Professional Development: Who Decides?

By: Dr. Jill Bella

Note: This resource is part of a self-reflection series focused on professional development. Read the rest of the series here.

Have you ever felt the disappointment of an employee who requested to attend a conference when you told them it wasn't going to be approved this year? I remember working with a colleague who didn't get excited easily and never really asked for much. One day she sent an email requesting to attend a conference. You could almost "hear" her excitement through the typed words. I wanted to approve it and provide her with a new learning experience while also validating this new enthusiasm and interest that could potentially energize her work in the future. I was heartbroken when I learned the director did not approve this opportunity, and so was she. It was the end of the year—funds were limited, and there were other priorities. At the time our organization did not have a policy designating a specific dollar amount for individual employees to be used for professional development each year. Instead individual professional development opportunities were allotted based on money available, other program priorities, director discretion, and somewhat of a first-come, first-serve basis.

Expanding this topic of professional development a little bit further, let's think about the on-site professional development that is often offered in programs. Are *all* employees required to attend (meaning not only teaching staff, but administrative and support staff as well)? If so, is the topic appropriate and relevant for everyone? If the professional development is required for all employees, are there certain employees who would benefit more from job specific professional development—relating more directly to what they do?

Points to Ponder

As an administrator, how do you decide who decides? Generate a list of the ways the following are determined in your organization:

- what type of professional development is offered,
- how are staff approved to attend/receive professional development, and
- how do you encourage/ensure staff receive professional development that is job specific?

Here's a link to a resource for determining staff approval, called a Professional Development Travel and Work Release Request form. In what ways would you improve or alter it for your program?

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