

## Policy Statement 87

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### **This We Believe About Virtual Professional Development**

Today's educational community is seeking a system of professional development that can be accessed virtually as members' lifestyles have become technocentric. This community demands instant access to information through technology. Educational providers of professional development have the ability through virtual learning environments to offer flexibility, mobility, connectivity, and interactivity anywhere, anytime. **We believe that** the virtual learning environment must be a component of ongoing, sustainable professional development.

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner increasingly demands web-based information sharing and interactivity, professional development for the educational community must become more readily accessible in the form of virtual learning opportunities. Virtual professional development includes formal and informal learning; activities delivered through on-line facilitated courses, conferences, and webinars offered by professional organizations/consortia; and use of emerging web-based technologies. The implementation of virtual professional development is imperative for the educational community to develop and deliver timely, relevant curricula that will prepare students to be competitive in the global environment. **We believe that** virtual professional development is, in essence, part of the continuum of professional development impacting a teacher's professional practice, curriculum, educational community, professional organizations, and professional philosophy.

#### **Virtual Professional Development**

Professional development has been a staple of teachers' career growth from preservice teacher education to retirement. Choices have traditionally included continuing education units (CEUs), credit courses, and activities that enhance our ability to work within our educational environments as learners and teachers. These choices include inservice education, participation in professional conferences,

graduate credit courses, curriculum writing, study groups, peer mentoring or coaching, and programs designed to help teachers gain insight into their teaching and pedagogy.

Technology is changing the way professional development is delivered, creating virtual learning environments that include but are not limited to mobile, electronic, distance, hybrid, and web-based instruction. Virtual professional development platforms are constantly evolving and vary in the level of interactivity and services provided. **We believe that** these virtual learning environments foster the creation of virtual professional development, leading to greater possibilities and opportunities for long-term, sustainable interaction; professional growth; and shared learning.

### **The Structure of Quality Virtual Professional Development**

Virtual professional development should be viewed by all stakeholders as complementary to traditional methodologies and as a data-driven response to identified needs. To be accepted by the educational community, instructors, and administrators, virtual professional development has to meet professional standards for context, process, and content. **We believe that** high-quality virtual professional development is measurable, collaborative, active and focused on problem solving, and connected directly to local, state, territory, province, and federal education reform initiatives.

Virtual professional development can be delivered synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination. Virtual professional development includes formal and informal learning activities such as e-learning, e-published documents (on-line journals), e-libraries, and e-portfolios.

### **Educational Community in Virtual Professional Development**

The educational community in virtual professional development is comprised of teachers as virtual learners, instructors, administrators, and providers. Virtual professional development providers include professional associations and consortia, commercial organizations, and educational institutions. Each member of the educational community plays a vital role in the success of virtual professional development.

Therefore, **we believe that** teachers as virtual learners must

- embrace the concept of life-long learning;
- take responsibility for locating high-quality virtual professional development activities;

- possess self-discipline to manage the virtual learning environment; and
- participate in opportunities to learn and apply new technologies to remain abreast of current trends and student knowledge, skills, and abilities.

**We believe that** instructors of virtual professional development content must

- understand the needs of their audience;
- create and deliver relevant virtual professional development opportunities—accounting for different learning styles and technology abilities;
- provide instruction/training using e-tools as needed;
- utilize an appropriate presentation method; and
- support virtual participants to reinforce learning.

**We believe that** administrators must

- embrace, support, and participate in high-quality virtual professional development as a valid method of delivery and learning;
- select virtual professional development programs that are sensitive to the needs of constituents and aligned with institutional goals and culture;
- seek and provide funding for virtual professional development; and
- foster professional development partnerships with groups such as professional organizations/consortia, institutions of higher learning, and school districts.

**We believe that** virtual professional development providers must

- respond to the needs of the institution and the educational community;
- use a variety of learning platforms;
- make available virtual conference sessions, webinars, and interactive networking opportunities;
- show flexibility in offering credit options—CEU's, professional development hours, or graduate credit; and
- offer compelling online experiences that foster positive virtual exchanges and the building of personal learning networks.

The stakeholders that comprise the educational community—teachers as learners, instructors, administrators, and virtual professional development providers—must embrace and integrate virtual professional development into the mainstream. Thus, **we believe that** a concerted, collaborative effort must be made by the entire educational community to maximize the potential of virtual professional development.

### **A Call to Action**

Since professional development is crucial to the growth and success of educators, they must embrace and participate in virtual professional development opportunities that remove the boundaries of distance, time, and space. Thus, **we believe** the stakeholders in the educational community have a responsibility to embrace, participate in, and provide virtual learning activities that respond to the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.