limited to: Curriculum specialists, central office administrators, principals, coaches, mentors, master teachers, and other teacher leaders.

(6) Principals should assist staff with alignment of professional learning tied to curriculum, instruction, and state and local learning goals and assessments.

(7) Professional learning may be supported by external expert assistance or additional activities that will be held to the same definition and standards as internally supported professional learning, and that:

(a) Address defined student and educator learning goals;

(b) Include, but are not limited to, courses, workshops, institutes, networks, studio residencies, virtual learning modules, and conferences provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities outside the school such as universities, educational service districts, technical assistance providers, networks of content specialists, and other education organizations and associations; and

(c) Advance ongoing school-based professional learning that occurs throughout the year with opportunities for regular practice and feedback while developing new skills.

(8) If a school district provides time for professional learning communities to promote ongoing professional learning during the school day, the framework and characteristics of a professional learning community shall be based on research of what creates an effective professional learning community and shall be consistent with the professional learning requirements established in this section. If a school district provides time for professional learning communities to promote ongoing professional development during the school day, the specific framework and characteristics that will be used to guide the implementation and continued functioning of the professional learning community shall be established through collective bargaining.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.415.434 and 2016 c 77 s 4 are each amended to read as follows:

The definitions in this section apply throughout RCW ((~~28A.300.600 and 28A.300.602~~)) 28A.415.430 and 28A.415.432 unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Differentiated" means that professional learning experiences are designed to meet the needs of individual educators based on multiple sources of data such as professional growth plans, observations, and student growth data.

(2) "Job-embedded" means a sustained series of activities such as workshops and coaching occurring throughout the year that is delivered within the context of an educator's instructional assignments, including both subject and grade level, to support the educator's acquisition and application of the knowledge and skills.

(3) "Professional learning community" refers to a group of educators within a school or school district that meets regularly to share expertise, reflect on their practice, and work collaboratively to enhance their knowledge and skills to teach and support students' academic, social and emotional learning and growth. A professional learning community can be made up of educators across different subject and support areas, grade levels and levels of leadership.

(4) "Student outcomes" refers to two broad categories of student measures: Academic measures and nonacademic measures. Academic measures refer to student learning, growth, and achievement. Nonacademic measures are indicators such as health, behavioral, or socioemotional factors that support student learning.

((~~(4)~~)) (5) "Sustained" means ongoing professional learning supported throughout the school year occurring several times within and across school years.

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